

A Study on the Positioning of Popular Fine Arts, Anti-Japanese Fine Arts and National Fine Arts in the Sino-Soviet Culture

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ABSTRACT

Sino-Soviet Culture, the organ of the Sino-Soviet Cultural Association, was an important medium of cultural exchange between China and the Soviet Union during the anti-Japanese War period, recording a large number of studies of literary and art theories and fine arts theories. The literary and art theories in Sino-Soviet Culture involved discussions on the positioning of popular fine arts, anti-Japanese fine arts and national fine arts, and contained outlooks on the value, style, and development direction of fine arts as well as the implicit clues among the three. Reorganizing and classifying these literary and art theories is conducive to clarifying the levels of fine arts research in Chongqing during the anti-Japanese War period, and supplementing and deepening the history of the anti-Japanese war fine arts.

Keywords: *Sino-Soviet culture, Popular fine arts, Anti-Japanese fine arts, National fine arts.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Sino-Soviet Culture was a cultural and artistic publication issued in Chongqing under the leadership of the Southern Bureau of the Communist Party of China during the anti-Japanese War period, aiming at seeking a united front in the anti-Japanese War. Sino-Soviet Culture formed the "Special Issue on Literature and Art" and "May Fourth Movement and New Literature and Art", "Special Issues on the Literary and Artistic Movement in the Four Years of the Anti-Japanese War", and other literature and art topics, which were objective and true records of anti-Japanese war literature and art and anti-Japanese war fine arts, being a branch of Yan'an literature and art. Compared with the attention paid to Yan'an literature and art in the academic world, Sino-Soviet Culture, which carried out anti-Japanese war literature and art activities in Chongqing, didn't attract enough attention. The purpose of this paper is to review the theoretical research on art and fine arts in Sino-Soviet Culture, and to use it as a basis for induction and analysis, so as to reorganize and examine the positioning of popular fine arts, anti-Japanese fine arts and national fine arts at that time,

and to correctly interpret and deeply explore the research on the value, style and development direction of fine arts by scholars in the special historical context. It is hoped that the study of fine arts theories in Sino-Soviet Culture will further complement and deepen the history of the anti-Japanese war fine arts.

2. THE DISCOVERY OF FINE ARTS VALUES AND THE POSITIONING OF POPULAR FINE ARTS

The revolutionary period was a special historical period in which the value of art was highly valued. The Comprehensive Anti-Japanese War meant that all classes in China should take up the task of fighting the war to save the country. Organizing the working people, who had the largest population base, to cooperate in the war became the most important, difficult and necessary part of this task. However, the cognitive level of the working class was relatively low, and literature and art enlightenment was more suitable than traditional education as an effective way to educate the people to enhance their sense of national identity and belonging. As Mao Zedong's Speech at the Yan'an

Forum on Literature and Art states, "Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole revolutionary cause of the proletariat, and, as Lenin said, are the gears and screws in the whole revolutionary machine." [1] Fine arts participated in the revolutionary process through the popularization of literature and art. The interesting and imaginative depiction of fine arts could mobilize the initiative of the masses to learn, stimulate their patriotic spirit, and provide a broad mass base for the cause of the anti-Japanese war, and was one of the important driving forces for the proletariat to achieve victory in the anti-Japanese war.

The value of literature and art is reflected in both cultural propaganda and ideological enlightenment, and fine arts, as an important part of literature and art, has the same value as literature and art. Xiang Linbing said, "We must use scientific methodology and worldview to conduct a comprehensive critical study of folk forms from literary, popular, linguistic, and phonetic perspectives, to supply creative reference, so that the works can maximize the effectiveness of enlightening the public in terms of content." [2] Xu Sheng also pointed out, "The first step in using 'folk forms' requires a thorough understanding of the 'endemicity' in 'folk forms', and the second step is to make our works fully equipped with this 'endemicity'. Only in this way can we make 'popular literature and art' reach out to the people and be accepted by the lower classes. Only in this way can 'popular literature and art' be developed universally for the purpose of propaganda and education of the people." [3] It can be seen that in order to give full play to the propaganda and enlightenment value of literature and art, scholars demanded that the content of literary works be appropriate to the appreciation ability of the masses and in line with their artistic tastes, so that art works would become popular among the workers, peasants and soldiers, enlighten the masses with their positive content, and bring into play the powerful propaganda and educational value of art.

The propaganda and enlightenment value of fine arts accompanies practical activities to maximize its effectiveness. Cartoons can be taken as an example. Huang Miaozi evaluated that cartoons had made deeper contact with the people and their propaganda avenues had been expanded. In order to adapt to the appreciation level and preference of the masses, "The anti-Japanese war door god New Year pictures became generally popular among the folk in the south and north China". Cartoonists from Luyi, Yan'an, organized

service teams to go to the front and published weekly cartoons and expanded their exhibitions on memorial days. [4] In evaluating the cartoon movement since the anti-Japanese war, Lin Ken pointed out that "Cartoons are loved by the people behind enemy lines in North China, not only as an enlightening tool for educating the masses, but the people themselves and it have become inseparable to employ this weapon themselves." [5] It can be seen that in order to obtain deeper and wider contact with the masses, the scope of propaganda of cartoons gradually expanded and broke through the inherent limitations of the medium. The popularity of cartoons was improved, the folk style of them was integrated and they walked into the life of the people. The integration of cartoonists into the working and peasant classes gained a rich source of subject matter on the one hand, and understood the needs of the people on the other hand, giving voice to the masses with their cartoon works and bringing into play the propaganda value of culture and the enlightenment value of thoughts. In addition, fine arts ensured its own development in the process of integrating into the masses. Lu Hongji pointed out that during the anti-Japanese war, fine arts gave the Chinese people "spiritual food" for the war, and that it "raised the status and value of fine arts, which had been around for thousands of years, by penetrating into the lives of the people." [6] This shows that in the special historical context of the anti-Japanese war, fine arts became a good medicine to soothe the people's hearts, and at the same time, through the content of the works, they depicted the people's aspirations, reflected the people's needs, and stood in the people's perspective to speak out for them. In practice, fine arts served the masses and the masses fed fine arts to promote a virtuous circle between the two, and fine arts raised its historical status in the process of bringing its value into play.

3. THE INFLUENCE OF THE SOVIET UNION EXPERIENCE ON THE STYLE OF CHINESE ANTI-JAPANESE WAR FINE ARTS

During the anti-Japanese war period, in order to propagate to the masses, enlighten them, and mobilize their functions to form a situation of the whole nation resistance, fine arts had to be close to reality and rule creation with the fine arts view of resistance realism. In the flames of the war, artists should abandon the escape from reality and self-paralysis of Song and Yuan literati paintings, and as the "screws" in the revolutionary machine, they

shouldered the task of mobilizing the masses to participate in the revolutionary cause. Fine arts style was crucial to the mobilization of people's minds: on the one hand, works that reflected the destruction of the country and the family could naturally inspire the nation's determination to win the war; on the other hand, works that reflected the suffering and aspirations of the masses could be actively accepted by the people and thus accelerate the process of the masses walking into the war. Besides, realistic fine arts works could truly record the process of national war from awakening to fighting, organizing, and growing, and restore the historical appearance of democracy. As Hou Wailu emphasized, realist anti-Japanese war literature and art was capable of "answering the dialectical relationship between rumor and truth".[7] Therefore, realism has positive significance for artists, for the public, for the anti-Japanese war, and for historical records.

The realist style pursued by Chinese fine arts was already well established in Soviet art, and the Soviet experience of realism was introduced to China in large numbers through the Sino-Soviet Culture. Before that, however, Soviet prints, which were both combative and realistic, had already had a full impact in China. While China's poverty and weakness in the first half of the twentieth century limited the development of most fine arts, prints were favored by Lu Xun for their vitality, saying that, "When the revolution comes, print is most widely used, and although it's extremely hurried, it can be done in a moment." [8] In this context, Lu Xun introduced a large number of Soviet prints to provide a model for Chinese workers to study. The emergence of Soviet prints broke the romantic and intoxicating atmosphere of the Chinese art world and infused it with nourishment of realism. In commenting on the spread of Soviet prints in China, Wang Qi noted that "All works are permeated with the richness of life" and that the decadence of romanticism was replaced by vivid flesh-and-blood facts in the art form, which resonated with the Chinese people's urgent desire for freedom and liberation.[9] The great popularity of Soviet prints in China laid the foundation for the literary and artistic exchanges between China and the Soviet Union, and the subsequent exchange of prints led to a steady flow of Soviet fine arts experience to China.

The Soviet print artists who came to China through Sino-Soviet Culture created a furious wave in China, attracting many art workers to follow them. The Soviet experience of realism deeply

influenced the Chinese fine arts style. Ma Da's *Soldiers* was a masterpiece of realism in the representation of national unity, which was praised by Ternofitz as "the product of the patriotic climax of the masses, which confronts the people, unites and consolidates their forces, and is known to the people and needed by them." [10] Thus, it is clear that under the influence of the Soviet style of realism, Chinese fine arts took a different path from the old society, which indulged in the catharsis of personal emotions, and from the escapism of personal interest or absurd eroticism influenced by the Paris School. The Soviet experience helped Chinese fine arts creation not only lay the foundation of realism in style, but also get closer to people's lives in content, consolidating the achievements of popularized fine arts.

Moreover, the exchange between China and the Soviet Union didn't only stop at learning from experience, but more importantly, Chinese artists became more deeply aware of the importance of creating works in the nationalist style. On the one hand, Chinese artists had realized that their long study of the Soviet Union had led to "inertia" in fine arts creation, and that their works were almost indistinguishable from Soviet style and lacked Chinese style. On the other hand, the Soviet artists pointed out that "Everything that could be used to identify Chinese woodcuts without error has in a way disappeared." [11] Thus, the cultural interaction between China and the Soviet Union didn't stop at the exchange of works and experience, but, more importantly, the Soviet artists, through their artworks, looked deeply into the reasons that hindered the development of Chinese fine arts and helped Chinese artists to adjust their direction in time, and they had an indelible merit for the continuity of Chinese fine arts.

4. THE REQUIREMENT OF NATIONALITY TO THE DIRECTION OF FINE ARTS DEVELOPMENT

The values and styles of fine arts were discovered and changed in order to move closer to the goals of popular fine arts and anti-Japanese fine arts creation.

The core motive of this change was to mobilize the masses to participate in the revolutionary struggle and maintain national unity through fine arts for the sake of national continuity, and in this process fine arts also gained a stage of development. However, the use of fine arts as a means of

resistance was only temporary, and literary artists needed to focus on the long-term development of Chinese fine arts. Through an analysis of the literary and artistic experiences since the May Fourth Movement, Sino-Soviet Culture summarized the strengths and weaknesses of the May Fourth Movement. In addition, it clarified the characteristics that national fine arts should have through the study of fine arts themes, techniques, and forms.

4.1 A Summary of the May Fourth Experience

The May Fourth Movement was a special period in which the New Culture Movement and the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal patriotic movement were intertwined, and therefore, the literature and art of the May Fourth period had the characteristics of both "enlightenment" and "salvation". The May Fourth Movement held high the two banners of "science" and "democracy" and vowed to purge traditional culture of its backwardness and negativity. In this regard, Wang Pingling commented that the May Fourth Movement "forced everyone to raise their heads from the dark hell, to open their eyes, to understand the gloomy environment, to understand the narrowing of their breath, and to recognize that all the evil forces hindering progress were not only the tangible national traitors, but also the invisible aspects such as the backwardness of thought, the sinking of national consciousness, the bad roots of stubbornness, superstition, feudalism, etc., which had not been completely removed. Thus, a new situation had to be opened, and the youth were encouraged to make efforts to absorb new knowledge, to bask in the luster of the vigorous new trend of thought, and to try to undo the bad luck that had accumulated for a long time." [12] The May Fourth Movement proposed the elimination of the inferior roots of national thought, which gave a new face to the stagnant fine arts, and fine arts was inundated with new blood, becoming active again. The bottom-up, folk-to-temple art development path emphasized by the May Fourth Movement also brought fine arts to the people, laying the foundation for its long and stable development.

Although the May Fourth Movement pointed out the rejection of the negative parts of traditional culture and affirmed the importance of the people to the development of literature and art, the fundamental overthrow of Chinese culture would undoubtedly become a roadblock to the

development of national literature and art. Xiang Linbing argues that the uneven development of culture has created differences in the cognitive levels of different classes of Chinese society, and that the May Fourth Movement's rejection of Chinese culture only exacerbated this problem. [13] Therefore, the development of Chinese fine arts should not be entirely based on Western-style techniques, but only on the national culture to ensure its long and healthy development.

4.2 Refinement of the National Style

The creation of works of fine arts with a national style has always been the goal of writers. Thus, Sino-Soviet Culture gathered articles on the vision of the path of development of fine arts, involving the study of themes, techniques, folk forms and the relationship between them, and in these studies, the national language of fine arts was gradually refined.

Theme is one of the most crucial conditions constituting fine arts, and the choice of theme directly affects the tone of fine arts. Since its birth, fine arts has been closely related to people's ideology, and is a concrete manifestation of their ideology. However, after the Song and Yuan dynasties, the theme of fine arts was concentrated on the expression of flowers, birds, fishes and insects, and a considerable number of painters even indulged in the imitating of ancient paintings. The content of the paintings was detached from reality, which limited the selection of materials for creation, and the narrowing of the selection of materials led to the stagnation of the development of fine arts. Jian Bozan once pointed out regarding the relationship between art and reality: "The content of art cannot be described apart from society; the development of art cannot be understood apart from history." [14] This requires that the theme of fine arts be in line with social life and the trend of history, i.e., the theme of fine arts must be highly relevant to realism in order to ensure the richness of fine arts creation and meet the necessary conditions for fine arts development.

In terms of ensuring the realism of the theme, the use of techniques is crucial to the creation of fine arts. Guo Moruo believed that fine arts was a sublimation of real life: "Fine arts cannot be separated from nature, nor can it be subjugated to nature; fine arts cannot be separated from life, nor can it be obsessed with life. It is necessary to take in the elements of natural beauty, to impel the resources of natural features, and to integrate them

and refine them, so as to serve the needs of life and constantly improve the standard of social welfare." [15] Guo Moruo's emphasis on "taking in elements" and "comprehensive creation" is essentially the use of fine arts techniques. Painting, like music, emphasizes a sense of rhythm. Different from the change of tone, scale and rhythm in music, the layout, virtuality and reality of the picture constitute the sense of rhythm in the picture, and the creative technique is the bridge between the rhythm and the picture. Fine arts developed in different historical contexts has different techniques of expression. In Chinese fine arts creation, "line" is one of the most important techniques that has been emphasized in painting. Some scholars believe that "line painting is beautiful and sensible, that is, the most expressive art of reality", [16] and it is also the most representative expression in Chinese fine arts. Although scholars have criticized Chinese painting for its long period of self-absorption and detachment from reality, they have praised its expressive power of "line". Zhao Wangyun said, "The brush lines and ink colors customarily used in old Chinese painting are the result of generations of painters' efforts and thousands of years of successive research and pursuit, and have their strengths in the method of painting composition." [17] In Zhao Wangyun's view, what needs to be discarded in old Chinese painting is its empty content rather than its techniques. Line, as the heritage of traditional Chinese painting, is very flexible and can not only express realistic content but also fully reflect Chinese temperament and national style, and can meet the requirements of painters to create realistic works with national style.

The form of fine arts expression is also the carrier of fine arts themes and techniques, and form is also the most important unit in constituting the national language, so how to select and utilize form has become a focus of scholars' research on art development. There was no shortage of discussion of national forms in Sino-Soviet Culture. Hou Wailu pointed out, "Any work that can express or place the whole history of the present Chinese society belongs to the Chinese national forms." [18] In his view, the scope of national forms is broad, and the content of the work is the decisive condition that determines whether it can be called national in character. Here, influenced by his historical perspective, Hou Wailu only emphasizes the important relationship between the theme of the work and the national form, and pays insufficient attention to other aspects of art other than content. Although he is able to accurately judge the overall

goal tendency of national art, he lacks some methods in the realization path. Zhao Wangyun's study of national forms doesn't only focus on the content of the work, but also emphasizes the technique of fine arts. He said, "The 'national form' of painting, as we think, firstly, is never a wholesale Europeanization that is accepted uncritically and undigested. Secondly, it is not a retro production that is based on the system." [19] He criticized both the fundamental negation of Chinese culture during the May Fourth period and pointed out the shortcomings of Chinese fine arts after the Song and Yuan dynasties. Zhao Wangyun believed that works in national forms need to be integrated in terms of content and technique, so total Europeanization and copying and returning to the ancients both suffer from a fragmentation of content and technique, and cannot create works with a national style. In addition, he also emphasized that "national form" and "Chinese style" must be derived from the limbs of the new China, but he didn't advocate that traditional Chinese fine arts forms should outshine others. He praised the art of cartoons and prints from abroad for their "vigilant posture" and their grasp of the "core of the times". This is consistent with Hou Wailu's view that anything that expresses Chinese society as distinct from other countries is a national form.

In short, the national language of fine arts is not only expressed in traditional Chinese fine arts forms. National fine arts works require that the theme be related to the history of the nation and that the technique be ethnically distinctive, and that works with national forms can be created only when the content and technique are closely matched. Only the interlocking theme, technique, and form can give fine arts works a positive and unique national language.

5. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the discussion of fine arts in Sino-Soviet Culture involves values, styles, and directions of development, and encourages the creation of fine arts toward popularity, realism, and nationality. Although these discussions form three main levels, there are implicit clues among the three. The study of fine arts in Sino-Soviet Culture is based on the goal of mass enlightenment and mobilization, and popular forms, realistic content and style are central to ensuring that the mobilization is effective. The popularity of form and the realism of content and style are important

components of nationality, and the three are all linked with one another, ultimately constituting a new direction for the development of Chinese fine arts.

As an important position in the study of Chinese literary and artistic theories during the anti-Japanese war period, Sino-Soviet Culture was an important component of the history of the anti-Japanese war fine arts. As a special publication led by the Communist Party of China and published in the Kuomintang occupied areas during the period of Kuomintang-Communist cooperation, Sino-Soviet Culture had a certain political significance, and the commonalities and consistency of its literary and artistic theoretical research represented the creative goals and development directions of fine arts during the anti-Japanese war period, and were of great significance in supplementing and deepening the history of the anti-Japanese war fine arts.

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