

## **The decorative experience of Chen Zhifo's artistic creation**

**By**

**Chi Zhang**

Ph.D, Candidate, Arts Performance Communication, School of Liberal Arts, Shinawatra University

Email: [16559632@qq.com](mailto:16559632@qq.com)

**Jaipak Burapajana**

Assoc. Prof.Dr.JAIPAK B. of Liberal Arts, Shinawatra University

Email: [jaipak.b@siu.ac.th](mailto:jaipak.b@siu.ac.th)

**Yan Zhang**

Prof.Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts

### **Abstract**

This paper makes a case study of flower-and-bird painting and book binding design in China, Chen Zhifo, and explores the decorative features and performance of Chen Zhifo's art, its emergence, background, operation experience, influence and many other factors, thus thinking about the practical significance of decorative language in contemporary China art circles. This paper adopts the methods of philology, stylistics and so on. The research results are as follows: Chen Zhifo shows a common decorative language in both painting and craft. On the one hand, it is based on the national tradition, and on the other hand, it is highly consistent with the western plane composition theory. It is a bold attempt to compromise between China and the West in the field of art design at the turn of the new and the old. Chen Zhifo's decorative language opened up a new direction for the formal development of meticulous flower-and-bird painting, and promoted the modernization of China arts and crafts. Facing the impact of western art thoughts, Chen Zhifo consciously made a response based on national characteristics, and put forward a set of "Chen Zhifo Plan" for the construction of China art decoration system.

**Keywords:** Chen Zhifo; Decorative; Flower and bird painting; Book binding; Design.

### **Introduction**

The first chapter mainly makes a formal analysis of Chen Zhifo's flower-and-bird paintings and book binding works, explains their formal characteristics and sums up their common decorative features.

The second chapter mainly discusses Chen Zhifo's understanding and thinking of arts and crafts. The first section discusses that Chen Zhifo's early ideas of arts and crafts were deeply influenced by western ideas of arts and crafts, and only after he returned to China did he gradually pay attention to the traditional arts and crafts of China. The second section focuses on the analysis of Chen Zhifo's thinking on arts and crafts in his career of more than 40 years,

including the essence of arts and crafts and how to revitalize the arts and crafts of our nation. The "decoration" discussed in the third section belongs to the category of formal beauty, and Chen Zhifo's "decoration" thought is contained in it, which is deeply influenced by the "decoration" thought of Chinese and western arts and crafts. This chapter discusses the emergence and background of Chen Zhifo's artistic decoration, and explains why Chen Zhifo's decoration came into being by means of literature and sociology.

The third chapter discusses the operational experience of Chen Zhifo's artistic decoration, and discusses the factors that determine Chen Zhifo's decorative characteristics, Chen Zhifo's artistic ideas and how he applies his ideas to concrete practice.

The fourth chapter discusses the influence and thinking of Chen Zhifo's decorative art, and analyzes the influence and reference significance of Chen Zhifo's decorative art on contemporary art by using in-depth interviews and field visits.

The remaining part comprehensively summarizes the decorative characteristics, causes, hidden ideas and influences of Chen Zhifo's art, discusses the possibility of constructing China's art decoration system, and analyzes the enlightenment brought by Chen Zhifo's valuable experience.

### ***Research objectives***

1. This paper intends to conduct a case study of flower-and-bird painting and book binding design in China, Chen Zhifo, to explore the decorative features and performance of Chen Zhifo's art.
2. The emergence and background of artistic decoration in Chen Zhifo.
3. Chen Zhifo's artistic and decorative operation experience.
4. The decorative influence of Chen Zhifo's art

## **Literature review**

In the 20th century, the study of Chen Zhifo mainly focused on art criticism, focusing on Chen Zhifo's painting style and his significance in the history of flower-and-bird painting in China. Since 2000, with the development of social economy, some new angles and methods have appeared in the study of Chen Zhifo, and gratifying progress has been made in the collation of Chen Zhifo data. Ouyang Moyi's Appraisal of Chen Zhifo's meticulous flower-and-bird paintings put forward some opinions on the appraisal of Chen Zhifo's flower-and-bird paintings in the rising art market, which shows Chen's important value in the vast number of painting and calligraphy collectors and art market. Yuan Xiyu's New Exploration of Book Binding Art in Chen Zhifo analyzes the achievements and contributions of Chen Zhifo's book binding in detail. Chen Le's "Modern Pursuit and National Shaping —— From the perspective of Chen Zhifo's" Oriental Magazine "binding design" analyzes the cover design of Chen Zhifo's Oriental Magazine from 1925 to 1930, highlighting Chen Zhifo's modern artistic pursuit and national image shaping. Cai Shiwei's Exploration and Development of Chen Zhifo Binding Design explores the cultivation of Chen Zhifo's concept of studying in Japan, and analyzes the design idea, style and design development track of his works. On the basis of detailed historical data, Zhou Jinchang's Examination of Chen Zhifo's Teaching in Guangzhou City Fine Arts

School analyzes Chen Zhifo's important role in promoting the design department of Guangzhou City when he was the first director of the department.

Generally speaking, the academic research on Chen Zhifo can be roughly divided into four aspects: arts and crafts, meticulous flower-and-bird painting, art education, life and comprehensive research, which involves textual research of artists' life events, analysis of works, artistic thoughts and many other aspects. There have been in-depth case studies on Chen Zhifo's flower-and-bird painting and book design, but the relationship between them and the art concept behind them, once again linked with the 20th century's Chinese and western art context, need further study. Fortunately, the newly published Complete Works of Chen Zhifo comprehensively and systematically collected the pre-living materials of Chen Zhifo, which built a bridge between the research of Chen Zhifo's flower-and-bird paintings and book design, and also provided a rare and valuable opportunity for the in-depth research of this article.

### ***Conceptual framework***

**Decorative:** Regarding the word "decorative", the Dictionary of Philosophy mentions "the unique aesthetic characteristics of works of art, especially arts and crafts, which beautify, decorate and decorate life". Here, the definition and division of "decoration" mainly focus on the field of arts and crafts. Even when it comes to decoration in other art forms, it only roughly indicates that it has aesthetic attributes, but what specific attributes are not further defined.

Gombrich believes: "This tinkering with forms and patterns in decorative arts is just a special example of a wider range of human creative activities. Whether it's poetry, music, dance, architecture, calligraphy, or any kind of craft, it proves that human beings like rhythm, order and complexity of things. " In our society, people always find the so-called art in a specific environment, accept it with special care, and use artistic terms with a specific idea. Gombrich didn't define the limitations, but generally referred to decorative arts in different fields. Humans like rhythm, order and complexity of things.

Combining the above definitions of "decoration", we can understand that decoration has its corresponding forms in different art forms, but no matter what kind of art, decoration is an artistic style, an artistic element and an artistic means. It can be comprehensively expressed by various forms of language such as lines, shapes, colors, etc., so decoration itself is a way and means widely existing in all kinds of arts. It covers all artistic fields, such as traditional Chinese painting, oil painting, printmaking, sculpture, design, etc. It is not only general and stylized, but also orderly, that is, decoration, but the conscious expression of artists. It is a concentrated expression of the artist's academic knowledge, personal moral cultivation and life experience. The artist's proper use of this method to create shows another aesthetic accomplishment of the artist. The purpose of decoration is to better express the artist's creative intention and artistic conception of his works, feel the nature in a unique form, show it to the viewer, and give people artistic shock and appeal.

**Composition (art and design terminology):** In the field of design, composition refers to the creative combination of certain morphological elements according to visual laws, mechanical principles, psychological characteristics and aesthetic rules.

## Research method

This paper mainly uses the methods of philology, stylistics, sociology, field work and in-depth interviews to make a detailed formal analysis of the subject. Based on the author's painting practice experience, on the basis of historical literature, the image is deeply interpreted.

1. Philology method: This paper belongs to the category of modern art history, so we need to collect a large number of art history and literature materials, and carry out detailed analysis and research. On the one hand, we can obtain the scientific and comprehensive cognition of the research topic, so as to grasp the writing direction of the thesis as a whole; On the other hand, the material and theoretical basis of demonstration are obtained from the carding and analysis to establish a deep literature foundation for the paper.
2. Iconology method: This paper tries to sort out Chen Zhifo's Chinese flower and bird painting works and book binding design data as far as possible, and carries out a comprehensive research on the composition, modeling, color, ink and so on.
3. Sociological method: in this paper, Chen Zhifo's Chinese flower and bird paintings are investigated in the context of social history, trying to avoid the analysis of single painting works. In the use of literature, attention should be paid to the textual research and collection of historical documents in addition to the image analysis of the works, because the emergence of a kind of literature material may pry into various voices and thinking positions issued in a specific era. Therefore, the combination of image analysis with political orientation, creator's attitude and position is an important way to explore this topic.
4. Field study method: the author will go to Nanjing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and other places to carry out field research to investigate the artistic activities of Chen Zhifo in that year.
5. In depth interview: Interview Chen Zhifo's family members, students, experts, organizers of Chen Zhifo exhibition activities, students and the masses to reveal their understanding, acceptance and specific details of Chen Zhifo.

## Research findings

1. Through the analysis of Chen Zhifo's pattern design and flower-and-bird paintings, it can be seen that Chen Zhifo attaches great importance to formal rules. In his early years, Chen Zhifo accepted new learning ideas, completed his studies under the modern art education mode, and received strict training on formal rules. From his early theoretical works on pattern design, it can be seen that Chen Zhifo is summing up and explaining the theoretical discussion of formal rules. Chen Zhifo often takes the rule of form as the guide of his own creation, so the aesthetic feeling of form in his works is distinct. In the works of pattern design, Chen Zhifo takes the content or positioning of books as one of the design elements, and he also introduced the avant-garde painting style into the pattern design.

In flower-and-bird painting, Chen Zhifo acquired exquisite skills and techniques in his early study of flower-and-bird painting in Song and Yuan Dynasties. Since the mid-1940s, flower-and-bird paintings in Chen Zhifo have gradually matured. His works in the 1950s and

1960s, for the complex shapes of pictures and images, strengthened the compact and solid structure of images, and showed strong decorative works by using natural and unrestrained brushwork and blooming colors. At the same time, he combined his rich humanistic quality with painting, injecting poetic beauty into decorative pictures.

2. Through the analysis of Chen Zhifo's early artistic experience, it is found that Chen Zhifo was greatly influenced by western arts and crafts thought in his early years, partly by Japanese literary thought. After returning to China, Chen Zhifo tried to sort out the traditional arts and crafts of China, sort out their development and changes, and analyze the cognitive concepts reflected by these ancient achievements. In terms of Chen Zhifo's understanding and thinking about arts and crafts, he believes that arts and crafts should have two categories: practicality and beauty, and decoration belongs to the category of beauty. Seeing the decline of local arts and crafts, Chen Zhifo put forward relevant solutions. First of all, he thought that people must establish a correct idea about the essence of arts and crafts, and then he gave a solution from the specific teaching system and other aspects. Judging from Chen Zhifo's practice, he put his related ideas into practice in 1950s and 1960s, which laid a solid foundation for arts and crafts education in New China.

3. Starting with the four painting learning methods of "viewing", "writing", "copying" and "reading" put forward by Chen Zhifo, this paper analyzes his concrete experience in learning and creating painting, so as to have a deeper understanding of the decorative core and practicality. He tries to convey a wonderful artistic conception with the help of high-quality lines and colors. "The artistic conception conveyed by his paintings is more related to nature and life, and reflects a wonderful poetry based on true feelings." This is an important reason why people can often immerse themselves in it and enjoy their paintings. This paper starts with Chen Zhifo's artistic thought of "seeking benefits from the wide range", and discusses Chen Zhifo's study of various kinds of fine arts and the changes made in keeping with the times. These can better reflect Chen Zhifo's tolerant attitude towards all kinds of fine arts, as well as his methods of extracting their essence to help his own creation.

4. In terms of teaching, Chen Zhifo advocated "three strictness" and "five excesses", striving to be strict in attitude, requirements and methods, and being able to achieve "five excesses" in thinking, inquiring, watching, recording and painting. All these reflect the long-term thinking and planning of the development of fine arts by a scholar and educator with a global concept and an overall artistic concept.

Chen Zhifo's meticulous flower-and-bird painting inherits the excellent tradition of ancient flower-and-bird painting, and draws on the outstanding works of outstanding painters. Combining with his own aesthetic ideas, he develops his unique personal style in concrete practice. Chen Zhifo didn't follow the fashion in the era of western painting in China. Instead, he started with the flower-and-bird painting in the courtyard that had been neglected for nearly a hundred years, and made in-depth study, which showed his confidence in the local culture. When he was learning from the ancients, he did not forget to learn from nature, observe life, and strive to paint with both spirit and form. He also exerted his own advantages in the creation of flower-and-bird paintings, absorbed the beneficial contents of pattern design, and made

every effort to make a breakthrough in formal beauty. After decades of efforts, Chen Zhifo has created a number of excellent works with beautiful style, strong decoration and appealing to both refined and popular tastes. Chen Zhifo's exploration was personal, which was not in step with the general trend of flower-and-bird painting at that time. His exploration also reflects that the national style and style contained in China's flower-and-bird paintings are unique, have inherent formal rules, meet the aesthetic needs of the nation, and are clearly different from other works of "integration of Chinese and western" styles.

5. As a research motif, Chen Zhifo's artistic decoration has bright significance in the past and present times. The exploration and theoretical accumulation of decoration runs through Chen Zhifo's complete academic and artistic career, and it is not a fragmented structure. Therefore, it should be placed in a big background to be analyzed. Therefore, this paper has re-recognized Chen Zhifo's personal artistic development and contribution to art education from the perspective of decoration, and formed an elaborate art and academic network with decoration as the core. This network is huge, which not only contains Chen Zhifo's artistic experience, but also reflects the development of modern art in China.

## **Discuss**

China's art decoration system still has a lot of room to be tapped. For example, is the western art decoration system the only reference for contemporary China's art decoration innovation? Does the foundation of traditional Chinese painting restrict the scale of Chinese painting reform? In today's diversified development of art, we need to reposition Chen Zhifo's artistic achievements, especially Chen Zhifo's outstanding contribution to decoration, and objectively understand its artistic education function and artistic appreciation value today. Today, in the 21st century, formal language, concept exploration and self-expression are paid attention to. Re-studying the decorative nature of Chen Zhifo's art itself contains more distinctive significance of the times. On the one hand, I hope this study can clarify many factors that produced classic Chinese paintings in that era; On the other hand, re-combing and analyzing Chen Zhifo's artistic ideas and ideas can not only sum up the gains and losses of the practical experience of Chinese painting, but also provide more realistic references for the current artists. We may also ask, how to construct the decorative system of China's fine arts when we are moving towards the socialist market economy and committed to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation? How to continue to play its social role in improving the national character in the decorative language of fine arts?

## **Conclusion**

Chen Zhifo's works of art show unique decorative interest, which is expressed through formal language, which is not only consistent with the principle of modern western plane composition, but also has distinct national characteristics of China. Chen Zhifo's bold attempt to compromise Chinese and Western art works enriches the language of pen and ink modeling, expands the picture composition, and to a certain extent, contributes to the diversified development of flower-and-bird painting in China and even art decoration language styles in China. This paper holds that Chen Zhifo, as an outstanding representative of modern artists in

the 20th century, organically combined Marxist dialectical materialism with national style and traditional characteristics, broke the theme tendency of "recluse" and the brush and ink technique characteristics of traditional flower-and-bird paintings in China, created paintings and book binding based on life-like feelings, broke through simple imitation of western formalism, and reflected the impact of modern artists on western art thoughts. Make a conscious response based on national characteristics, and put forward a set of "Chen Zhifo Plan" for the construction of China's art decoration system. His creation is connected with the fate of the country and society, which shows the valuable humanistic and realistic care of modern artists.

## Suggestion

Although Chen Zhifo's art decoration system ended in an unfinished state, the research on art decoration initiated by him never stopped. He trained a large number of students in decades of educational work, among which outstanding people such as Deng Bai, Li Youguang, Zhang Daoyi and others practiced and developed Chen Zhifo's artistic and educational ideas through continuous efforts. Although more than half a century has passed since Mr. Chen Zhifo's time, in Zhang Daoyi's words, "The 'pattern study' and 'arts and crafts' in those days developed around the people's food, clothing, housing and transportation. It takes decoration as the main force, that is, beautifying life, enriching life, enriching life and creating life. In this sense, it will never be backward, obsolete or outdated." From this perspective, although Chen Zhifo didn't have the opportunity to complete his extensive art decoration system, its value has been reflected and confirmed in history. Our current discussion of art technology is also based on a full understanding of Mr. Chen Zhifo, standing on the road he paved for us. Under the current context of renaming and independence of design major, how to sum up the decoration experience from the height of art and design, and how to climb and build the theory from the perspective of systematic pattern science and decoration science?

## Reference Data

- Chen Zhifo: *The Complete Works of Chen Zhifo (All 16 Volumes)*, Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press, 2020.
- Xie Haiyan: *Chen Zhifo's Life and Flower-and-Bird Painting Art-Preface to Chen Zhifo's Flower-and-Bird Painting Collection*, *Journal of Nanjing Art Institute (Art and Design Edition)*, No.2, 1979, pp.4-10.
- Liu Juqing: *The sense of the times and expressive skills of meticulous flower-and-bird painting-the experience of learning from Chen Zhifo's meticulous flower-and-bird painting*, *Journal of Nanjing University of Art*, No.2, 1979, pp.11-15.
- Deng Bai: *Chen Zhifo's meticulous flower-and-bird painting*, *Fine Arts*, No.6, 1979, pp.3-5, 17-18 and 24.
- Chen Zhifu, *Journal of Nanjing Academy of Arts*, No. 1, 1982, No. 1.
- Sun Peilan: *Chen Zhifo's meticulous flower-and-bird painting and Suzhou embroidery*, *Journal of Nanjing Art Institute*, No.3, 1982, pp. 43-45, 48.
- Huang Ke: *Huai Chen Zhifo and his binding art*, *Reading*, No.1, 1983, pp.129-134.
- Ding Tao: *Dialectics of Art Design-On the Theoretical Value of Chen Zhifo's "Sixteen-character*

- Decision", Art Garden (Art Edition), No.3, 1996, pp. 71-74.
- HU Guanghua: A Study of Chen Zhifo's Craft Thought, Art Garden, No.3, 1996, pp.75-79.
- Chen Le: Modern Pursuit and National Shaping —— From the Perspective of Chen Zhifo's Binding Design of Oriental Magazine, Journal of Fine Arts, No.5, 2013, pp. 74-79.
- Cai Shiwei: A Brief Study on the Origin and Development of Chen Zhifo Binding Design, Journal of Nanjing Art Institute, No.4, 2019, pp.166-171.
- Yuan Xiyun: New Exploration of Book Binding Art in Chen Zhifo, Journal of Nanjing Art Institute, No.2, 2006, pp. 152-159.
- Arnold Chang , Painting in the People's Republic of China: the politics of style, Boulder : Westview Press, 1980.
- Ellen Johnston Laing , The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China , Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Julia F. Andrews , Painters and politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979 , Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China, New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998.
- Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen , The Art of Modern China, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.