

PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

The Cultural Connotation and Artistic Value of Ren Bonian's Paintings of Jiung Kweir

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ABSTRACT

Ren Bonian was an all-round painter in the late Qing Dynasty. He created a large number of landscape, figure, flower and bird paintings, especially in figure painting. Jiung Kweir is a heroic figure in ancient legends who hunted ghosts and warded off evil spirits. The royal family respected Jiung Kweir, which made the pictures of Jiung Kweir widely circulated among the people, and they became a subject of both elegant and popular appreciation by the painters. Ren Bonian was also engaged in the creation of Jiung Kweir's paintings. He painted many pictures of Jiung Kweir in his life. He used Jiung Kweir to express his emotions, and he had new creations compared with previous people in terms of modeling techniques and brushwork.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ren Yi, courtesy name Bonian, firstly named as Run, pseudonym Ziyuan, Xiaolou, aliases include Shanyin Taoist, Shanyin Walker, etc. Ren Bonian was an all-round painter in the late Qing Dynasty in China and also an outstanding representative of the "Shanghai Painting School" in the late Qing Dynasty. His fine brushwork, freehand brushwork and heavy color paintings are superb. He was extremely talented and had a wide range of painting themes. He has a large number of paintings on figures, landscapes, flowers and birds, beasts, fish and insects, etc., which are accurate and vivid. Among them, the achievement of figure paintings is particularly outstanding, which has far-reaching influence on later generations [1]. The mythological and historical figures like Jiung Kweir were his favorite subjects in his figure paintings. According to legend, Jiung Kweir was originally a poor scholar in the Tang Dynasty. He was very ugly. He was wronged and died. After his death, he became an immortal who specialized in catching ghosts and became a favorite mythical figure in the painters' pens. Since the Tang Dynasty, there have been painters who created Jiung Kweir in all dynasties. Ren

Bonian was also engaged in the creation of Jiung Kweir's paintings. There were many pictures of Jiung Kweir in his life, and the Jiung Kweir he painted had his own uniqueness in the style and ink. Ren Bonian lived in the era of raging Western barbarians being rampant, and his life in poverty gave him a unique understanding of painting. In his life, he painted a lot of Jiung Kweir to express the stagnant injustice in his heart and his feelings about the fate of the country.

2. INHERITANCE SIGNIFICANCE OF JIUNG KWEIR IN CHINESE FOLK CULTURE

Jiung Kweir is a heroic figure in ancient legends who hunted ghosts and warded off evil spirits. According to the old custom, people will hang the statue of Jiung Kweir on the Dragon Boat Festival every year to achieve the purpose of exorcising ghosts and warding off evil spirits.

There are many versions of the legend of Jiung Kweir. According to the records in "Mengxi Bi Tan · Bu Bi Tan" written by Shen Kuo, a naturalist in the Northern

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Song Dynasty, Jiung Kweir was a scholar from a poor background in the Tang Dynasty. However, he was discriminated against in the imperial examination because of his ugly appearance, and was disqualified from admission by Emperor Xuanzong of Tang, and hit on the palace steps and died. Shortly after the unjust case in the examination room, Emperor Xuanzong of Tang was seriously ill. One night, he dreamed that a ghost would sneak into the palace to steal treasure, and was eaten by a ghost who came later. After Emperor Xuanzong of Tang woke up, his body recovered. Recalling that the ghost's appearance was that of the ugly scholar Jiung Kweir, so he summoned Wu Daozi to draw a statue of Jiung Kweir and hang it inside and outside the palace to exorcise the ghosts and ward off evil spirits. Since then, Jiung Kweir has become a world-famous ghost hunter.

Jiung Kweir hunted ghosts. After the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, people gave Jiung Kweir multiple identities, such as praying for blessings, seeking fortune, hoping for children, etc. Jiung Kweir has become a hero in people's lives and a favorite mythical figure written by painters of all dynasties.

The royal family respected Jiung Kweir, which made the pictures of Jiung Kweir widely circulated among the people, and became a subject of both elegant and popular appreciation by the painters. Literati painters and folk painters created a large number of Jiung Kweir pictures. Jiung Kweir's image is in the same line, and he is in the image of a poor scholar. Before Ren Bonian's paintings, most of Jiung Kweir's paintings were portrayed in a ferocious image. In contrast, Ren Bonian's lovely and amiable Jiung Kweir's images are more attractive.

According to records, Wu Daozi, the painter of the Tang Dynasty, was the first master to paint Jiung Kweir. His paintings have been lost. However, in the Northern Song Dynasty, there were still people who saw his real work. From the records of Wu Daozi's painting of Jiung Kweir in Guo Ruoxu's "Hearings of Pictures", Volume 6, "Recent Events" in the Northern Song Dynasty, people can see the image of Jiung Kweir in Wu Daozi's writings: Jiung Kweir wore shabby clothes, with a shaggy head and a fierce face, and had the image of a down-to-earth scholar. He was catching the kid ghost in one hand and trying to catch his eyes in the other and he looked weird. After the Tang Dynasty, there were many famous painters of Jiung Kweir, such as the paintings by the Southern Song Dynasty painter Gong Kai, which also had a strange appearance; the painting of Jiung Kweir's night tour by Dai Jin of Ming Dynasty, the image of the little ghost was strange, the eyes of the characters were very large, and the lines of transportation were ups and downs, heroic and majestic and so on. In the inscriptions of his works, Jin Nong, a painter in the

Qing Dynasty, listed famous painters who painted Zhong Kui from the Tang Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, such as Wu Daozi's "Jiung Kweir Towards the Palace" and Zhang Wo's "Jiung Kweir Holding a Scepter" in Tang Dynasty, Mu Yuande's "Jiung Kweir Beating the Ghosts" in the Five Dynasties, Shi Shu's "Jiung Kweir Sending His Sister to Marriage", Sun Zhice's "Jiung Kweir in Snow", and Li Gonglin's "Picture of Jiung Kweir Sending His Sister to Marriage" in Song Dynasty, Chen Hongshou's "Jiung Kweir's Night Tour on the Lantern Festival" in Ming Dynasty, etc.

3. UNIQUENESS OF REN BONIAN'S DRAWINGS ON JIUNG KWEIR IN MODELING AND BRUSHWORK

Ren Bonian is a master of painting of a generation. He made many Jiung Kweir paintings in his life. According to statistics of Ding Xiyuan, a researcher of Ren Bonian, during the more than 20 years from 1842 to 1893, Ren Bonian created more than 20 Jiung Kweir paintings in the serious and stern images with political and military achievements. Moreover, these Jiung Kweir have absolutely no similarities in shape and technique. It can be seen that Ren Bonian has profound painting skills and strong modeling ability.

Ren Bonian has a solid foundation in painting. His father was a folk painter, and he received his father's strict painting training since he was a child, and has a solid ability to portray and observe. According to legend, once there was a visitor at home, when his father returned from a trip, Ren Bonian drew the visitor's face on a piece of paper, and his father knew who the visitor was at a glance. It can be seen that at that time he already possessed quite strong modeling ability, which laid a good foundation for his future creation. Of course, Ren Bonian's success is inseparable from personal hard work. Every time he went out, he would bring a hand fold with him, and when he encountered interesting people and things, he would sketch it in real time. This allows him to have a lot of drawing materials, which is of great help to the creation of his figure paintings. In addition, he has also received training in Western realistic sketching and applied it in his creations, and the modeling performance of his characters is better than his predecessors. Therefore, he can paint the same subject repeatedly, and the figure modeling techniques are different [2].

Ren Bonian's Jiung Kweir comes from tradition and integrates new techniques. His paintings of Jiung Kweir not only inherit the form of traditional literati paintings, but also integrate the freedom and liveliness of folk paintings. His paintings are based on tradition, and he organically applies Western painting

techniques such as anatomy, perspective, tone, and warmth to his own creations, creating his unique style of painting – based on tradition, focusing on realism, and bright colors, which the image is vivid and different from the new style of literati paintings. Therefore, Jiung Kweir in his paintings has new creations in terms of shape, brush and ink (Fig. 1) [3].



Figure 1. Ren Bonian's "Picture of Jiung Kweir".

Ren Bonian's Jiung Kweir is different from his predecessors in shape. The literati painters since the Yuan Dynasty paid attention to the idea of painting with the brush. The Jiung Kweir they paint was more expressive and vivid, but the shape was not accurate enough, and the image was a bit blunt, while the Jiung Kweir drawn by Ren Bonian was more accurate in shape, and the characters were well-equipped, natural and vivid. Even if there are no ghosts in the picture, viewers can feel that Jiung Kweir is chasing ghosts, and there are paintings outside the painting. At first, his figure modeling was learned from Chen Hongshou, with obvious deformation, and was influenced by his father's folk painter's painting form. Compared with the previous paintings of Jiung Kweir with green face and fangs, slaying ghosts and catching demons, upright, ferocious, and without innovation, the images of Jiung Kweir painted by him in the early stage are strange and exaggerated, but they are quiet and serene. In the layout, the hands and eyes of the characters are particularly prominent, and the

simplicity is slightly lively. They are quite different from the tenderness of the literati painters since the Yuan Dynasty, For example, he painted "Jiung Kweir with Hairpin" in Jiayu year during Tongzhi's reign (1874). In the painting, Jiung Kweir is organizing his hairpin, wearing a long sword on his waist, with a serene expression, and auspicious flowers and fruits are placed in the scene. The image of Jiung Kweir is completely free from the ugly and ferocious characteristics of the ancient Jiung Kweir paintings, but is serene, peaceful, ironic, humorous, and full of the human touch of the world. Ren Bonian's later works were influenced by Western realistic sketches, mostly drawn from folk materials, and the proportions of the figures were more accurate. During this period, Jiung Kweir's image got rid of the form of Chen Laolian and had a strong sense of realism. Jiung Kweir's modeling is no longer limited to traditional forms, but mostly captures scenes of people's activities from the folk, with a strong flavor of life. Like the portrait of Zhong Jinshi he painted in the Xinmao year of Guangxu (1891), in the painting, Jiung Kweir holds a long sword in one hand and wants to hunt ghosts in the other, like the image of a folk butcher. In the overall composition of Ren Bonian's paintings of Jiung Kweir, he got rid of the people-oriented and stable form of the ancients [4].

Ren Bonian's paintings of Jiung Kweir also have his uniqueness. Most works of Jiung Kweir drawn by predecessors are neat, mostly outlined in thick ink, with little change in ink color, and the main method is meticulous brushwork. On the other hand, Ren Bonian's paintings of Jiung Kweir have varied brush strokes and rich and colorful ink colors. Ren Bonian studied under "two Mr. Ren" and Chen Laolian in his early years, and his paintings of Jiung Kweir were mostly traditional Chinese realistic paintings. The ink is strong, the writing is heavy, and the closing is erratic, with obvious characteristics of "nail head and mouse tail". In this issue, the paintings of Jiung Kweir mostly focus on outlines and colors. There is no major change in the brush strokes used by the predecessors in painting Jiung Kweir, but the running of the lines is smoother. The ink used is also the same as the predecessors, with little change in shade, dryness and wetness. The colors are richer than before. Ren Bonian saw the authentic works of Zhu Da in his middle age, and had an epiphany to use the brush. And he said to himself "painting to me, can be regarded as writing." In his later paintings of Jiung Kweir, it was precisely because of his specialty of "writing" that he gradually got rid of the "two Mr. Ren" (the Shanghai-style painters Ren Xun and Ren Xiong in the late Qing Dynasty) and Chen Hongshou's

painting methods, and tended to be freehand. In the later period, the brushwork of his paintings of Jiung Kweir is full of changes, more concise and general. The brushwork is both thin and thick, swift and hesitant, and smooth and refreshing, while the hardness and softness are combined, the strokes are like the wind, and the painting is done in one go. There is both thick ink and light ink, forming the artistic characteristics of his paintings that are bright and easy, natural, and both elegant and popular. It is completely different from the monotonous ink color of previous paintings of Jiung Kweir. He also integrated the realistic light and shade of Western sketches into the creation of Jiung Kweir's paintings. The faces of the characters are no longer left untreated like the predecessors, but are slightly rubbed with a brush to show the light and shade. He also painted boneless Jiung Kweir, or used the method of sloppy brushwork. The brush and ink are vivid, the characters are accurate, and the spirit is bright.

Ren Bonian's paintings can be bold and innovative. His paintings of Jiung Kweir have changed the image of the ancients, reflecting his unique painting style. Wang Yifei wrote on Ren Bonian's figure painting art: "It was not until the end of the Qing Dynasty that there appeared a figure painting master with extraordinary artistic talent and superhuman modeling ability. His sudden emergence is like a thunderbolt, breaking the long-standing figure painting circle, revitalizing and reviving the figure painting that has been in decline for hundreds of years. This painter is Ren Bonian, who is known as the Shanghai-style giant" [1]. Gong Chanxing wrote in his article, "Ren Bonian's works can break through the model of orthodox painting in the late Qing Dynasty, and his creations have distinct characteristics of the times. The form uses the ancients and the new ideas, the conception is more modern in connotation, the people and things are cherished, and the refined and the popular are shared, which adapts to the aesthetic taste of the citizen class. His paintings have extended the unique art form of Chinese painting from beginning to end. Even though he is impacted by Western painting, he still maintains the writing consciousness of traditional Chinese painting, and changing the brush and ink techniques. The purely Chinese language features, emphasizing expression of subjective consciousness and the clumping structure of the effectiveness of visual impact, are quite contemptuous and overwhelm the former sages" [2]. Ren Bonian injected a new force into the painting world and opened a new era of painting.

4. SELF-EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION OF REN BONIAN'S PAINTINGS OF JIUNG KWEIR

Ren Bonian lived in a turbulent era. He was born in 1840 and died in 1895. The year of his birth coincided with the beginning of modern Chinese history [5]. In 1840, the Opium War opened the door for Western powers to invade China. When Ren Bonian just came to Shanghai, it was the time just after the failure of the Opium War and the unequal treaty of "Five Ports Trade" signed in the "Nanjing Treaty". At this time, Shanghai has become the gate of aggression against China opened by the aggressors. Shanghai has become the largest commercial port in East Asia. The West dumped goods into China from here, and also brought Western culture and concepts. China's feudal economy began to disintegrate, political independence began to be lost, and cultural influences were enormous. Living in such a social environment, Ren Bonian repeatedly portrayed the image of Jiung Kweir and used Jiung Kweir to express his indignation and ridicule towards the society.

Ren Bonian's life has experienced two Opium Wars, the Taiping Rebellion Movement, the Westernization Movement, and the Sino-Japanese War until the year when the Treaty of Shimonoseki was concluded. This most tragic period in modern China had a huge impact on Ren Bonian's thinking, and his paintings reflected the characteristics of that era. Although his artistic achievements played a pivotal role in the history of Chinese art, he was not accepted by the so-called orthodox literati painting at that time. In the face of poverty, the political corruption of the Qing Dynasty, and the misery of the people; the imperialist powers danced wildly to carve up China, and civilian painters like Ren Bonian could only use brush and ink to express their righteous indignation and resistance. Therefore, Jiung Kweir's image with a sense of justice appears repeatedly in their paintings, in order to use the image of Jiung Kweir to express the injustice accumulated in their hearts.

Ren Bonian painted many Jiung Kweir paintings in his life, and there are no less than 20 Jiung Kweir paintings that were handed down from generation to generation. Jiung Kweir in his paintings is less fierce and domineering, and more like a cynical warrior full of humanity. In his heart, Jiung Kweir is not only able to catch and exorcise demons, but also the embodiment of justice. Jiung Kweir is upright, not afraid of evil, slaying demons and demons, vowing to eradicate the ghosts and monsters in the world, and make the world clean. In the era when Ren Bonian lived, the Shanghai Concession was crisscrossed and the Western barbarians were rampant. Facing the strange and changeable foreign invasions, full of

sorrow and grievances in the concession, as well as the weakness and incompetence of the Qing government, Ren Bonian, as a commoner, was unable to change the reality, and could only express his feelings with pen and ink and express his dissatisfaction of the Qing government, and the worry about the survival of the nation. Jiung Kweir, the traditional Chinese god of eliminating evil, just happens to be very representative. Ren Bonian borrowed the meaning of Jiung Kweir to clean up the invaders in Shanghai and save the nation. Ding Xiyuan wrote in his essay on Ren Bonian, "These figures are either stroking the beard and holding the sword, or leaning out to catch ghosts, or biting the back of the sword, stepping on the demon fox, or swinging the fan and pressing the sword, and their eyes are like radio. The huge arm stretched forward, and the five fingers were powerful; The mighty place is stunned by the wind and clouds, and the heaven and the earth are low; when it is elegant, the flowers are arranged on the hairpin, and the scroll is like a whisper. These images of Jiung Kweir, who are loyal, righteous, wise and moral, are Ren Bonian's bludgeoning and powerful mockery of the dark reality he lived in."

The pictures of Jiung Kweir in all dynasties are the emotional expression of slaying demons and catching ghosts, but the Jiung Kweir drawn by Ren Bonian has his own emotional catharsis. Different shapes reflect different moods. Facing the weakness of the Qing government, Ren Bonian changed the vicious image of Jiung Kweir in all dynasties. He let Zhong Kui organize the hairpin, bow his head and meditate, subtly integrating his emotions into the painting. It is cynical, expressing the irony of the Qing government: colluding with the outside world, suppressing the people, ceding territory, and giving sovereignty to protect its so-called "peace" have far-reaching implications. In the face of the cession of the country and the loss of sovereignty, he made a picture of drinking alone on a moonlit night, and let the little ghost blow Xiao, Jiung Kweir sat alone by the barren mountain and wild valley and drank happily, and he was drunk and rested, which also expressed his feelings about the survival of the nation. Western powers are rampant, and he is worried about when the country will be clean. In the face of the wild dance of the demons of the Western powers, he painted Jiung Kweir catching the ghost. In the painting, Jiung Kweir stepped on the little ghost, rolled up his sleeves with the other hand to catch the ghost, and showed a fierce face, which meant that the Western powers were driven out of China.

In addition, the inscriptions of Ren Bonian paintings of Jiung Kweir can also reflect his feelings of worrying

about the country and the people. For example, he wrote in "A Picture of Jiung Kweir Holding a Sword", "Now Jifu is called Ningfu, and there is no need to ask you to grab the devils"; Gao Yongzhi wrote in a picture of Jiung Kweir inscribed by Ren Bonian, "I would like to borrow you a sword to slay out a light in this dark world"; In Wu Changshuo's inscription on a picture of Jiung Kweir in red, he also wrote: "there are ghosts on the road behaving evil, wish your sword can be full of the ghosts' blood." It is not difficult to see from the poem that he not only regarded Jiung Kweir as a symbol of justice, but also regarded it as a hero who could destroy the dark society [6].

The Jiung Kweir in Ren Bonian's paintings no longer has the domineering image of Jiung Kweir in previous dynasties, but more of a cynical and vicissitudes of life, expressing Ren Bonian's sigh at the loss of the country and his indignation at the invaders. As a commoner Ren Bonian, the various injustices in the world and the ups and downs in his life made him full of indignation towards the Qing government and Western powers. Although he was unable to change the world through his own power, he could express his feelings with pen and ink, reflecting the injustice twists and turns in the heart.

5. CONCLUSION

Ren Bonian's paintings are a fusion of Chinese and Western styles, and his Jiung Kweir is not only superior to his predecessors in shape and brush and ink, but also expresses his personal emotions incisively and vividly. Ren Bonian's new form of painting, based on tradition and incorporating Western techniques, made his paintings full of vitality, and made him a master who opened up a new style of painting in the history of modern Chinese art. His paintings focus on the expression of emotions, borrowing from the past to describe the present, reflecting his charisma. Ren Bonian is worthy of being a great master in the history of Chinese painting.

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