

Sculptor Goon T. (Shek Kwan) Chan (1893 - 1951) - A Missing Page

This exhibition organized for the May Asian Heritage Month has special meaning for the Chinese Cultural Centre Museum. When Dr. Victor Chan approached me in March, 2009 with his family album and information on his father, a modern Chinese sculptor who went abroad to study his art, I was amazed at the exquisiteness and superiority of his work and already thought this will make an excellent exhibition. Goon T. Chan was that rare first-generation overseas Chinese artist, who returned to China to contribute to the development of his country. The exhibition of his works will make up a missing page in the history of contemporary Chinese sculpture development.

Although Goon Chan shone only for 20 years from his return to China in 1931 after studying abroad to his death in 1951, one cannot but marvel at both the volume and standard of his work. A study of the artist and his work will no doubt shed interesting information on the social environment within which returned artists operated around 1930's to '40s in China and their activities, but also especially on Chan. However, as a preliminary study, this exhibition would more likely provide an tentative assessment of his achievement and position in China's contemporary history of art. The icing on the cake is the re-printing of a catalogue "The Sculpture Album of Shek Kwan Chan" (First Edition), published by the artist in 1941, for distribution during this exhibition. This is the missing catalogue, which a Hong Kong art critic Li Shizhuang referred to in his article, "When did sculpture art first evolve in Hong Kong?" in the Hong Kong Economic Journal on 21 March, 2001.

Li's article occurred at a time when Hong Kong's intellectuals were reflecting on the effect of the colony's return to China in 1997 after a long period of British rule. The change of political, economic and social identity of the city had given rise to self-searching in various circles and the academics, especially in the field of the arts. Thus, there were certain interest in the early history of the arts, and so in sculpture, in Hong Kong.

Chinese sculpture being traditionally regarded more as a craft than art, had a comparatively short history in Hong Kong. While the common perception was that the teaching and creation of western sculpture was first introduced to Hong Kong by Zhang Yi (Chang Yi, b.1935) and Wen Lou (Van Lau, b. 1933) from Taiwan in the late 1950's and early 60's, Li pointed out that at least two early Guangdong sculpture artists, Goon T. (Shek Kwan) Chan (1893-1951) and Liang Zhuting (1887-1974) were quite active around the period of 1930s in Hong Kong. However, there were little information about Goon Chan, except that Hong Kong Museum of Art had two pieces of sculpture in collection attributed to him, one was supposed to be a head bust of Professor Xu Dishan (1894-1941), head of the Chinese Department of Hong Kong University in 1935. In the first ever "Hong Kong Art History" published by Zhu Qi of Hong Kong Joint Publishing Co. in 2005, Goon Chan's name was not even mentioned, although there is a short paragraph on Liang Zhuting. As we learn from the list of works and photographs provided by his family in this catalogue, there is actually a wealth of Chan's works in Hong Kong. Few people were aware that the bust of Sir Robert Kotewall at the Hong Kong Central Library was created by him, as was the bas relief of Dr. Sun Yat-sen in the boardroom of the Medical School of Hong Kong University.

That Goon Chan was a prominent and significant sculptor in the thirties is evident from the numerous references of him in contemporary Chinese literature on the art. Chen Ruilin in *Fine Art Education in 20th Century China: A Historical Perspective* (Tsing Hua University Press, 2006) cited him as among the earliest Chinese students who went overseas to study at the Boston Museum School of Fine Art from 1919 to 1931. The section on creative fine art around the early period of the founding of the Republic of China in 1911 in *A Brief History of Guangdong Fine Art* (Guangdong Cultural Net, 6 February, 2009) mentioned Goon Chan, among other pioneers, such as Li Tiefu (1869-1950) and Zheng Ke (1906-1987), went abroad to study. On the part relating to shelf sculptures in *Modern Chinese Sculpture* (Chinese Sculpture design Art network, 16 January, 2007), Chan was credited, with Li Tiefu and Liang Zhuting, as among the early artists who had creative sculpture on Dr. Sun Yat-sen. While in the part relating to large-scale commemorative sculpture and garden sculpture, again, Chan's statue for Admiral Cheng Biguang (1861-1918) was ranked together with Li Jinfa's Wu Tingfang and Jiang Xiaojian's Dr. Sun Yat-sen as the most prominent outdoor statues at the time. Finally, Goon Chan (Chen Xijun) was recognized as among the early pioneers in Wang Keqing's *Past with the Future Flourish – Chinese Sculpture in the City 50 Years* (Chinese City Sculpture 50 Years, 1999) who helped to turn a new page in the development of modern Chinese sculpture.

Contemporary historian often eulogizes China's distinguished long history of stone, clay and wooden carving, covering imperial grave-yards and figurines of the Qin (211 – 206 B.C.) and Han (206 B. C. – 220 A.D.), the religious statues in Buddhist grottos in north-western China from the 5th to 8th centuries, and household decoration and table art for private appreciation. However, the western concept of memorial sculpture at public place or in natural environment, such as gardens and parks, did not appear in China until the return of overseas Chinese students with professional training. Many of them were trained in France and Japan, with a few exceptions in North America and other European countries. Goon Chan arrived in Montreal, Canada in 1907 to study English and medicine. He later switched to Boston Museum School of Fine Arts to study life drawing, water color, oil painting and design in 1929 and proceeded to concentrate on sculpting. The reason for his choosing fine arts was not known, but he was probably influenced by his exposure to western art, as well as the political upheavals in China, which called for the artist to serve the country through education and art.

In Boston, Goon Chan studied sculpture with Charles Grafly (1862 – 1929). In 1928, he obtained a scholarship to go to Paris, France to study for one year with Antoine Bourdelle (1861 – 1929), a famous teacher and invited assistant of the French sculptor, Augustine Rodin (1840 – 1917) at Academie de la Grande Chaumiere. It appeared that at about the same time, another Chinese sculptor, Yue Lun (1901 – 1942), from Shanghai also studied with Bourdelle. Yue Lun became the first ever Chinese artist who launched a one-man exhibition of his sculpture in the French Quarters in Shanghai in 1934. Unfortunately, none of Yue's works is known to exist, and we have only photographs.

From Paris, Goon Chan went to Florence, Italy to study at the Florence Academy of Art for two years. During this time he persuaded a 12 years old Italian boy, Mario, to sit for a bust. It took a month's sitting of an hour a day to do his cast, and another two months for him to complete his masterpiece. Chan did his own cutting of the Carrara marble. The "Portrait of a Boy", which showed the ultimate craftsmanship of Goon, was later donated by the Chan family in commemoration of their father to his alma mater Boston Museum School of Fine Art in September, 2008.

During his visit to Capri while in Italy, Goon came to know an Italian girl, Nina de Maria, with whom he fell in love. It was, however, two years later in fulfilment of a promise to her mother that he returned to Capri to marry Nina in 1931. He then went back to China to start his professional career.

From 1931 to 1936, Goon taught sculpture at the Canton School of Fine Arts and became a professor at the provincial Xiang Qin University until 1937. In 1934, he was selected as one of the five finalists in a bid for a statute of Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), the first President of modern China at the Nanjing Mausoleum. The other finalists out of a group of 15 participants were Li Jinfa, Mei Yutian, Huang Langping and Teng Baiye. That was his greatest honour, although he did not win the competition. With World War II ravaging in 1937, he moved with his family to Hong Kong. Meanwhile, he received many commissions. With the fall of Hong Kong to Japanese occupation in 1942, he refused to make sculpture for the enemy and escaped to the city Zhanjiang (Canton Bay). He returned after World War II in 1945 to Hong Kong, until his death in 1951.

Within a short span of 20 years, Goon Chan had produced a prodigious body of work, including close to 68 known sculptures, and some 60 water color and oil paintings – no small achievement! His sculptures may be roughly divided into two periods: in Guangzhou (Canton) during the '30s, and in Hong Kong both in the '30s and '40s. A major part of his works were shelf sculptures, that is, busts and reliefs that are often put on shelves, although he did make impressive outdoor statue of a large scale, such as Admiral Cheng Biguang, originally stood on a bust outside the Pearl River Park (Zhuhai Gongyuan) before it was submerged and the statue removed to somewhere unknown, and the larger than life-size Gu Xiangqin at the former Xiangqin University, which we can only see from photographs.

Goon Chan's group of sculpture in Guangzhou were mostly important figures from Guangdong who were involved in the evolution of the Republic of China until the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. These, including Hu Hanmin (1879-1936), Chen Xiezhi, Li Xiangen (1893-1943), Xie Yingzhou (1894-1972) and Liu Jiwen (1890-1957) had been associated with Dr. Sun Yat-sen, and were sculptured in life. However, he also took commissions for other minor officials and wealthy merchants, such as shipping magnate Xu Aizhou (1880-1966) and herbal medicine manufacturer Wei Shaobai (1894-1944). He did two sculptures on Dr. Sun Yat-sen and at least one on Generalissimo Chang Kai-shek (1887-1975). In the case of Dr. Sun, there was one in informal and more humane appearance, while the other in rather formal and official atmosphere.

Chan also showed a multi-cultural aspect of the city, in figures such as German military adviser to China, General F. Lindermann (1934) and Rev. Mere Marie du Sacre Coueur (1936) in Guangzhou, Sir Robert Kotewall (1939), Governor Sir Graham Northcote (1940), Yu Dongxuan (1940), Duncan Sloss (1948) and Sir Robert Hotung (1949) in Hong Kong. However, the most outstanding ones of this group were probably the busts he made on contemporary Hong Kong artists and scholars, including Huang Bijun (1936), Zhao Shaoang (1936), Huang Shaoqiang (1939), Ye Gongcho and Xu Dishan (1938). While in general Goon Chan stuck to the sensuous realism of Rodin in his work, in this latter group of sculptures, he had done, like other contemporary Chinese sculptors, beyond realism to seek for a way of expressing the innate spirit of the person he was sculpting. The art critic, Ren Zhenhan, especially praised his bust for Ye Gongzhao for brevity in representational details as a return to the spirit of Tang Dynasty Buddhist sculpture art.

Goon Chan's sculptures share with other pioneer Chinese sculpture artists, such as Li Jinfa, Teng Baiye, Yue Lun and later, Hua Tianyou (b. 1933) in their experimentation in finding a way of combining the technique of Western sculpture with the traditional perception of Chinese art. Hua even advocates integrating Xie He's (479-502) "Six Methods in Chinese Painting" into sculpture. However, there are always subtle differences between their works because of their educational background and training in the art. Along with the pioneering sculptors who returned to China with Western training, Goon exemplified the first-generation that marks the political development ending in 1949 with the founding of the People's Republic of China. The second phase, that ran for 20 years until disrupted by the sweeping Cultural Revolution in 1966, was fired

with Romantic Realism dominating all the arts in China. Goon Chan passed away in 1951 which brought an abrupt end to his art. Should he have lived longer, one wonders he would no doubt continue to contribute to subsequent development of China's sculptural art.

This exhibition fills the gap in the history of contemporary Chinese sculpture art, with the additional benefit of being able to see Goon Chan's rich endowment in paintings and valuable photographs of his life. Some of his paintings were done when he studied art before turning to sculpture. They were mostly still life paintings. He returned to painting after he moved to Hong Kong. These water-color and oil paintings of his later years were mainly on Hong Kong's waterscape and flowers. In the water colors, he explored the effect of color and light on the subjects in washing technique, very much like ink in Chinese paintings. In the oil paintings, his use of the spatula like a carving knife suggested a reversed effect of his training as a sculptor. This clearly occurred in his paintings of roses and peonies and the fishing boats to create the effect of life bursting out of the canvas.

One regrets that only about one-third of Goon Chan's sculptural art works are shown in artifacts in this exhibition, which are provided by his family. Many of his early sculptures are either in the hands of those who commissioned them or were lost during wartime or social turmoil, and we are only able to show them in photographs. The China Sculpture Institute recently called for support to build a national sculpture museum so as to preserve some of the early pioneering works, as well as to provide information on the early Chinese pioneer sculptors. It is a project never too late to start.

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中國現代雕塑史遺失的一頁——第一代雕塑家陳錫鈞（1893-1951）

舉辦這回顧展覽，特別是在溫哥華的《亞裔傳統月》期間，對中華文化中心文物來說，無疑是具有特殊的意義。當去年三月陳錫鈞的後人陳偉祥醫生來見我，將他家傳珍貴的圖片與剪報給我看，及介紹他父親的歷史的時候，我便感覺到這是一個很重要的展覽。他將是中國早期藝術家在海外留學學成歸國，反對國家及社會有所貢獻的資料，也彌補了中國近代雕塑史上一頁空白。

雖然，自1931年回國至1951年在香港逝世為止，陳氏的真正活動期只有短短的二十年，但其創作的豐富，質量水準的高超，就從今次回顧展所收集的資料來看，也令人豁目相關。其中人們或多或少可從所列舉的資料中窺見三、四十年代，中國藝術家，尤其攬雕塑的陳錫鈞，在廣東及香港的活動情況，以及當時的社會環境。至於陳氏在近代中國或早期香港藝術史上的評價。希望作為初步研究的本文，能夠提供一點索。是次展覽中，陳氏家將他們父親於1941年（中華民國三十年一月）自資印刷的《陳錫鈞雕刻畫集》（第一輯）（即李世莊於2001年3月21日在香港《信報》“香港雕塑藝術何時有？”一文所提及而無法覓得的文獻）重新複印派發，尤見其珍貴。

李世莊的文章，源起於1997年回中後，前殖民地香港在政治、社和文化化上所引起的身份改、自身和認同，乃至對香港藝術史書寫的問題，其中當然包含有關早期香港雕塑活動和發展的興趣。由於中國傳統上雕塑被認為是一種次於美術的工藝，故此其在香港發展的現代歷史也是比較短暫。一般認為現代雕塑在香港的創作與教學始於五十年代末和六十年代初，張義（1935生）和文樓（1933生）分別從台灣回港所引進。李世莊指出早在三十年代，起碼有兩位雕塑家曾在香港非常活躍：即陳錫鈞（1893-1951）與梁竹亭（1887-1974）。但有關陳氏的資料卻甚為缺乏，只知道香港美術館收藏有兩件紀錄為他的雕塑作品，其中一件被認出是一九三五年擔任為香港大學中文系教授的著名學者許地山（1894-1941）。二〇〇五年，香港三聯出版社發行了朱琦所著的《香港藝術史》，書內雖然有一小段關於梁竹亭的記載（頁77-78），卻沒有陳錫鈞的資料，連名字也沒提到。然而，我們從本目錄陳氏後人提供的年表及作品名單可知陳氏在香港創作了為數不少的雕塑，例如中央圖書館內的羅旭和爵士的雕像，和香港大學醫學院會議室內的孫中山先生的浮雕。

當代美術史家在評述中國傳統雕塑藝術時往往贊譽中國具有悠長歷史的石刻、彩陶和木刻，分別出現於秦代（西元前211-206）的彩陶兵馬俑和漢代（西元前206-西元220）帝王陵墓石彫、從五世紀到八世紀經歷唐，宋，元三代河西走廊一帶雲岡、大同和敦煌石窟的佛教雕刻，和明清以後室內及案頭不刻小品。西方觀念的雕塑，如紀念性人像或戶外公共場所的大型雕塑品，直至二十世紀三十年代從海外回國的留學生開始後，才建立起來。這期留學生，多在法國或日本學雕塑，在北美及其他歐洲國家學習的較少。

陳錫鈞於一九一九從廣東地加拿大滿地可，原意學習英文及醫科。一九二七年，轉到美國波士頓博物館美術學校攻讀繪畫及設計，後來更專修雕塑。他轉學的原因不明，可能是在西方接觸藝術後的影響，又或者認為通過藝術及教育可以報國。

在波士頓，陳氏追隨查理士·格非（1862-1929）學雕塑。一九二八年，他獲得獎學金前往法國巴黎進入雕塑大師羅丹的助手安東布德爾（1840-1917）工作室學習。大約同一時間，另一位從上海來的留學生岳俞（1001-1942）亦跟隨布氏學習。岳俞後來於一九三四年在上海法租界舉行了雕塑個展，成為中國近代美術史上第一個舉行雕塑個人展的藝術家，可惜我們現在看到的只是照片，原作實物已經不存在。

從巴黎，陳錫鈞取道義大利佛羅稜斯，並且在佛羅稜斯美術學院進修兩年。在這期間，他以每天一小時的一個月的時間，為一位十二歲的義大利男童造像，總共花了三個月，還親自挑選及彫鑿雲石，這件名為《男童》的作品是他一生最精緻的一件雕塑。二〇〇八年陳氏家族為了紀念他們的父親，將這件作品捐贈給他的母校波士頓博物館藝術學校，曾引起一番哄動。

在義大利的時候，陳錫鈞曾到卡普利遊歷，並結識了一位名叫瑪麗亞連娜的義大利少女。兩年後，於一九三一年，履行他的承諾，回到卡普利與該少女結婚，並且一起回到中國，開展他的事業。

一九三一年到一九三六年，陳錫鈞在李研山（1898-1961）邀請下在廣州市立美術專科學校教授西畫及擔任為雕塑系主任。一九三三年完成古勤勤（應芬）（1873-1931）的全身銅像，並出任為紀念革命元老的省立勤勤大學為教授，歷任五年。一九三四年，他參與南京市中山陵孫中山先生銅像雕塑的公開徵集競賽，並且從十五位參賽者中被選為五位入圍者之一，其他四位分別為李金發、梅雨天、黃浪萍和滕白也。他雖然沒有獲獎，但已經是他一生的最高榮譽。迨第二次世界大戰於一九三七年爆發，陳氏與家人移居香港，以他出色的造詣，獲得不少造像的委約。四二年，香港淪陷，為了逃避日軍要脅造像，他匿藏於法租界滬江市，至二次大戰於一九四五年結束後，才回到香港，五一年病逝為止。

在短短的二十年間，陳錫鈞創作了為數不少的作品。包括近69件的雕塑、60件以上的水彩畫和油畫，成就不菲。除了早期的作品以外，他的雕塑大約可分為兩個時期：即三十年代在廣州的作品，和三十年代與四十年代在香港的作品。他大部分的作品又以架上雕塑為主，即頭像和掛牆的浮雕。大型紀念性的戶外或是室內近真人的全身雕像不多，如前廣州珠海公園廣場的程璧海軍上將的雕像，六十年間由於珠海公園的沉歿，已不知去向。他為省立勤勤大學所作全身站立塑像，現在所能看到只有圖片。

陳錫鈞在廣州所造的雕塑，大都是在廣東省出生與中華民國創立和孫中山先生有關的重要人物，如胡漢民（1879-1936）、陳協之、李仙根（1893-1943）、謝瀛洲（1894-1972）和劉紀文（1890-1957）。陳氏為他們立像，使得以傳世。另外，他也接受一些地區的官員和商人，如第一代船王許愛周（1880-1966）和中藥二天堂的韋少伯（1894-1944）的委約造像。他曾造過兩次孫中山先生的雕像，及至少一次蔣介石（1887-1975）的雕像。孫中山的雕像，其一較為慈祥及平民化，而另一個較莊嚴和肅穆的。

他又為各種不同的人物造像，展現出多元民族的面貌，如在廣州為德國籍的中國軍屬顧問林德曼將軍（1934）、法瑪麗亞聖心修道院院長（1936）塑像；在香港為羅旭和爵士（1939）、港督羅富國爵士（1940）、餘東旋（1940）、香港大學校長史諾斯（1948）及何東爵士（1949）塑像。然而，他最出色的一組雕像，卻是為香港同代藝術家及學者的塑像。這一組雕塑包括國畫家黃君璧（1936）、趙少昂（1936）、黃少強（1939）、學者葉恭綽及許地山（1938）。一反他一般追隨羅丹的感性寫實風格，在這組作品中，正如其他同期的雕塑家一樣，他超越了一般的西方的寫實，表現出以捕捉對象內蘊精神的中國寫意手法。藝評家任真漢特別讚揚葉恭綽頭像的概括、省略枝節的寫意手法，認為具有唐代佛教雕塑藝術的精神。

陳錫鈞和早期開創性的中國雕塑家，如李金髮、滕白也、岳俞，甚至後來的滑田友（1933生），都努力嘗試在雕刻作品中，將西方的技巧融入於中國傳統藝術的精神。滑田友甚至倡導將南朝謝赫（479-502）的繪畫理論“六法”引入中國現代雕塑製作。不過，由於個人的教育背景與訓練的各有不同，他們的藝術表現也各有微妙的差異。陳錫鈞與其他同期的留學回國的雕塑家，都分別反映出他們年代的政治發展，使他們與其後於一九四九年新中國成立後的一代雕塑家有所不同。第二期的雕塑發展，延續了差不多二十年直至一九六六年文化大革命的爆發中斷。澎湃的蘇聯革命浪漫的寫實主義，影響一切中國藝術包括雕塑。陳錫鈞於一九五一年逝世，使他的藝術生涯乍然而止。假如他活得長命一點，不知會否改變他的藝術成就與中國雕塑的發展。

這個展覽除彌補了現代中國雕塑史上空白的一頁外，還讓我們看到由陳氏家族提供的陳錫鈞繪畫天賦和一些生平珍貴的圖片。一部分繪畫是花卉靜物的練習。他晚期回到香港後，作了大量的水彩和油畫，畫的多是花卉和香港的海景。他以寫意的筆法，在水彩畫中探討色彩與光線的效果；在油畫中，他卻用雕刻運刀的手法，反過來用在畫面上，造成批削的立體感，特別在他繪畫的牡丹、玫瑰和漁船的表現上，使繪物像突出畫面，富有生命感。

是次展出由陳氏家族提供的雕塑作品，只約略占陳氏全部作品三分之一，其他由於屬於私人收藏，或因社會動蕩而失散的關係，我們只能展出原作的圖片，令人不無遺憾。中國雕塑學會最近努力呼籲政府早日建立現代中國雕塑博物館收藏及保存早期中國雕塑家的作品及文獻，並鼓勵雕塑家的後人將先輩作品集及圖片等資料，捐贈國家保存，以給後人參考。因有感於是次展覽的經驗，雖屬亡羊補牢之見，為時亦未為晚也。

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