

Exploration of the Art Form of “Gusu Version” of Woodcut New Year Pictures

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Abstract—Western painting has a profound influence on the “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures, but it is different from the characteristics of traditional New Year pictures. This article aims to explore the art forms of the “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures.

Keywords—Woodcut New Year Pictures, Art Forms

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures was first proposed by Japanese art historian Kuroda Yuji in the preface to the “Ancient Chinese Prints”. Most of these New Year paintings are hidden in Japan, and it is rare in China. We can see the influence of Western painting on the “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures, as well as its characteristics different from traditional Chinese New Year paintings. The traditional woodcut New Year pictures are mostly auspicious and festive, and even the drama stories are mostly such scenes. This kind of love and love for the festive auspiciousness also makes the theme of the new year painting have certain limitations. “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures does not emphasize the celebration of auspiciousness, but mainly depicts the landscape, specifically the indulgence of the natural and human environment at that time. Characters are usually only used to decorate scenes in the picture, and they are of small size.

II. GUSU VERSION

In contrast to the traditional Chinese paintings we are familiar with now, in addition to the obvious differences in content, “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures also appears to be influenced by Western painting styles in style and technique. The principles of Western painting, such as focus perspective, light and shade, are everywhere in the picture. Take the “Gusu Version” of the “All Walks in Life” as an example, the composition of the work is complete, the level is far and near, the perspective is accurate, the space is arranged properly, and the emphasis is on the architectural style. The characters only exist in the way of embellishing the scene. The work is very Western-style copperplate. Moreover, there were more direct inscriptions on the New Year pictures indicating the use of Western painting. The “Gusu version” of the “Romance of the West Chamber” not only allows us to find traces of Western paintings again in the technique, but also clearly indicates the imitation of Western painting technique, “Tesi”. It can be seen that the style of reference to Western painting at that time was indeed popular.

Even if the content and technical characteristics are left out, the “Gusu version” woodcut New Year painting has special features in terms of color. For traditional Chinese paintings, the usual method is to emphasize colors, such as red, yellow, blue, green and purple, which are the primary conditions for attracting people’s attention. However, in the “Gusu version” of works, there are no previous dazzling colors, which are replaced by the combination of light colors, a large number of intermediate tones. Besides, the performance of the light and dark shadows has greatly reduced the brightness of the picture, and the whole work seems to be closer to the meaning of genre painting.

The most direct source of the “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures “Tai Xi” should be attributed to the aesthetic tastes and hobbies of the emperors at that time. As early as in the Ming Dynasty, as Matteo Ricci brought Catholicism into China, Western painting naturally entered the Chinese people’s vision. Chinese artists and ordinary people began to face a new way of observation and expression. Western paintings have a realistic approach that made most Chinese painters at the time overwhelmed. However, the Chinese literati painters at the time did not rush to this painting method. They all believed that the Western paintings had no brushwork at all, but they were only craftsmen and dismissive. This situation continued until the Qianlong period, and it was changed with the Emperor Qianlong’s favor of “Western techniques”. The enlightened Emperor Qianlong did not reject or even admire Western techniques, and greatly used many missionary painters. In the Qing Dynasty painter Leng Mei’s work “Indus Double Rabbit Drawing Axis”, the shape of the double rabbit is accurate and vivid, and the image is realistic; the fur is smooth and rich in texture. The rabbit’s eye is reflected in white, and the eyes are crystal clear. The composition is dense and sparse, and the fineness of the pen and attention to the texture are obviously influenced by Western painting techniques.

We are accustomed to believe that the New Year painting is a kind of civilian art, and its paintings and engravings are born in the cold, belonging to the category of artisans. What they do seems to be a simple mechanical labor, which does not play a decisive role in the artistic style of the entire New Year’s painting, and even does not leave a name in the history of painting. However, in the “Gusu version” of woodcut New Year paintings, some of the artist’s names were unexpectedly left, and the large-scale inscriptions abounded, and most of them were lyrical poetry. This point is very similar to Chinese literati painting,

reflecting the self-cultivation and aesthetic tendency of the drafter from the side, and also shows that the “Gusu version” of woodcut New Year painting should have literati painters to participate in the creation. It should be said that it was the active participation of the literati painters that made the court's admiration for Western law throughout the creation of the “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures, which was impossible for artisans with low general cultural standards.

The participation of the literati painter added the draft of the “Gusu version” of woodcut New Year painting to the factor of “seeking Western techniques”, but it was obviously futile if there was no good cooperation. In Suzhou at that time, there was a batch of engravings that had been influenced by Western methods, which made the drafts with Western methods factors perfected. Perhaps this is the direct reason why the popular Western style can be brought into Suzhou.

For the appearance of the Chinese and Western styles of the “Gusu version” of woodcut New Year paintings, only the good time of the day - the Emperor Kangxi and the Emperor Qianlong's love of Western painting methods; the geographical advantage - several understanding of the work of Western law was not enough. The overall environment of Suzhou's foreign trade during the Qianlong period was also the reason why this western-style was found in the Peach Blossom Castle New Year painting. The development of the business has also brought about the prosperity of the handicraft industry, and the hand workshops are all over the suburbs. Su embroidery and jade carvings, including the Taohuawu New Year paintings, all developed and developed in the Qing Dynasty. Many merchants at that time also included many Western merchants. The frequent appearance of these Western merchants in Suzhou is bound to bring some Western products and artworks, so that Suzhou craftsmen have ample opportunity to understand, and thus may be familiar with and agree with Western painting methods. The “Gusu version” woodcut New Year pictures will have the soil that was bred. This is also a condition that is not available in other regional New Year paintings.

The “Gusu version” of woodcut new year's paintings are carefully crafted, the ink lines are clear, the colors are similar, and the visual feeling is closer to the painting, filled with a faint book. Such an effect undoubtedly needs to be achieved by repeated printing over and over again, laborious and laborious, and the price should naturally be high. Although it is exquisite and elegant, it obviously does not meet the psychological price that the common people can accept every year to change the New Year's painting. In addition, the theme is not the festive celebration of the people, so it is not acceptable to ordinary people. It can be seen that the audience of the Peach Blossom Castle “Gusu version” of woodcut New Year paintings is not ordinary people.

The “Gusu version” of woodcut New Year painting obviously has the original intention of the new year painting, and it does not meet the traditional aesthetic requirements of the Chinese people for the New Year painting. However, the “Gusu version” is objectively present and popular. Then, it is necessary to make a systematic study of “Gusu version” of woodcut New Year pictures.

By studying the spread of “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures, we can find an intriguing phenomenon: as the origin and the traces of spreading the “Gusu version” is rarely found in Suzhou, even in China. Most of the existing works in this section are in Japan. Does this state of preservation indicate the Peach Blossom Castle “Gusu version” of woodcut New Year painting, and the main sales target is the neighboring country of Japan at that time?

While studying the “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures in Suzhou, you can't help but mention the Japanese prints. Ukiyo-e is a genre painting of the Edo citizens. After the 17th century, in Edo, the civic class consisting of peasants and ronens quickly rose. Although they did not occupy a political position, they actually grasped the economic lifeline. A culture that they created to express the life of the citizens was widely popular at the time and was called “Edo Culture”. Ukiyo-e is an important part of the Edo culture. In order to cater to the aesthetic taste of the ordinary citizens, it directly represents the characters and scenes in Edo's life, and is known as the “Encyclopedia of the Image of the Edo Era”. However, due to its excessive realism and secular performance, it was called “Edo painting” by the Kyoto people. “Edo Painting” is the same as “Ukiyo-e”, which was indecent at the time and represented the Kyoto people who had excellent cultural traditions. The background of this incomprehensible citizen art has much in common with the “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures.

The Edo period was an era of great development of “Ukiyo-e”. By the middle of the 18th century, many different genres and styles emerged. This period coincided with the Yongzheng and Qianlong periods of the Qing Dynasty, and it was also the time when the “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures flourished. Before the birth of Ukiyo-e, the Japanese Edo genre paintings prevailed. The genre paintings show the life of the upper class, which is more elegant, painted on the screen, the fan and the long scroll; the ukiyo-e is good at depicting the social scenes, which are more vulgar and painted on a single page. “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures are about 110 cm high. It is not appropriate to use the new year pictures posted on the portal, but it is more appropriate if it is mounted on a screen or a fan.

In Japan, there is no habit of posting new year pictures, and “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year pictures is popular in Japan, and it is so popular. What is its real use? Its prevalence is closely related to the artistic ethos of the Edo period in Japan. Comparing the relationship between the two, you can find the answer to the question.

The urban cultural scenes such as Kabuki in Ukiyo-e were similar to those in Suzhou. At that time, Edo concentrated most of Japan's wealth, and the material consumption of citizens was unprecedentedly strong. As a result, the demand for cultural consumption was growing stronger, and the old art forms could not adapt. This change has led to the emergence of cultural forms including kabuki and sumo. This is very similar to Suzhou, which has been bustling since ancient times.

In the "Gusu Version" of woodcut New Year pictures and the ukiyo-e, the ladies' pictures are a big category, but the new-year-old ladies are mostly female, while the ukiyo-e ladies are mainly geisha. In ukiyo-e, in addition to the chess and calligraphy, the business woman who combs her hair, washes her feet, cuts clothes, dresses, bathes, flirts, and even sells firewood can also enter the painting beautifully.

III. CONCLUSION

"Gusu Version" of woodcut New Year pictures appeared during the Qing Dynasty, Yongzheng and Qianlong years. It is the period of Japanese popular Western painting. It may not be possible to verify who influenced who, but from "Gusu Version" of woodcut New Year pictures Judging from the preservation of Japan and Japan, it may be precisely Japan's demand for such genre paintings in Western law to promote the unique style of "Gusu Version" of woodcut New Year pictures.

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