

The Characteristics and Artistic Value of "Gusu Version" of Woodcut New Year Paintings

Xing Zhou

Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute

Jingdezhen, 333403, China

Abstract—For a long time, when it comes to the New Year paintings, everyone is familiar with folk traditional Chinese paintings in the traditional sense, such as the door god paintings, as well as the historical paintings of the historical figures, myths, operas, and auspicious patterns. These new year paintings either symbolize the multi-childity, the wealth, or the idea of expressing evil spirits. Even the drama stories are mostly about festive and auspicious topics. Little is known about the “non-mainstream” New Year paintings such as “Gusu Version” of woodcut New Year paintings. Is such an annual painting really like an independent art form that cannot be formed without the fixed tradition and common foundation, as some people think? Let's explore it in this paper.

Keywords—Folk New Year Paintings, 'Gusu Version' of Independent Art Forms

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of "Gusu Version" of New Year paintings was first proposed by Japanese art historian Kuroda. He believes that 'Gusu Version' of New Year paintings refers to works produced under the influence of Western copperplate prints. It is a large-scale print with excellent technology that is extremely rare in the history of Chinese printmaking. It is particularly important to pay attention to the fact that it can accurately grasp the image obtained in Western copperplate prints, dissolve it into the theme of traditional Chinese painting, and express the characteristics of Western painting in a natural form. It is rooted in traditional folk art and completely out of the traditional form of New Year painting. Then, how does this independent art form emerge and develop?

II. THE COLORFUL FOLK NEW YEAR PAINTINGS

As we all know, the new year paintings are derived from religious woodblock prints, but to fully understand the nature of the new year paintings, we must understand the deep relationship between the new year paintings and traditional painting art. Because of the inherent laws of art, there must be a commonality between folk new year painting and mainstream aesthetic art. In fact, the colorful folk new year paintings and the aesthetic art of high-level society are also mutually influential and interactive.

The wooden board paintings were produced in the Five Dynasties and Northern Song Dynasty. At that time, the hand-painted New Year pictures were no longer in line with the social needs of mass production. Therefore, the woodcut New Year pictures quickly occupied the market. When this novel art type appeared, the traditional painting art was already in a mature stage, and several factions existed at the same time, which inevitably affected the folk art at that time. One of the factions is the "literary painting" of the Song Dynasty. The literati painters advocate free creation, oppose the complete pursuit of a similar style of painting, and promote poetry into the meaning of painting. 'Do not learn to be human, entertain yourself.' At that time, the New Year paintings were obviously influenced by the literati paintings. During the Tang and Song Dynasties, professional painters and sculptors came together. The traditional Chinese painting art and the folk art ideas were combined to create a great success.

'Gusu Version' of woodcut New Year paintings was born in Suzhou in this big development background. Its theme is different from traditional folk New Year pictures. There is no religious content, no auspicious meaning or guardian function. These new year paintings are only aesthetically meaningful and created for enjoyment. And its most important feature is the use of Western copperplate painting methods, and the light and dark relationship, the spatial perspective relationship, and the artistic conception of Western copperplate paintings are brought into the picture of traditional Chinese painting.

At that time in Suzhou, due to the development of industry and commerce and the frequent exchange of maritime trade and culture, many excellent Western painting art works flowed through here and entered the eyes of the Chinese people. The realistic style of Western paintings is puzzling to Chinese painters, but most orthodox painters only think that Western painting art is a new and strange thing, but there is no artistic conception, just a product of the workshop. They are not intended to be emulated. This situation continued until the Qing Dynasty Qianlong period. Since the emperor had great interest in European art, the missionary Lang Shining became his court painter and was greatly favored. He painted many paintings introducing the life of the emperor and singing praise. It is because of the emperor's preference that it determines the attitude of Chinese painters in the era to Western painting. Since then many painters have gradually begun to emulate Western painting techniques, and as a result, Western art has begun to spread widely. At that time, the "Gusu Version" of New Year paintings no longer emphasized the festive auspiciousness, but mainly based on the simple depiction of the scenery, specifically the indulgence of the natural and humanistic environment of the then. The characters in the picture are only used to embellish the scene, the volume is small, and it is insignificant. In addition to the obvious differences in content, in terms of style and technique, there are also special styles influenced by Western painting methods. The principles of Western painting, such as focus perspective, light and shade, are everywhere in the picture. In terms of color, "Gusu Version" of New Year paintings also has special

features. In traditional Chinese painting, thick ink is a common method, red, yellow, blue, green, and purple, which are the primary conditions for attracting people's attention. However, in the "Gusu version" of works, the smashing of the sun's heavy color no longer appears, replaced by a light color combination, the use of a large number of intermediate colors, the large number of lines showing the dark and dark shadows greatly reduces the brightness of the picture, the painting seems to be more like a genre than a New Year painting.

But why does this Western style of painting have not affected the form of New Year paintings in other regions, but only played a role in the "Gusu version" of Suzhou? For example, the famous Yangliuqing paintings, Yang Liuqing is closer to the capital, and more susceptible to the influence of the court. However, in the Qianlong Emperor's Yangliuqing paintings, such styles are rarely seen. Moreover, even in Suzhou, the birthplace of these new year paintings, it is difficult to find traces of their distribution today. Most of the existing such new year paintings are kept in Japan. Can this lead to an inference, "Gusu Version" of woodcut New Year paintings, the main consumer market is Japan?

III. INDEED, STUDYING "GUSU VERSION" OF NEW YEAR PAINTINGS CANNOT FAIL TO MENTION JAPANESE UKIYO-E PRINTS. SO LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT JAPAN AT THE TIME.

In Japan at the time of the initial establishment of the Shogunate, in order to strengthen the centralized ruling constitution, the country's policy of locking the country was implemented in 1635, and it was forbidden for the natives to go abroad. At the same time, foreigners other than China and the Netherlands were prohibited from entering Japan. In terms of foreign trade, only Nagasaki is the only trading port. During the Qianlong period, trade exchanges between Suzhou and Japan were very developed. Nagasaki City came to 193 Chinese ships in 1689. Most of these ships came from Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Guangdong. As the trade between China and Japan has increased year by year, Chinese books, paintings, handicrafts, and silk have been introduced to Japan. Paintings such as literati paintings and "Gusu Version" of New Year paintings must also be mixed in during that period. The Japanese painters at the time were actively exploring the new artistic conception, new expressions and new painting techniques of painting. The arrival of "Gusu Version" of New Year paintings will not attract their attention, and naturally it will be very popular.

In Japan in the Edo period, the economic initiative has been transferred from the aristocrats and senior warriors to the hands of the merchants, which will inevitably bring about changes in the form and content of culture and art. The art of the Edo period presents a different face and character than the Japanese art. The previous paintings only serve the upper class. It is an art that is above the ordinary people and is a kind of "minority" art. But the paintings of the Edo period are different. Most of the painters come from the private sector. They face the reality of living. The deafness is not the elegant atmosphere created by the deliberate creation. Their artistic audience is not the nobles who are up to the government, but the ordinary citizens who do not have high cultural accomplishments. Therefore, these will inevitably affect the artist's focus on subject choice and content performance.

Ukiyo-e is a genre painting of the Edo citizens. After the 17th century, Edo, a civic class composed of peasants and rogues, rose rapidly. Although they did not occupy a leading position in politics, they actually grasped the economic lifeline. A culture that was created by them to express the life of the citizens was widely popular at that time and was called "Edo Culture." However, due to its excessive realism and secular performance, it is represented by the Kyoto people who have a good cultural tradition. The background of this kind of hard-to-find civic art has many things in common with the "Gusu version" woodcut New Year pictures. The reason why ukiyo-e was able to maintain its vitality for a long time afterwards was largely due to its ability to pursue new techniques and new forms in the unexplored field of woodblock prints. This coincides with the development of background and techniques for the "Gusu Version" of woodcut New Year paintings. Not only that, but there are many striking similarities between many "Gusu Version" of New Year paintings and the ukiyo-e paintings of the Edo period. The spatial concepts and the relationship between light and dark and the precise perspective revealed in these paintings all show the great influence of the characteristics of Western painting art.

The "Gusu Version" of New Year paintings appeared in the period of Emperor Yongzheng and Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty. It was the period of Japanese popular Western painting. It may not be possible to verify who influenced who. However, from the preservation of the "Gusu Version" of New Year paintings in China and Japan, it may be precisely the Japanese demand for the use of this genre painting of the West Law. "Gusu Version" of New Year paintings.

IV. CONCLUSION

By studying the "Gusu Version" of woodcut New Year paintings from the 17th to the early 19th century, we can explore the development trend of Chinese traditional Chinese New Year art at that time so that we can understand this unique art form and develop it for future folk art.

REFERENCES

- [1] Zhou Xu. Summary of Chinese Folk Art[J]. Package Design Performance Techniques, 2011
- [2] Wang Kun. The Evolution of Chinese New Year Paintings in the 20th Century—Also on the Spontaneity of Folk Culture[D]. Tianjin University, 2013-05-01.
- [3] Xun Shenglan. Source and Flow: Traditional Culture and Modern Design [M]. Nanchang: Jiangxi Fine Arts Publishing Co., Ltd., 2007.
- [4] Jie Ziping. The disappearing folk art--Chinese New Year. Shanxi Ancient Books Publishing House 2004.
- [5] Wang Shucun. History of Chinese Folk New Year Paintings. Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1991