

ลักษณะทางศิลปะและสุนทรียศาสตร์แบบดั้งเดิมของภาพพิมพ์ปีใหม่เถาฮั่ววู่

The Artistic Characteristics and Aesthetic Origins of Taohuawu New Year Prints

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บทคัดย่อ

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Abstract

This qualitative research aims: 1) to study the artistic characteristics of Taohuawu New Year prints, and 2) to analyze the aesthetic origins of Taohuawu New Year prints. Data were obtained through literature research and interviews with inheritors of New Year prints, academic researchers, collectors, and traditional painting experts. Descriptive analysis was used to summarize and discuss the results. The results are as follows: 1) Since the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, Taohuawu New Year prints have undergone four major development periods and developed different artistic characteristics. 2) Their compositions, visual elements, production techniques, and themes are influenced by Suzhou's civic culture, the Wumen School of Painting, Song Dynasty literati paintings, Ming and Qing Dynasty novels, engraved book illustrations, handicraft traditions, and Western copperplate engravings, creating a fine and elegant fusion of literati and civic aesthetics. This study defines the artistic characteristics of Taohuawu New Year prints, sets the standards for modern creation, and guides its development and inheritance while preserving the "original flavor."

Keywords: Taohuawu New Year Prints, Artistic Characteristics, Traditional Chinese Aesthetics, Aesthetic Origins

Introduction

New Year prints, which refer to the folk paintings used during the lunar New Year, are the products of China's "Nian" culture and later include other folk paintings used in festivals, weddings, birthdays, and other folk activities (Zhou, 2009). In the secular lives of traditional societies, New Year prints hold significant importance. All provinces produce Chinese New Year prints, reflecting the diverse lifestyles of the locals. New Year prints have distinct styles (Wang, 2002). The most famous New Year print production areas are Tianjin Yangliuqing and Suzhou Taohuawu, known as "South Tao and North Yang" (Zhang, 2017).

The Taohuawu area of Suzhou is where most of their workshops are, hence the name of their New Year prints. This delicately carved and elegant piece is full of public life

interest, typical of Chinese folk aesthetics. About 400 years have passed since Taohuawu New Year prints were created in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties (Zhou, 2009). Political and social changes, lifestyle and folk custom changes, and printing technology advances have all influenced New Year prints' theme, form, and style.

However, from the "New Taohuawu New Year prints" created after the founding of the People's Republic of China to the current works, the style and characteristics of most works have almost disappeared, except for the content and themes of individual works with local characteristics. These woodblock decorative prints with new citizen colors or custom paintings have no relation to traditional Taohuawu New Year prints.

At present, Taohuawu New Year prints are facing problem because they haven't used their cultural identity well. Producers have improved and innovated traditional New Year prints to make them more suitable for modern people, but this has resulted in the disappearance of their unique characteristics. Although inheritors can survive with income, the Taohuawu New Year prints have lost their cultural identity. Have they survived? Innovation is good, and traditional art needs to fit into modern life. Should innovation be measured?

The usage, production process, and artistic characteristics of Taohuawu New Year prints make up their cultural identity. We can change their materials, thereby enabling the creation of new products and changing their use. It can adapt its production process to utilize semi-automatic or fully automatic tools to engrave, print, and perform other tasks with half the effort. However, the artistic characteristics of traditional Taohuawu New Year prints cannot be changed, and if they are changed, they become other woodblock prints and decorative paintings.

Thus, continuing traditional Taohuawu New Year prints necessitates a thorough understanding of their artistic characteristics and an exploration of their origins through Chinese aesthetic theory.

Research Objectives

1. To study the artistic characteristics of Taohuawu New Year prints.
2. To analyze the aesthetic origins of Taohuawu New Year prints.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative research. The researchers first analyze and summarize Taohuawu New Year prints' artistic characteristics across time. The researchers then used aesthetic theory to examine Taohuawu New Year prints' composition, visual elements, production techniques, and theme. The researchers chose Taohuawu New Year prints for analysis based on these criteria: 1) the most well-known. 2) the most distinctive. Data were collected from literature and interviews with Taohuawu New Year print inheritors, academic scholars, collectors, and traditional painting experts. The results are presented as a descriptive analysis.

Results

1. The artistic characteristics of Taohuawu New Year prints

Usually, New Year prints are difficult to alter. However, Taohuawu New Year prints have changed due to politics, economy, society, and other factors in each period, as their audience has shifted from citizens to farmers. Summing its artistic characteristics into a single feature is not rigorous. To accurately describe their artistic characteristics, researchers will delineate different periods according to time.

1.1 Initial period: The push of civic culture and illustration prints

Since the Ming Dynasty, woodblock prints have made New Year prints an independent art form (Ah, 1954). After the middle of the Ming Dynasty, Suzhou's handicraft industry was developed, the

commodity economy was active, civic culture was prevalent, and opera, novels, and popular books made the book engraving industry and illustration prints flourish, which promoted Taohuawu New Year prints and its rich street culture (Zhou, 2009). Literati painting tradition is evident in Taohuawu's early New Year prints, which imitate Wanli's prints. The painting, engraving, and printing are exquisite (Gao, 2012).

1.2 Prosperity period: "Gusu engraving" influenced Japanese ukiyo-e

The Qing Dynasty's most prosperous periods were the Kang, Yong, and Qian dynasties when Suzhou was one of the top economic and cultural centers. Taohuawu New Year prints were Western-compatible at this time. The perspective and line arrangement resemble Western copperplate engravings (Zhang, 2017). The majority of New Year prints were exported to Japan. The "Gusu engraving," which the Japanese art world credits with influencing "ukiyo-e," mostly refers to this period (Feng, 2011).

1.3 Recession Period: the inevitable result of war and technological innovation

Following the 1840 Opium War, Qing prosperity declined. China adopted Western lithographs to replace woodblock engravings, and Taohuawu New Year prints declined, transforming the market and style. The country's closure ended export orders, shifting the market from citizens to farmers. To reduce expenses and cater to rural preferences, Taohuawu New Year prints simplify engravings, make lines clumsy, and transform colors from

light to gorgeous (Zhang, 2017). The theme tends to be secular life. However, due to Suzhou's profound cultural heritage, the local and citizen characteristics of the New Year prints are still very obvious; the colors are bright and vivid without losing elegance, and the modeling and composition are decorative and interesting (Gao, 2012).

1.4 Creation period: professional painters create "new-style New Year prints."

In 1949, the government of the People's Republic of China revived the Taohuawu New Year prints. New Year prints and politics are becoming more closely related (Wang, 2021). The primary focus of art creation is serving the people and subordinating to politics, which has resulted in the creation of new-style New Year prints (Feng, 2011). For more than half a century, the "New Taohuawu New Year Prints" have been characterized as woodblock decorative or custom paintings, rich in colors of the new citizens. They do not have any inherited relationship with Taohuawu New Year prints.

Thus, a systematic study of Taohuawu New Year print's artistic characteristics is needed to find its aesthetic origin, guide contemporary New Year print creation, and solve the problem of losing authenticity during inheritance.

2. The aesthetic origin of Taohuawu New Year prints

2.1 The aesthetic origin of the composition of Taohuawu New Year prints

2.1.1 Chinese Scattered Perspective and Western Focal Perspective

Theory

In “Linqan Gaozhi,” Guo Xi of the Northern Song Dynasty proposed “Three Perspectives,” which gave Chinese landscape painting a spatial schema. This theory differs from the Western focal perspective. The focal perspective employs “near clear and far blurred” to establish a three-dimensional perception of space, whereas the near and far scenes in Chinese landscape paintings are all “clear.” This distinguishes the foreground and background by arranging a period of “clouds” at the junction of the near and far scenes. This creates a visual effect of black and white, dense and sparse, suggesting a relationship between the front and back spaces (Zhao, 2017). This perspective method, called “scattered perspective,” emphasizes “changing the scene step by step,” which emphasizes viewer appreciation. Chinese landscape painting uses panoramic composition to capture the beauty of different times and places. This composition is used in landscapes and other paintings.

As early as the Tang Dynasty, Western art was introduced to China along with Western religions, and missionary Matteo Ricci was the first to explain the principles of Western painting to Chinese people (Wang, 2017).

Traditional society displays the Taohuawu New Year prints at home for a year, which emphasizes the viewer’s careful appreciation of the picture’s rich and subtle beauty. Traditional Chinese paintings utilize a scattered perspective to integrate plots from various times and spaces

into a single painting, a technique that Taohuawu New Year prints employ extensively in their compositions. Although Taohuawu New Year prints did not use the Western focus perspective of “near clear and far blurred,” they did use “near big and far small” and light and shadow to create a three-dimensional sense.

2.1.2 The form of Ming and Qing Dynasty novels engraved book illustrations

1) Suzhou moonlight version illustration and Song Dynasty literati painting moon-shaped fan

The moonlight version is called “round light” after its circle picture, like a full moon (Wang, 2002). In Suzhou in the late Ming Dynasty, moonlight illustrations with a circle setting and picture content were popular. The circular border evokes images of mirrors, panes, and moon doorways, and it appears to peek into the novel’s scene. The circular frame draws attention, creating a sense of substitution.

The Suzhou moon light version resembles the Song Dynasty literati painting of the moon-shaped fan. The fan often highlights the best parts. The moonlight version of the Taohuawu New Year print follows the novel’s moonlight illustration and the moon-shaped fan.

2) The “two-section version” and “three-section version” of the Ming Dynasty novels’ opera book

Ming Dynasty novels’ opera books often have “two-section versions” or “three-section versions.” The book’s two illustrations share a page, and the upper and lower illustrations use eaves, clouds, etc. to blur the

boundaries and give the reader the impression that the two pictures are taking place simultaneously. The publisher's layout naturally reduces illustration pages, engraving, and printing costs. This form appears in the Taohuawu New Year print "Gusu engraving."

3) "Bian Er Chai" and "Hui Zhen Tu"

The 1639 novel "Bian Er Chai" has two illustrations: the main and secondary. The main illustration shows the story, while the secondary illustration shows flowers, birds, insects, and other objects. The secondary images' objects match the main image's storyline, which is usually a metaphor (Zhao, 2022). The secondary illustration in "Bian Er Chai" (Figure 1) has a compositional style similar to Taohuawu New Year prints of wrapping paper of the Republic of China, like "Chang'e Running to the Moon" (Figure 2) and "Nine Beauty Reunion." It's just that the New Year print replaces the novel's "thing" with a festive "thing." The gourd, bat, and other symbols symbolize blessings, and the closer arrangement of "things" aligns with the New Year print's message of embracing fullness and striving for perfection.



Figure 1 Illustration of "Bian Er Chai"

Source: <https://www.sohu.com>



Figure 2 "Chang'e Running to the Moon"

Source: Chinese New Year Wood-block Print Integration, Volume of the Japanese Collection, 2011

The woodblock prints of "Hui Zhen Tu" (Figure 3), published in 1640, are based on the novel "The Romance of the Western Chamber." In one picture, the book intertwines two creative threads: the development of "The Romance of the Western Chamber," where pictorial elements depict the novel's characters and scenes, and the fashionable objects of the Ming Dynasty. Scrolls, fans, screens, lamps, pavilions, and other items all bear the characters and scenes from the storyline. The Late Ming society promoted awareness of life's interest in everyday objects (Chen, 2023). This compositional style bears a resemblance to the Taohuawu New Year prints "Xiaoyi Yi Menjing" (Figure 4) and "Youdi Chong Tianlun." The artist skillfully frames characters and inscribes the story title on the mascots of the plot. The latter should be an imitation of the former.



Figure 3 Illustration of “Hui Zhen Tu”

Source: Ming Dynasty Min Qiji’s Compilation and Engraving of Hui Zhen Six Illusions, 2022



Figure 4 “Xiaoyi Yi Menjing”

Source: Chinese New Year Wood-block Print Integration, Volume of the Japanese Collection, 2011

2.1.3 Bird-and-insect script and Text patterning

The Qin and Han dynasties created “Bird-and-Insect Script,” a font that combines character strokes with bird-shaped insect shapes to beautify the text (Yu, 1959). The Tang Dynasty Wu Zetian period created “The Stele of the Ascension Prince” for the Bird-and-Insect Script. The stroke starts with a “bird’s head,” and the end is a “bird’s tail.” It inspires a combination of regular script, official script, and bird-and-insect script (Zhang, 2020). The ancient wisdom of beautifying texts goes beyond birds and insects. In Ming Chongzhen’s “32 Seal Scripts Diamond Sutra,” the Diamond Sutra is displayed through 32 different writing methods, such as the tadpole seal, Kylin, and dragon scripts. This “text” absorbs, processes, and transforms “patterns” and images, revealing Chinese character decoration’s infinite charm. The “Fu character map” in the Taohuawu New Year print incorporates the auspicious schema of “Fu” into the stroke space of the word “Fu.” From the Qin and Han Dynasty bird-and-insect script to the Tang “The Stele of the Ascension Prince” and then to the Ming Dynasty “32 Seal Scripts Diamond Sutra,” the ancients used calligraphy and painting isomorphism to beautify decorative text. The Taohuawu New Year prints’ text patterning works are inherited from one line.

2.2 The aesthetic origin of the visual elements of Taohuawu New Year prints

2.2.1 The color of Taohuawu New Year prints

1) “Jiangnan misty rain” and “suitability of coloring”

Humid and rainy subtropical monsoons characterize Jiangnan, China. Suzhou represents Jiangnan. Jiangnan’s “Misty Rain” is elegant and hazy. Many Jiangnan buildings have “white walls and black tiles.” In Suzhou Gardens, stones from Taihu Lake form a rockery. This type of stone emits a mist of heavy water vapor, allowing people to enter a fairyland. Ancient people called it “ink Jiangnan” for its beauty, compared to ink painting. Jiangnan is usually rainy and foggy. The water vapor and fog neutralize the red flowers and green trees, turning them into a gentle gray. The scenery is fresh and elegant, with rich, vague colors. This gentle color matches the ancient concept of “suitability of coloring” and the literati’s retreat, as well as the introverted and reserved nature of the Suzhou people who grew up on this land.

In the Wei, Jin, Sout hern, and Northern Dynasties, Xiehe proposed the “six canons” for assessing painting quality in the “six canons of pictorial art.” One canon, “suitability of coloring,” asserts that the inherent color of objective objects reflects the original color, aligning with early humans’ simple and intuitive color perception and honoring nature. In the “Preface to Painting Landscapes” by Zong Bing of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, “suitability of coloring” meant “depicting the

shape and color of an object based on its original shape and color.” Ancients tended to match the color of the object (Zhong, 2023). Jiangnan’s misty rain colors are elegant and hazy. The Song and Yuan literati paintings, especially the Women school of paintings, show this sense of color. It influenced the early Taohuawu New Year prints, and many literati participated in their creation, which naturally portrayed an elegant and colorful literati atmosphere.

2) “Berlin Blue” and “National mourning and filial piety”

New Year prints during the Qianlong period used more “Berlin blue”—a European chemical pigment. Why did New Year prints before Qianlong rarely use blue, and if they did, it was a dull gray blue rather than the bright blue of Qianlong? In 1706, German painter Heinrich Diesbach discovered and synthesized Berlin blue. Twenty years passed before chemists discovered the pigment formula (Zhang, 2016). The Kangxi Dynasty was from 1662 to 1722 when Berlin blue had not yet been introduced to China and couldn’t appear in New Year prints. Cultural exchanges and technological progress affect painting greatly.

From Jiaqing to Daoguang, Taohuawu New Year prints used many calm flower blue colors. Why did they create plain colors, unlike the prosperous period’s rich color sense? This is due to the recession and political reasons. In Jiaqing’s fourth year, Emperor Qianlong died. Jiaqing issued a holy oracle to institute “national mourning and filial

piety.” Musical instruments are banned at weddings and funerals. Bright colors are prohibited in folk New Year prints.

3) Taohuwu, Peach Blossom, Tang Yin, and Peach Color

The use of peach color in Taohuwu New Year prints is one of their most distinguishing features. Why is peach red so common in Taohuwu New Year prints but not in others?

“Taohuwu” means “the place where the peach blossoms bloom.” Past celebrities settled here because of the peach trees. The most famous is Tang Yin. Talented but ill-fated, he returned to Suzhou in his later years to build a room named Taohuaan, plant several acres of peach trees, and write the popular “Taohuaan Song” (Zhou, 2009). Tang Yin’s legend seems linked to Taohuwu New Year prints. In the Longqing three years of the Ming Dynasty, Suzhou published the “Miscellaneous Records of the West Chamber,” with the frontispiece “Yingying Image.” The image says “imitation of Tang Yin.” Later-engraved books and New Year prints have many imitators. (Feng, 2011) Taohuwu is named after peach blossoms; Tang Yin wrote “Taohuaan Song”; and his indissoluble relationship with Taohuwu New Year prints are the reasons why peach color has become the representative color of Taohuwu New Year prints.

2.2.2 Tang Yin’s lady painting sets the aesthetic tone of beauty

Tang Yin’s paintings are appreciated by both the elegant and the

vulgar, and the “vulgar” in them has greatly inspired the folk painters. The ladies’ facial shape, eyes, eyebrows, etc. in his “Autumn Breeze and Fine Silk Fan” are very similar to the Taohuwu New Year print “Cool Breeze and Fine Silk Fan.”

Many of the objects in Taohuwu New Year prints have traditional patterns and cannot be changed casually. Beauty has slender, single-eyelid eyes. Qing Li Yu’s “Pleasant Diversion: Judging Beauty,” says, “Thin, long eyes indicate a soft character; thick, big eyes indicate a tough character (Li, 2015). At that time, it was not like today’s people think that a woman’s big eyes are beautiful. The Taohuwu New Year print depicts a delicate, soft, slender, thin lady with narrow shoulders and a thin waist, typical of Jiangnan people, who are mild and gentle. This modeling technique followed the painting mantra of “beauty should be slender” and “painting women should narrow shoulders” and met society’s aesthetic standards for female images (Wang, 2021).

2.2.3 The relationship between the Ritual and Music System and the size of the characters

How can the thin palace maids carrying the chariots in Yan Liben’s “Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy” lift the huge emperor? In ancient Chinese painting, characters should be hierarchical. The emperor is taller than the minister, who is taller than the palace maid. Taohuwu New Year prints follow this rule.

This treatment reflects the ritual tradition of classical Chinese aesthetics. Music and etiquette deal with interpersonal relationships. Music communicates emotions, while etiquette governs behavior (Yi, 2011). Beauty that is bound by the ethic of honor and inferiority, by a moral code, is true beauty.

2.3 The aesthetic origin of the production techniques of Taohuawu New Year prints

2.3.1 Western copperplate engraving line arrangement and Hui school engraving

In 1583, missionary Matteo Ricci brought copperplate engraving to China from Europe. In 1696, the court painter Jiao Bingzhen used the Western perspective method to draw the “Ploughing and Weaving Map.” Kangxi liked it and ordered Zhu Gui, a Suzhou engraver, to print it (Zhou, 2009). After working at the Imperial Palace Painting Academy, many Suzhou engravers returned home and used copperplate engraving techniques to engrave New Year prints. The “Gusu engraving” of “imitation of the West brushwork” appeared in Suzhou.

The Ming and Qing dynasty huizhou carving line is dense, delicate, rich, and elegant, with literati bookishness and folk childishness. Huizhou merchants have grown the engraving industry, and Jiangnan is full of Huizhou bookstores and carving workshops (Ju & Ye, 1995). Huizhou family engravers Huang helped develop Suzhou printmaking after settling there (Gao, 2012). Suzhou illustrated prints after Wanli combined

the Suzhou literati painting tradition and Hui school print engraving, resulting in a dexterous and exquisite “Su School” style with distinctive composition and line drawing (Zhou, 2009). Taohuawu New Year prints inherited the Suzhou illustrated prints’ modeling, line engraving expression, and color matching techniques, especially engraving and Gong Hua techniques, which absorb Hui school carving techniques.

2.3.2 Mogu painting, water color block printing, and the Gong Hua technique
Traditional Chinese painting outlines an object using the “Gu method,” where “Gu” refers to the outline line. The Mogu painting is “directly drawn in color,” meaning it shapes the object’s image using ink or color rendering rather than ink lines (Yu, 2022). Traditional Taohuawu New Year prints outline, then overprint the color within the line, but Bogu flower themes often color directly instead of outlines. This style resembles “Mogu painting.”

Watercolor block printing and Gong Hua appeared in the middle and late Ming Dynasty (Gao, 2012). The so-called watercolor block printing, according to the different colors of the drawing, is carved into many small pieces of plate, according to the color overprinting. The Gong Hua is printed by using the inlaid and extruded method of two woodblocks, showing a relief-like effect. These printing methods gave Taohuawu New Year prints their characteristics.

2.3.3 Imitation of the technique of glazing and halo dyeing in meticulous painting

Chinese meticulous paintings' "transparent" colors are dyed layer by layer. Like meticulous painting, the glazing technique of Taohuawu New Year prints uses multi-layer overprinting of colors to create rich gray tones. Taohuawu New Year prints are printed using meticulous painting's halo dyeing technique. That is, a color is dipped in the brush first, then another color in the nib, and the two colors naturally transition and fuse on the brush to add the effect of a stroke from one color to another. The brush is then moved sideways on the plate and transferred to the paper. So, colors are printed in different shades and variations.

2.3.4 The Suzhou soft dialect, rice planting culture, and delicate engraving

Dialects are regional languages with strong local cultural traits. Suzhou dialect is known as the "soft dialect" and is characterized by "soft," "sweet," "gentle," and "mellow," creating Suzhou people's elegant and introverted temperament (Shen, 2008). Suzhou is the core city of the Taihu Lake Basin, a famous land of fish and rice, and has a developed rice-planting culture (Yin & Liu, 2014). The rice here is harvested twice a year due to the climate, so intensive cultivation is needed in all seasons to maximize yields. Continuous work has given Suzhou people resilience, meticulousness, and patience. Thus, Suzhou people excel at delicate, time-consuming tasks like New Year prints.

2.4 The aesthetic origin of the theme of Taohuawu New Year prints

2.4.1 "A doting daughter father" and "female family head"

The theme of ladies first appeared in Suzhou, and Taohuawu New Year prints have many female themes, which are rare in other New Year prints. The low status of women in traditional Chinese society is well known. In Suzhou, things are different. Parents allow their daughters not to marry but to get a son-in-law. Fathers take their daughters on trips (traditionally, women cannot leave the house), and women can travel alone (Xuan, 2010). When fathers and husbands have guests, daughters and wives can join them (traditionally, women cannot meet outsiders). At least 100 talented women in Suzhou had poetry collections to examine during the Ming and Qing dynasties (Hu, 1985).

Suzhou has no "male family head," but women are called "female family heads." Men who marry wives are called "begging for wives" and fathers "doting daughter fathers." Qianlong's "Changzhou County Chronicles" stated that "it is mostly women who are in charge of the family" (Li & Gu, 1991). Why do Suzhou women rank so high? This relates to its developed economy. For instance, Suzhou silk is famous worldwide and requires silkworm raising, embroidery, silk tapestry, and other female labor. The economic base determines the superstructure, and women are highly regarded. Suzhou women could study and travel socially due to their wealth. Traditional Taohuawu New Year prints feature vibrant female themes.

2.4.2 “Keep on Good Terms”

The Taohuawu New Year print “Keep on Good Terms” is based on Zhu Jianshen’s Ming Dynasty painting. The painting’s allusion, “Three Laughs at Tiger Creek,” references Jin Dynasty monk Huiyuan, who lived on Mount Lu and never sent guests past Tiger Creek. Confucian Tao Yuanming and Taoist priest Lu Xiujing visited. At the time of parting, Huiyuan sent them, chatting all the way, unconsciously sent through Tiger Creek. The three looked at each other and smiled, which was the “Three Laughs at Tiger Creek” (Song, 2014). Zhu Jianshen combines the three people into a circular figure to promote religious harmony (Figure 5).



Figure 5 Zhu Jianshen’s
“Keep on Good Terms”

Source: The Palace Museum, 2024

“Keep on Good Terms” is the most popular Taohuawu New Year print (Figure 6). The print depicts an ancient child with a crocheted bun and a long life lock

around his neck. The wrinkled face looks like an old man or old woman, and the figure combines man, woman, old man, and child, implying that everyone is harmonious and happy. The round shape symbolizes “completeness.” The inheritance relationship between the New Year print “Keep on Good Terms” and Zhu Jianshen’s “Keep on Good Terms” is clear at a glance.



Figure 6 Taohuawu New Year print
“Keep on Good Terms”

Source: Suzhou Taohuawu New Year Print Museum, 2024

2.4.3 “Cats catch rats and protect silkworms” and “Money Tiger”

The Suzhou silk weaving industry is developed, and so many silkworm breeders exist. Silkworm raising has many taboos, including smoking, strangers, pregnant women, etc. During the silkworm breeding

season, the silkworm room sticks a New Year print on the door to remind visitors not to enter. "Exploitation of the Works of Nature," says: "Sparrows, rats, and mosquitoes harm silkworms. Rats are always harmful, but sparrows and mosquitoes can't harm cocoons or early silkworms" (Song & Pan, 2016). Silkworm farmers in Suzhou need "Cats Catch Rats and Protect Silkworms" as a door god painting because cats kill rats.

Suzhou has both feminine and masculine beauty. Many warriors have practiced martial arts there. "Hanshu Geography" states: "Wu and Yue kings were warlike and revered military forces. Thus, these people liked swords, were fearless, and were easily angered." (Ban, 1963, p. 1667). The "Money Tiger" symbolizes masculinity's beauty. The money tiger symbolizes wealth because Suzhou people believe the tiger is a sacred animal that protects the family and pronounces "tiger" and "rich" similarly. The tiger's powerful shape also reveals the beauty of the perseverance of the Suzhou people.

Discussion and Conclusion

Jiangnan's wealthy Suzhou produced Taohuawu New Year prints. At the end of the Ming Dynasty, Suzhou's handicraft industry flourished, the cultural characteristics of the citizens were obvious, the literati and ink writers gathered, the calligraphy and painting market thrived, and the Women school of paintings appeared. The mutual influence and penetration of literati and folk paintings in Suzhou make Taohuawu New Year prints

unique in many New Year prints of origins, especially elegant, integrating literati and public aesthetics.

Suzhou is the southeast's largest city and a major transportation hub, making it easy to adopt foreign cultures. Its traditional handicrafts are famous worldwide for their fine, elegant, ingenious, and fashionable designs, and Taohuawu New Year prints have developed elegant characteristics under the influence of such craft ideas. The later engraving is less exquisite than the early "Gusu engraving" due to time, cost, and the inability to adapt to a wide range of distribution, but it is still better than other New Year prints. The lines are delicate and stretched. Although the later audience changed to cater to folk aesthetics, the color turned gorgeous, but this kind of gorgeous is by no means gaudy; it pays attention to color harmony and the sense of color system, forming a gorgeous and elegant coexistence with beautiful and strong color characteristics, thanks to Suzhou's profound cultural heritage, and the literati's participation in the creation is inseparable.

In different development periods, Taohuawu New Year prints developed regional characteristics and other artistic characteristics in theme, composition, color, and modeling due to social economy, customs, humanities and history, aesthetic taste, production technology, materials and tools, and the creators' style. Why different expressions? This is mostly caused by the social situation at the time. The so-called beauty is more the expression of the spiritual level, the outlook

presented through the spiritual level. It is the aesthetic integration of the era and regional culture.

Previous researchers have made mostly declarative statements about the artistic characteristics of Taohuawu New Year prints, rarely analyzing the reasons for their formation in depth. For example, why are there so many female themes in Taohuawu New Year prints? Why did it start in Suzhou? The theme of ladies reflects the secular aspirations of ancient Chinese patriarchal society to have a beautiful and virtuous wife, according to scholars (Wang, 2017). Why are other origins' New Year prints lacking in female themes? Isn't the rest of ancient China patriarchal, and doesn't it need family happiness? The researchers found the answer from the perspective of the unique state of female existence in ancient Suzhou.

In addition, scholars have not considered the delicate handiwork of Taohuawu New Year prints from the perspective of the character of Suzhou people cultivated by dialect and rice planting culture. Before, color characteristics were only summarized, and the causes of the color were rarely discussed, let alone climate, environment, place names, and people's perspectives. Ming and Qing Dynasty novels engraved book illustrations may have influenced Taohuawu New Year prints (Zhou, 2009), but novel engravings are varied, and the predecessors did not specify them. The researchers discovered that the layout of "Bian Er Chai" and "Hui Zhen Tu" is unique and influenced Taohuawu New Year print

compositions. Previous scholars discussed the Western focal perspective's influence on Taohuawu New Year prints (Wang, 2017) but ignored its relationship to traditional Chinese painting's scattered perspective and the "Three Perspectives" theory. Most scholars believe that Taohuawu New Year prints are full because they satisfy the psychology of Chinese seeking roundness and fullness, but the composition of New Year prints of different themes is different, such as the female theme, which is very particular about the "blankness" of traditional Chinese paintings, and the picture is dense and orderly, not "full." Previous researchers only mentioned Taohuawu New Year print printing's one-page, one-color, and overprinting technology (Zhang, 2023). In fact, at least seven printing methods for Taohuawu New Year prints exist, including imitation of traditional Chinese meticulous painting glazing and halo dyeing, which can print color gradients.

The current research seems to rarely cover some details of the aesthetic origin, which will not be repeated here, leaving us without a complete understanding of Taohuawu New Year prints' artistic characteristics. Many things we think we know, we do not.

This study has limitations. First of all, in the field investigation, respondents may make subjective judgments on the artistic characteristics of Taohuawu New Year prints based on their aesthetic preferences. To avoid single or wrong information and make more accurate judgments, more creators, collectors, and scholars should be interviewed. Secondly,

the listed forms of composition and theme of Taohuawu New Year prints are not comprehensive enough. Insufficient historical data and space prevented this article from discussing some root causes. Wang Jiaju, for instance, thinks Western copperplate engravings have the least impact on Taohuawu New Year prints (Wang, 2017). It may have been influenced by “Dutch learning” from Japan, according to Zhou Xinyue (Zhou, 2009). Thirdly, the two are similar, so their relevance can be determined. For example, the layout of the engraved book “Hui Zhen Tu” is very similar to Taohuawu New Year prints “Xiaoyi Yi Menjing” and “Youdi Chong Tianlun.” The researchers cannot prove that the Bird-and-Insect script inspired Chinese character image processing in New Year prints, but they can speculate. The New Year print has strokes with different images, while the Bird-and-Insect script is directly formed into strokes with a bird or insect image. There is still a difference between the two.

Recommendations

This paper discusses Taohuawu New Year prints’ artistic characteristics and aesthetic origins, enriching related academic research. It clarified the essence of Taohuawu New Year prints and the standards that should be followed in their modern creations to develop and inherit them while retaining their “original flavor.”

Since Taohuawu New Year prints have different artistic characteristics over time, what should we use as samples today? The psychological “proximate cause-effect” (David, 2006) states that people remember the nearest period’s New Year prints better, and the early Qing Dynasty’s New Year prints lacked “New Year’s flavor,” so the recent Taohuawu New Year prints with citizens and farmers as the audience and used for New Year’s festivals should be the main form. The paintings’ artistic characteristics should be preserved.

This study can “template” cultural studies. This study’s “text” and “concept” relationships and research perspectives apply to other intangible cultural heritage with similar phenomena and can solve similar problems.

Additionally, the reason early Qing Dynasty Taohuawu New Year prints were mostly yellow and red; the influence of Southern Song Dynasty imperial-court decorative painting and calligraphy brushwork on the lines of the New Year prints; the relationship between Song Dynasty boundary paintings and Taohuawu New Year prints; the origin of the flattening style of Taohuawu New Year prints; the relationship between Suzhou folk house architecture and New Year prints’ color tones, etc. Given the length of the article, it is impossible to elaborate on them one by one, but these are all directions worthy of scholars’ research.

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