

"Natural Fruits" to "Art Fruits": a Glimpse of the Gourd-shaped Creation Art*

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Abstract—From the perspective of creation art, the article explores the historical evolution, creation form and symbolic meaning of Chinese traditional gourd-shaped art. It is believed that the traditional Chinese gourd-shaped creation art has historical stage characteristics in evolution. It can be divided into two types in form: three-dimensional entity and two-dimensional plane. It contains multiple meanings of primitive religion, Taoist symbol, literati character, and auspicious sign, which also serves as valuable resource for creative design.

Keywords—gourd; art fruits; gourd shape; creation art

I. INTRODUCTION

In the recent period, cultural events related to the gourd have flowed into people like a trend. With the help of modern media, the classic cartoon "Calabash Brothers" has evoked the childhood memories of several generations. The collection of thousands of gourd-shaped porcelains and gourd-ware in the museum, especially in the museum, is astounding, which tells the fashion of the past; the colorful gourd folklore and the gourd myth in ethnic minority areas have become the "soft signboards" of the relevant tourism economy, showing the power of culture; the Taoist "dark eight immortals" gourd instruments, the stabilizing house gourd, gourd patterns and gourd-shaped components in the residential field, gourd, gourd pattern, gourd-shaped components, gourd shapes of different materials in folk art from different places, are all countless. In the 2002 APEC meeting in Shanghai, the gourd artwork was even designated as a gift by the organizing committee, which conveyed the far-reaching Chinese gourd culture internationally. In recent years, gourd products have frequently been seen in pedestrian streets, tourist attractions and other places, attracting customers with their attractive shapes. Faced with the enthusiasm of this gourd culture, the academic community responds from different angles, or explores knowledge related to gourd, or gets rid of the stale and brings forth the fresh, and so on and so forth.

Modern archaeological materials and literature prove that the gourd as a plant and the gourd shape as a kind of culture

and art are not modern things, but are cultural phenomena that are accompanied by ancient Chinese ethnic groups. Then, why is it that today, when modern science and technology are advancing by leaps and bounds and some regions are the first to enter a rich society, gourd creation art, as an ancient cultural phenomenon, cause a lot of cultural ripples, or even cause a trend of popularity? This paper explores the history, types and symbolic meanings of the gourd-shaped creation art from the perspective of art, and interprets the profound cultural implication of this ancient creation.

II. THE HISTORY AND TYPE OF GOURD-SHAPED CREATION ART

"Gourd shape" is a special small category of Chinese traditional creation art, which is derived from the archaeological community's characteristic description of the prehistoric intentional imitation of the natural gourd relics. Throughout the creation, it has a strong tendency to imitate the shape of the natural gourd on the motive; in the form, it has a tendency to imitate the three-dimensional shape or two-dimensional profile shape of the natural gourd; in the meaning, it has obvious symbolic meaning of the gourd. They not only have three-dimensional entity-like shapes, but also two-dimensional plane shapes. Therefore, they are called "gourd-shaped creation art", to distinguish from crafts such as gourds carving that are artistically processed of natural gourds.

A. The History of Gourd-shaped Creation Art

China gourd-shaped creation art has a long history. The Neolithic period is the beginning of the Chinese traditional gourd-shaped creation art. According to archaeological materials, it is mainly distributed in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River Basin, which is concentrated in Gansu, Qinghai and Shaanxi, and there are sporadic discoveries in Shanxi and Jianghuai regions. In the form of creation, it is dominated by gourd-shaped pottery of utensils and supplemented by gourd-shaped decorative patterns of dermatoglyphic patterns. And the human head-shaped gourd-shaped painted pottery bottle with the combination of utensils and sculpture can also be seen. Most of them are red pottery and black pottery, often appearing in prime surface and the colored drawing can also occasionally be seen. The colored drawing patterns are rich, such as animal-like bird

*Funds: 2018 Fujian Province Young and Middle-aged Teacher Education Research Project (Project No. JAS180359); 2016 Fujian Province Young and Middle-aged Teacher Education Research Project (Social Science) (Project No. JAS160827).

and fish patterns, plant-like flower patterns, and geometric patterns such as vortex, chord, line, and mesh. Among them, gourd-shaped utensils are mainly various bottles and cans shape, especially ogival base bottles, amphora and lagena, which are beautifully designed. In the Xia, Shang, Zhou and Qin dynasties, the gourd-shaped creations, in addition to the gourd-shaped pottery, also appeared the original porcelain Pao pots, bronze Pao pots, and sculptural bronze standing cow Hulusheng musical instruments, which have enveloped the color of ritual culture.

During the Eastern Han Dynasty to the Northern and Southern Dynasties, the art of gourd-shaped creation entered a period of transformation. The gourd-shaped five-link cans with rich shapes and beautiful decoration are most famous and popular with strong symbolic meaning of Taoist culture. In the Sui, Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties, the enthusiasm for the creation of gourd-shaped five-link cans was greatly reduced. The gourd-shaped creation art was widely influenced by the interaction and integration of the three cultures of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, and then entered the development period. The shape of the creation is mainly the gourd-shaped porcelain. The gourd-shaped tea set, the gourd-shaped wine vessel, the gourd-shaped tower spire, the gourd sacred object and the implement are the most typical ones, and the depiction of the gourd image has been seen in paintings. In particular, the gourd-shaped porcelain is the most diverse in form, rich in variety, wonderful in glaze, and numerous in kilns.

After the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the gourd-shaped creation art entered a period of prosperity. The shape of creation is more diverse. The figure of gourd-shaped creation can be seen in traditional arts and crafts such as porcelain, wood carving, glassware, jade, jadeite, tinware, gold and silver ware, clothing and so on. In addition, a large number of gourd-shaped elements are used in traditional dwellings, and the theme of gourd in the field of painting has also become fixed. The function of gourd in folk activities is also omnipotent. The gourd-shaped creation culture can be described as fascinating. The cause of this should be closely related to the overall prosperity of traditional Chinese arts and crafts, the prosperity of vulgar culture, the rise of civic culture, and the parallel of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism.

B. Types of Gourd-shaped Creation Art

On the whole, the art of gourd-shaped creation mainly has two types of three-dimensional entity and two-dimensional plane, both of which originated from prehistoric times.

The three-dimensional entity gourd-shaped creation imitates the overall shape of the natural gourd, mainly based on the materials of ceramics, bronze, lacquer, porcelain, wood, glass, jade, jadeite, gold and silver, Cloisonné, tin, purple sand, stone, etc., involving traditional arts and crafts as well as architectural components. In almost every period of material prevalence, gourd-shaped creation can be seen all the time. Its design features have already been seen in the infancy. Taking prehistoric gourd-shaped pottery as an

example, the following can be divided according to the degree of imitating natural gourd. The first one is the "exactly-like type", which is found in the early sites of Dadi Bay and Wangjiayin Wa and other places in Yangshao, which is 7000-6000 years ago [1]. The upper abdomen and lower abdomen is located in the middle of the most bulging part, and the girdling is obvious, and the surface of the object is unadorned. The second one is the "similarity in form type". For the purpose of decoration, the upper abdomen is reduced and the lower abdomen is elongated and enlarged. The related unearthed work can be seen in the II to the X-type gourd bottle of Jiangzhai Phase II and the middle and late gourd-shaped bottles in the tomb of Wangjiayin Wa. The third one is the "improved type". It was first seen in the middle period sites of Yangshao, such as Dadi Bay, which is about 5600 years ago. In order to further weaken the degree of imitating the natural gourd for the needs of social concepts, the upper abdomen is reduced upwards and merged with the object's mouth. The object's mouth of is often decorated with a sculptural shape, and the lower abdomen is elongated and enlarged with dematoglyphic patterns. The fourth one is the "transcendental type", which highlights the practical considerations in the design and gradually surpasses the prototype of the gourd. The characteristics of the gourd with slender middle part are ambiguous, and some also add the abdomen ear, which can be seen in the Liuwan Ruins in Ledu, Qinghai, about 4,000 years ago. These four design features basically cover the main creation methods of the three-dimensional entity class. From imitation to transcendence, the design artisans of many later generations can find the source here.

The two-dimensional plane gourd-shaped creation imitates the plane view of the natural gourd. Among them, the gourd-shaped pattern has appeared in the Neolithic period. For example, the mid-level hill colored pottery gourd pot [2] of the Majiayao culture is decorated with six groups of gourd-shaped patterns on the shoulder and abdomen, and the inside of lines is filled with plaid and netting patterns. This is more common in the folk embroidery of many ethnic groups, which has become a major decorative theme. At least between the Sui and Tang Dynasties and the Song and Yuan Dynasties, the gourd has already been used in the painting, which is a symbol of the immortal Tieguai Li. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Tao and Dharma instruments often appeared in paintings. Since the end of the Qing Dynasty, the gourd has gradually become the main body of the picture, and Wu Changshuo, Huang Binhong, Qi Baishi and other painters all have dabbled in. In residential buildings and garden buildings, hole mouths, ornamental perforated windows, gable decorations, floors, door handles, etc. often adopt the gourd pattern as the modelling and decoration. In the degree of imitating natural gourds, most of them are in the stages of "exactly-like type" and "similarity in form type", which symbolizes rich meaning.

III. THE MEANING OF GOURD-SHAPED CREATION ART

The term "symbol" has a wide range of definitions. Cliford Geertz, a famous American anthropologist, believes that "symbolic symbols refer to things, behaviors, natures or

relationships as the carrier of ideas — concepts are symbolic 'meanings' [3], linking meanings and symbols, with enlightening. Studies have shown that the art of gourd-shaped creation, like many cultural phenomena, accumulates rich connotations and presents multiple symbolic meanings, which is also the deep reason why it has been passed down to the present.

A. Primitive Religious Concepts

Primitive religious concepts such as reproductive worship, ancestor worship and soul return to the ancestors are found in various forms of art, and the art of gourd-shaped creation is also the same. In the prehistoric period, there must have been a prehistoric use of natural gourds [4], which is what the scholars call the "Gourd Container Age". Nowadays, the Yi people in Maguan County, Yunnan Province, still use the natural fruits such as gourd as the inner mold to make pottery.

The gourd-shaped pottery that is buried in prehistoric times is not an object of practical use, but has symbolic meanings such as reproductive worship, ancestor worship, and soul return to the ancestors. The outer abdomen contour of the natural gourd is shaped like a pregnant belly contour and has the biological characteristics of many seeds. This naturally produces a similarity association under the "original thinking" of "analog", which makes the gourd transcend "form" and has the symbol "meaning". The records of the later literature on the worship of the "Paogua Star", such as "the Paogua Star masters the imperial harem ... if the Paogua Star is bright, then ... there will be a lot of descendants in the imperial harem; if the Star is dark, the power of imperial harem will be weak" [5], which has clearly stated the symbolic reproduction meaning of the gourd (Pao is a kind of gourds). The myths of about "gourd's giving birth" [6] in various ethnic groups that have been passed down to now all point to the gourd and the reproductive parent body. Wen Yiduo even thought that Fu Hsi and Nuwa were all gourds. [7] In the evolution of the gourd-shaped pottery, there are also human face decorations, etc., with the symbolic meaning of ancestor worship. The generation of these meanings is closely related to the situation at the time, because "the full power and full life ability of the clan is determined by the number of its members, therefore, the death of each member is a major loss for all the rest." [8]

In short, the gourd-shaped creations in the infancy period all used simulated analogous techniques. The characteristics of the drum abdomen gourd and its amazing fecundity are compared with human beings' pregnancy. The aim is to highlight the theme of birth and reproduction, which is more detached from practicality and endowed with primitive religious concepts. This accumulation of reproduction and ancestor worship is the elementary gene of the art of gourd-shaped creation, which has been circulated in related folk creations.

B. The Sign of the Tao and the Character of the Literati

Under the impact of the foreign Buddhism, the native Taoism was forced to construct the systematic theogony, gradually forming concepts such as fascinating places and

celestial mountains and constructing a symbolic system. At least in the Han Dynasty, the gourd has become a symbol of practicing medicine. In the story of the "Immortal Tao Fei Changfang" [9], the gourd is transformed into a symbol of the Taoist cave paradise, which can be used for immortals to come in and go out. In the Qin and Han Dynasties, the "Three Mountains in the Sea" was also established relationship with gourd in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. The "Three Mountains" was renamed "Three Pots". By the time of the Tang Dynasty, the gourd had been widely recognized as a Taoist instrument and symbol. Here, the gourd-shaped creation has produced a layer of Taoist meaning, symbolizing the realm of the immortals. This outstanding performance is reflected in the symbols of identity, such as the gourd-shaped five-link cans, the Taoist gourd-shaped towers, and the Tieguai Li. Moreover, the gourd also entered Buddhism, with a gourd-shaped porcelain as a Buddhist relics can, and a gourd-shaped tower was also can be seen on the stupa.

The scholar-bureaucrat of the Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties pursued and advocated a kind of "pure" aesthetics and tastes, and the elegant and tranquil situation was highly admired. In the Tang Dynasty, the poetry articles of the gourd appeared in large numbers. Li, Du and Wei praised the beauty of the gourd's texture, shape, color and instrument and so on. In the Song and Yuan Dynasties, the literary works of the gourd were beloved more by the scholar-bureaucrat. Su Tungpo of Song Dynasty, as well as Wang Yunzhi, Fan Guo, Wang Xu, Xie Zongke, and Qian Zizheng of Yuan Dynasty all had gourd eulogy left in the world. Su Tungpo also used the gourd objects to drink alcohol. The old man Shen'an of Song Dynasty in the "Cha Ju Tu Zan" also specially listed a tea set of "landlord Hu" (that is, ladle and scoop). In this situation, the gourd-shaped creation was added a symbol of the elegant character of the literati. The gourd-shaped ewer, gourd bottle and gourd-shaped dragon head pot become popular and fashionable, with exquisite style, simple decoration and elegant pattern.

C. The Auspicious Concept of Praying for Good Fortunes

Praying for good fortunes, escaping disasters and pursuing happiness are the inherent value of human beings and the inexhaustible plea for life. In fact, in the gourd totem worship of the gourd reproductive worship produced in prehistoric times, the concept of auspiciousness has already been implied. The prosperity of the civil culture in the Song Dynasty eventually became an enthusiastic situation in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The cumulative development of the commodity economy and the continued growth of the citizen class have led to a certain degree of change in the knowledge concept and belief field. Many forms and carriers of emotional externalization originating from folk villages are simple, pure and true, which are widely recognized by the upper classes of society and the pursuit of both elegance and popularity has become the pursuit of creation art.

In this context, the art of gourd-shaped creation in the Ming and Qing Dynasties changed the elegance of the Song and Yuan Dynasties, and turned to the elegance and popularity taste, with a strong and enthusiastic praying for

good fortunes. The gourd-shaped shape in the garden architecture, the gourd and vine as the main image in the painting, the paper-cut of the gourd theme in folk art, and the gourd pattern in the costume often take advantage of the shape or character of the gourd to represent good luck. In addition, because the name of gourd sounds like "Fu Lu", the popularity of the picturizing of the propitious language has made the extension of the gourd-shaped creation art expand, and it even became a favorite theme in bird-and-flower paintings.

In short, the gourd shape's symbolizing auspiciousness is a major feature of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Moreover, this symbolic way of thinking is based on the "original mythological thinking", which follows the symbolic analogy model, and its basic logic rules are analogies. In the reasoning of symbolic analogy, the shape, character and sound of the gourd have become the starting point of analogy, and they all become the way of auspicious meaning generation. Besides the case of gourd, the design of ancient Chinese "bionic objects", and the selection and performance of some plant and animal themes in traditional paintings are also the result of this symbolic thinking.

IV. CONCLUSION

The rapidly rising Chinese economy has brought a solid material foundation and sufficient humanistic confidence to the art of creation. However, the dramatic changes in modern times have subverted the existing artistic and cultural foundations as well as knowledge paradigms, resulting in different degrees of disruption of the artistic traditions. The international art and design field has increasingly emphasized the use of regional ethnic style elements. Looking back at traditions and drawing inspiration and creativity have become the trend of today's design. This kind of internal and external situation reminds people to review and explore the traditional Chinese creation art, and return to the starting point to start again. In this sense, the wisdom accumulation and creative accumulation in the field of Chinese traditional gourd-shaped creation art is an example for people to review the artistic tradition of plant subjects, and the creativity of related "humanistic fruits" material naturally has the traditional context and reference.

Today's cultural and creative industries are in the ascendant, and the core of their operations is innovation and creativity. Its presence and height depend on the originality of cultural and creative products in terms of artistic characteristics, pattern and style, and also on the psychological power that cultural and creative products can evoke emotional memory. Gourd-shaped creation art has accumulated multiple symbolic meanings since prehistoric times. It has become a strong collective emotion, flowing in the heart of Chinese descendants. It is also a typical creative material to be explored.

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