

# Study on the Images Formation of Fengxiang Woodcut New Year Picture with Only Male Kitchen God on It\*

Jie Du

Xi'an University of Technology  
Xi'an, China 710048

Zhen Wang\*\*

College of Art and Design  
Xi'an University of Technology  
Xi'an, China 710048

\*\*Corresponding Author

**Abstract**—Fengxiang woodcut New Year pictures have been listed as one of China's first national intangible cultural heritage, which have well preserved the original and simple natural features and strong local folk aesthetic features. Fengxiang woodcut New Year picture with only male kitchen god on it is an art covering religion and folk customs, an indispensable part of Fengxiang woodcut New Year pictures for six immortals who bless the house, and the specific manifestation of local folk gods. Its composition, shape and artistic expression form are rich in unique decorative and strong folk culture of the region. Based on the images formation of Fengxiang woodcut New Year picture with only male kitchen god on it, this paper analyzes images of the pictures, makes clear their commonalities and differences, and probes into the uniqueness of the local one.

**Keywords:** *Fengxiang woodcut New Year picture with only male kitchen god on it, images formation, uniqueness*

## I. INTRODUCTION

During New Year's festival, sacrifice to male kitchen god is an indispensable activity for people in Fengxiang area. They paste such wooden New Year pictures to pray for god's blessing and ward off harm and evil. Due to the different sacrificial orientation and the different needs of the sacrificial person, the same layout of the New Year paintings will have different decorative schemata, promoting the diversification of Fengxiang woodcut New Year picture with only male kitchen god on it. Cultural inspiration and meaning are derived from "schema", and different images formations embody different connotations and functions.

## II. OVERVIEW OF FENGXIANG PICTURE WITH ONLY MALE KITCHEN GOD ON IT

The sacrificial ceremony of kitchen god was recorded in Ji Fa of the Sacrificial Way of Book of Rites in the Han Dynasty: The son of heaven demanded the people of the

whole world to sacrifice seven gods closely related to people's daily life, that is, the god of destiny, the god of house, the god of door, the god of way, the god of punishment, the god of access, and the god of kitchen. Princes also sacrificed to the first five gods mentioned above, senior officials in feudal China offered sacrifices to three of the above gods: the third to the fifth, while ordinary scholars and common people worship only one god that is closely related to life: the god of access or the god of the kitchen". [1] The kitchen god was a product of ancient feudal society, when everything in the world has a spirit. As an artistic symbol, the kitchen god carries people's belief in witchcraft, religion and various mystical concepts, and expresses people's looks to a better life. Up to now, the kitchen god painting is the most common folk articles in the sacrificial activities all over the country. The kitchen god painting in Fengxiang folk prints is rich in meaning and mysterious and interesting, and a paper-based god painting integrating religion, art and folk customs. It not only truly reflects people's aesthetic consciousness in a certain period, but also vividly reflects the development concept of local folk culture.

### A. Description of Fengxiang woodcut New Year picture with only male kitchen god on it

Fengxiang was called Yong in ancient times. According to Fang Yu Sheng Lan, the place where the phoenix flies is Fengxiang, one of the nine continents in the world. Fengxiang County is located in the Guanzhong Basin and loess terrace like plain north of Weihe River in the central and western Shaanxi and northeast of Baoji. It boasts excellent geographical location, with Mount Qian in the north, Weihe River in the south, Qinling Mountains and Longshan Mountain in the west, and looking east to Xi'an. [3] What's more, in ancient times, it was the post station of "Silk Road" and the cultural city of Guanzhong, with long history and profound culture. According to the records of the ancestral case preserved in Nanxiaoli village, as early as the second year of Zhengde period of the Ming Dynasty, eight families had engaged in the production of woodcut New Year pictures. [4] In the middle Qing Dynasty, in addition to Nanxiaoli village, Beixiaoli village and Chencunzhen village

\*Fund: This paper is sponsored by National Youth Fund Project for the Arts of the Ministry of Education (Project No: 17YJC760007), and Fund Project of Education Department of Shaanxi Provincial Government (Project No: 17JK0527).

also engaged in such practice. By the end of Qing Dynasty, the number of New Year painting producers was increasing and various painting bureaus appeared. For a long time, artists learn from the predecessors, while meeting the needs of the people in different areas. The format of the New Year pictures is consistent with that of the predecessors. Fengxiang New Year picture for kitchen god is an important constituent of Fengxiang New Year pictures for six immortals who bless the house, including picture with only male kitchen god, both male and female kitchen gods, and male kitchen gods with his dual-attendants. Among them, Fengxiang woodcut New Year picture with only male kitchen god on it has the most styles, which can be divided into Sijihuazao (painting of the kitchen god with flowers in spring, summer, suthum, and winter for decoration), Heipaozao (picture of the kitchen god in a black robe), Hongpaozao (picture of the kitchen god in a red robe) and so on. The content and overall form of the kitchen god painting inherited the folk version of the kitchen god schema, which is mainly spread in Nanxiaoli village and is the main image of the kitchen god worshipping in this area, forming a unique local folk style.

*B. Fengxiang New Year picture with only male kitchen god on it*

Fengxiang woodcut New Year pictures with only male kitchen god can be divided into Sijihuazao (painting of the kitchen god with flowers in spring, summer, suthum, and winter for decoration) and Denglongzao (the kitchen god is painted with lanterns on either side) according to the background decoration, and can be divided into inscribed and uninscribed according to the inscription, among which the kitchen god with inscription belongs to Denglongzao, and the kitchen god without inscription belongs to Sijihuazao, and the Sijihuazao is composed of Heipaozao (picture of the kitchen god in a black robe) and Hongpaozao (picture of the kitchen god in a red robe). "Fig. 1" is a Denglongzao with only male kitchen god collected by Tai Yi<sup>1</sup> in Chencunzhen village in 1979, while "Fig. 2" is a painting of Tai Liping collected by the author. Through comparative analysis, it can be concluded that "Fig. 2" and "Fig. 1" share the same wood plate, so the author believes that "Fig. 2" is a duplicate of Denglongzao with only male kitchen god. "Fig. 3" is the collection of Shaanxi Provincial Art Museum, "Fig. 4" is Hongpaozao reproduced by Tai Liping<sup>2</sup> in 2019 collected by the author. Through the comparison of the image data, the author believes that these two paintings are the print schema of Chencunzhen village of Qing Dynasty. The collection of precious Fengxiang woodcut New Year picture with only male kitchen god, the discovery of collections, and the analysis of New Year picture with only male kitchen god, especially the exploration of the history of Fengxiang woodcut New Year picture in Nanxiaoli village through field

visits, are of great significance to the author's in-depth understanding of the original state of Fengxiang woodcut New Year pictures with only male kitchen god. In the following part, two representative New Year pictures with only male kitchen god are selected to discuss and analyze the proportion and schematic composition of the figures (See "Fig. 5" and "Fig. 6").



Fig. 1. Denglongzao with only male kitchen god collected by Tai Yi.



Fig. 2. Heipaozao by Tai Liping.



Fig. 3. Sijihuazao in Chencunzhen village.



Fig. 4. Hongpaozao by Tai Liping and taken by the author.



Fig. 5. Hongpaozao whose painting bureau is unknown.

<sup>1</sup> Tai Yi is the father of Tai Liping.

<sup>2</sup> In 2019, the author paid another visit to Tai Liping, a folk artist, and mentioned that the painting was his recently reproduced version of the kitchen god in the Qing Dynasty, but did not mention which region and painting bureau the reproduced painting belonged to before.



Fig. 6. Heipaozao by Tai Weiwei and taken by the author.

### III. THE IMAGES FORMATION FEATURES OF FENGXIANG PICTURE WITH ONLY MALE KITCHEN GOD ON IT

Images formation is the spatial layout of image elements. Among them, schema is related to cognition and is related to "meaning". The "structure" of composition means "frame house" or "house". In modern Chinese, it means "structure". "Composition" generally refers to the formation, that is, the structure and configuration method of artistic image. [5] As the top philosophical cognition in artistic creation, schema plays a leading and dominant role in the overall control of structure and configuration. [6] The images formation of Fengxiang picture with only male kitchen god is an important part of the picture and a direct factor for the interpretation of the work. It adopts the planarization composition and symmetrical layout, emphasizing the balance, fullness and integrity of the picture. Among them, the kitchen god, as the main image, is located in the middle of the picture. The picture is centered symmetrical and the composition is even, which is the typical representative of such schema. According to the above analysis, Fengxiang picture with only male kitchen god in a symmetrical center can be divided into the form of altar shrine and wooden window screen. The Denglongzao (See "Fig. 7") belongs to the former, while the Sijihuazao (See "Fig. 2") belongs to the latter. In the images formation, the segment is in the black line, the character the red line, and the background decorations and sacrificial objects the blue line.

#### A. Composition form of Fengxiang woodcut New Year picture with only male kitchen god

There are two forms of background decoration schemata in Fengxiang woodcut New Year picture with only male kitchen god, one of which is the altar shrine. The ingot pattern is symmetrical in the middle and is repeatedly distributed at the top, the inscription identifying the kitchen god is in the middle, the two sides are the circular curves symmetrical distributed in the transverse "凹" shape, below is the god shade that decorates with curved decorative pattern line and large round lanterns suspended symmetrically in the shade. As shown in "Fig. 7", the blue wireframe on the background presents an inverted "凹" shape and is symmetrical in the middle. The curved and straight lines in the picture make the picture move in static state and enhance the sense of flow of the picture. The other is n-shaped wooden window screen. In the background of the picture, flowers of four seasons: plum, chrysanthemum, lotus and peony are symmetrical in the middle to form four screens,

which are all in the n-shaped wooden window. The four curved screens are in sharp contrast to the wooden window screen of regular hexagonal shape. Among them, the curve pattern and the thick and dense wooden window screen pattern form a contrast between the thin space in the middle and the dense space on both sides, so that the picture pattern produces a strong decorative effect, and the whole presents an inverted "凹" shape with a symmetrical pattern in the middle. The sacrificial decoration patterns at the bottom of the picture are all corollaries, the left and right sides are respectively chicken and dog, the dog stands for night, responsible for guarding the door, the chicken stands for day, responsible for getting people up and working. Among them, offering a chicken has auspicious meaning. The position of the chicken and dog is corresponding to the position of the kitchen god. There are also two symmetrical patterns in the same shape. When posting pictures, the dog's head should toward the direction of the door, as the saying goes: Ji Wang Jin Qian, Gou Wang Chu Yao (the chicken is afraid of being pecked into the face, while a dog is not.) [7] The sacrificial pattern is rectangular and symmetrical with neat and orderly picture.

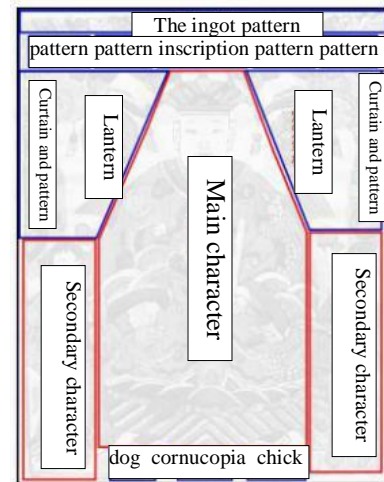


Fig. 7. Denglongzao Fengxiang picture with only male kitchen god in a symmetrical center drawn by the author.

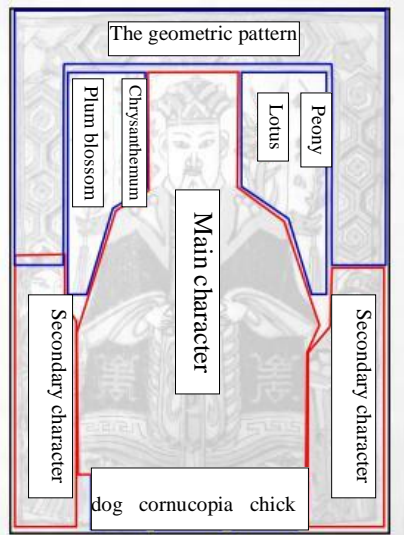


Fig. 8. Sijihuazao Fengxiang picture with only male kitchen god in a symmetrical center drawn by the author.

**B. The proportion of the composition of the figures in Fengxiang woodcut New Year picture with only male kitchen god**

Such paintings of kitchen god as Denglongzao and Sijihuazao are centered and symmetrical. Through the comparative analysis of the composition characteristics and the main and secondary characters of Fengxiang woodcut New Year picture with only male kitchen god, it can be seen that the full-body image of the kitchen god sits upright in the middle with a hat on the head. The kitchen god's white face and three long beards are the brightest parts of the whole picture, in sharp contrast to the overall figure decoration. A symmetrical pattern is formed when three quarters of the attendants on either side are about the lower half of the main character. The attendant on the left carries the seal with both hands, while the attendant on the right carries the clerk's book with both hands. The attendants look at the center of the picture, forming a focus pattern and highlighting the divinity of the kitchen god. With the size of each head as unit 1, it can be seen that the head and body schema ratio of the main figure kitchen god is 1:3, and that of the secondary figure attendant is 1:4. The proportion of their sitting and standing posture follows the huge modeling of character in Fengxiang and is consistent with the folk aesthetic. The kitchen god in Denglongzao holds a belt in his left hand and a guard plate in his right. He wears long robes with wide sleeves. The patterns of the dragon's head, dragon scales and moire on the chest, arms and legs are symmetrical in the middle. (See "Fig. 9") However, the kitchen god in Sijihuazao holds a belt in both hands and wears a round collar robe decorated with flowers and auspicious patterns. The pattern in the middle of the robe, the auspicious clouds on both shoulders, the word "longevity" on the legs, and the geometric pattern are symmetrical. The colors of the shoulders and calves, sleeves and thighs create a strong contrast. (See "Fig. 10") The primary and secondary characters are in neat shape and located in the middle of the

picture. The lines of the picture are concise and smooth, with curves and zigzag lines interspersed with great strength. The overall density is appropriate, and the image is symmetrical in the middle. Under such composition, the image is concise and vigorous, simple and generous, which further refines and amplifies the image beauty of the kitchen god. It is an intuitive expression of aesthetic consciousness, expressing the theme of extolling the kitchen god's "noble and official beauty", and enriching the scheme that is symmetrical in the middle.

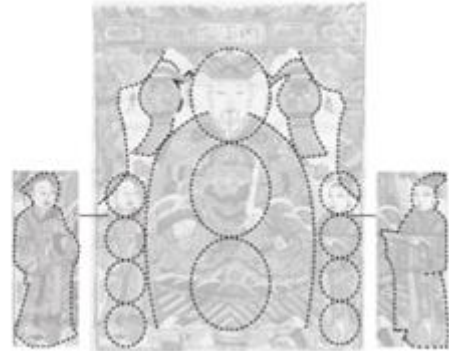


Fig. 9. Proportion analysis of figure composition in Denglongzao drawn by the author.

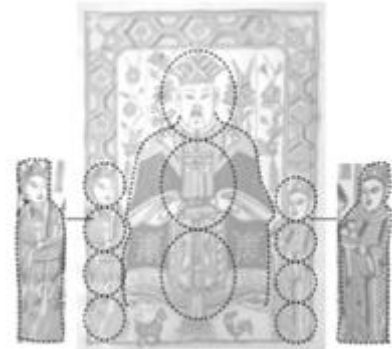


Fig. 10. Proportion analysis of figure composition in Sijihuazao drawn by the author.

To sum up, the layout features of Fengxiang New Year picture with only male kitchen god are as follows: the main characters occupy the center of the picture, and the secondary characters are arranged in the middle or lower part of the main characters. The background decoration presents an inverted "凹" shape with a symmetrical pattern in the middle, and the sacrificial pattern is symmetrical at the base of the main character. From the aesthetic point of view, the layout of Fengxiang picture with only male kitchen god is neat and unified, which not only highlights the status of the kitchen god, but also highlights the local people's attention to and respect for the kitchen god. It is an image that combines

"sublime" and "beautiful" into one. From the perspective of function, such layout satisfies the structure of two doors of Fengxiang local traditional houses and local customs and folk customs. As shown in "Fig. 5" above, the top of the center is the title: "Bingding Palace". The decorations such as ingot, plants, and curtain decorated with flowers of four seasons and lantern pattern are symmetrically distributed in the middle, forming the building structure. In order to enhance the fun of the picture, lanterns, animal and plant patterns and other symmetrical decoration are indispensable. The craftsman pursues the change in the unity in the details, so that the primary and secondary figures and the background schema of picture with only male kitchen god with symmetrical distribution in the middle have a sense of depth and rhythm, which has strong local characteristics.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The symmetrical composition in Fengxiang picture with only male kitchen god is not only the presentation and appreciation of the beauty of the kitchen god, but also the release of the lofty character of the kitchen god to some extent. In order to highlight and expand the presentation of this beauty and release of character, the image of the kitchen god is presented in the picture in the way of filling, which reflects the sensibility of "seeking for fullness" and achieves the effect of constructing a perfect middle-symmetry schema.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Dai Sheng. *Ji Fa Of the Sacrificial Way of Book of Rites*. [M]. Beijing: Beijing United Publishing Company. 2015: 88. (in Chinese)
- [2] Jiang Linqing, Liu Shui. Application of Wuxi Zhima Art Visual Elements in Modern Decorative Pattern Design [J]. *Journal of Jiangnan University (Natural Science Edition)*. 2018(4): 336. (in Chinese)
- [3] Li Shuangyu, Liu Zijian. Look at Creation Life of Folk's Traditional Fine Art from Festival Woodcuts in Fengxiang [J]. *Art & Design*. 2005(8): 78. (in Chinese)
- [4] Tai Gaudi. *Research on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Guanzhong — Fengxiang New Year Pictures*. Shaanxi: Shaanxi People's Fine Arts Publishing House. 2008: 11. (in Chinese)
- [5] Yuan Zhoufei. The Images Formation of Female on Chinese New Year Pictures in Qing Dynasty [J]. *Art & Design*. 2015(6): 114. (in Chinese)
- [6] Tai Jie. The Origin of "Schema" in Artistic Creation [J]. *Studies in National Art*. 2010(3): 86. (in Chinese)
- [7] Cultural Museum of Fengxiang County, Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center of Fengxiang County. *Fengxiang Woodcut New Year Pictures* [M]. Shaanxi: Internal Materials of Shaanxi Province. 2015: 34. (in Chinese)