

Inheritance and Transmutation

Discussion on the Artistic Features of Chinese Lacquer Painting

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ABSTRACT

As an independent easel painting form, lacquer painting is undergoing a similar formation process in other painting forms. Whether it is the choice of materials or the selection of craftsmanship, it has a profound historical origin and inheritance relationship with the traditional lacquer craftsmanship in terms of artistic characteristics. At the same time, in view of the high efficiency of contemporary information exchange, the independence and formation of lacquer painting art has the characteristics of incorporating various forms of painting art, which has greatly enriched and expanded the connotation of lacquer art, at the same time accelerated the growth of it and gradually formed lacquer art with its own artistic characteristics and aesthetic style.

Keywords: materials, techniques, craftsmanship, paintings, theme, sense of form

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout all the art categories, all contain specific content and forms and the same is true of painting. Writing brushes, ink sticks, paper and inkstones and mineral plant pigments constitute the external form of Chinese painting; the external artistic conception created by the line shape and the light and dark ink colors constitutes the various inner state of Chinese painting. The content and form of these are not static, and it is precisely the evolution of all art categories that has merged into a mighty art history. As a relatively young form of painting, in the contemporary era where globalization and information communication are more smooth and efficient, the soil for the development of lacquer painting is more fertile, but it also faces many confusions and disputes. Like all easel paintings, lacquer painting in the modern sense is independent from various buildings and lacquer utensils. Its development also faces how to coordinate the relationship between traditional inheritance and modern innovation. Everything has its connotation and extension. As far as lacquer painting is concerned, no matter how it develops, it must adhere to its essence while expanding its scope of expression. Therefore, it is very necessary to study and explore the origin and artistic characteristics of lacquer painting.

II. MATERIAL SELECTION FOR LACQUER PAINTINGS

A. Inheritance of traditional materials

Modern lacquer painting is born out of traditional lacquer art, therefore, at the beginning, the creative materials of lacquer painting are mainly traditional lacquer art materials, the most basic of which is natural lacquer, also known as tree lacquer, which is refined into raw lacquer and then is mixed with multicolor mineral pigments and tung oil to make various colored paint. Huang Cheng, a lacquerer of the Ming Dynasty, mentioned in "Xiushilu" that: "Decorations of ancient times were mostly solid color paintings; later, with the emergence of another kind of painting with colors, the kinds of decorations were changed". This shows that the color of the lacquer is relatively single, mostly based on raw paint and black red paint. The lacquer is thick and mild with a large span of use environment and conditions, and has good practicability. The natural lacquer is thick because it has translucent properties. In particular, the refined transparent lacquer presents a slightly transparent visual effect of coffee color, and combined with the traditional painting materials such as gold, silver and aluminum, it creates a deep and subtle image conception through cover dyeing and blooming.

Every kind of painting has its relatively "self" material selection. Through different combinations of material processing and different drawing forms, it presents different artistic effects. In addition to the inherent gold, silver, black, and cinnabar materials, lacquer painting materials also include titanium

cyanine, malachite green, and gamboge. Lacquer contains laccase and acid, and most metals such as iron, sodium, plumbum and zinc will chemically react with it, so they can't be used. Black red is the most representative color of traditional lacquer art, so it is widely used in modern lacquer painting. With the development of traditional lacquer art, more and more materials have been added, such as gold and silver foil, gold and silver wire, mother-of-pearl inlays that have emerged with the development of inlay technology, and various gems embedded in treasure chest. During the evolution of lacquerware from extravagance to ordinary, copper and aluminum foil and wire entered the art of lacquer instead of gold and silver. Aluminum and copper are widely used in modern lacquer paintings, and gold and silver materials will be used in high-end customized lacquer paintings. At the same time, in order to reduce costs, lacquer is sometimes replaced by cashew paint. Cashew paint is a semi-natural resin-based oil-based paint. The main raw material is cashew nut shell juice, mixed with methylbenzene and urushiol, and after the polymerization and then adjusted to a solvent. The traits are similar to that of lacquer, which dries slightly faster than lacquer, but has a strong taste and slight toxicity.

B. Expansion of modern lacquer painting materials

Each form of painting advances in independent development and drawing on other art forms. Modern and contemporary lacquer painters excavated traditional lacquer painting materials and continued to expand and innovate through exploration and research. Some new materials are constantly added to the creation of lacquer paintings, which greatly enhances the expressiveness and creative power of lacquer paintings, making the artistic style of lacquer paintings more diverse in unity. The application of the diversity of lacquer painting materials is now the main method of lacquer painting creation. Since the colored paint of lacquer painting is basically based on the white and transparent colors of the lacquer and blended with the color powder, and because the white color as the base color is slightly beige with light coffee color, in order to make up for this deficiency, the white color in modern and contemporary lacquer painting has increased the adhesion of eggshells. The application of various eggshells has greatly enhanced the expressive power of lacquer paintings. There are two main groups of lacquer creation, one is various free and semi-free lacquer painters, and the other is teachers and students of various fine art colleges. As a lacquer painter, he or she has close contact with social production, especially lacquer art production. The production of lacquer handicrafts oriented to market products has strong flexibility in the choice of materials. Starting from product quality and production efficiency, more and more new materials are applied to products, which in turn greatly enriches the lacquer painter's material

choices, such as gold and silver powder, various fabric leather materials, flashlight powder, mica titanium pearlescent powder, cornstarch, etc. The teaching of lacquer painting in fine art colleges generally tends to be more traditional in terms of material selection, and at the same time, it also explores and studies the combination of new materials and lacquer. Students use a large amount of copper powder, aluminum powder, eggshell powder, paper, dried leaves, mung beans, sesame seeds and other seeds, and cut tobacco, monofilament and other available materials. Some materials are directly used into the painting, and some are used to graining to make the texture. In addition to the traditional tree lacquer and cashew lacquer, some synthetic lacquers and industrial chemical lacquers are also used in the selection of lacquer. Chemical lacquer are characterized by rich and showy colors and short drying time, especially in the case of low humidity and high temperature, it can become dry within a day. But chemical lacquer also has a relatively big disadvantage, that is, after it is dried, it has enough hardness and insufficient elasticity, and the painted works have a short shelf life. In particular, the transparent lacquer with cover is prone to yellow and crack after passing through a long time, which is suitable for the painting of lacquer art products and lacquer paintings with lower cost.

Due to the limited choice of hue and color in traditional lacquer paintings, some modern lacquer paintings have gradually begun to incorporate oil painting, Chinese painting and acrylic paint, as well as mineral plant pigments in rock paintings, and even a small amount of gouache and watercolor paints. At the same time, patent leather and paint powder made of synthetic paint, especially chemical paint, sawdust powder, carbon powder, etc., and various new metal powder materials are also widely used. The addition of these materials makes the color expression of lacquer painting more flexible and diverse, greatly improving the expressive power of lacquer painting. In addition to the materials available for different paintings, modern lacquer painting also absorbs any compatible materials, such as titanium dark green, gamboge, lithol red, lampblack, cadmium yellow and other chemical pigments. The extension of modern lacquer painting has been extended to the territory of comprehensive materials. Some lacquer creations no longer completely follow the traditional process, and the finished products are no longer polished, buffed, and brightened, which provides the possibility of painting on various "impossible" materials. The use of certain construction materials such as tile ash, gypsum powder, talc powder, and lithopone and so on, makes expressive lacquer painting extend in the direction of relief effect. In addition, all kinds of decoration materials such as plastic sheets, glass, hemp rope, etc., and even pigskin,

fishskin, pillis ophidia, etc. can be included in the painting.

III. THE TECHNICAL LANGUAGE OF LACQUER PAINTINGS

A. Inheritance of traditional techniques

The lacquer painting originated from the ancient lacquer art and was named in modern times, so the lacquer painting looks both old and young. As far as the technique of lacquer painting is concerned, it can be traced back to seven or eight thousand years ago. At that time, the ancestors began to paint lacquer on the utensils. The earliest lacquer ware discovered in the world at present is the lacquer bow unearthed at the Xiaoshan Kuahu Bridge Ruins in Zhejiang, which has a history of about 8,000 years. The lacquered objects in the archaeological discoveries of tombs in the new period mainly include wooden bowls, pottery pots, steans, etc. In the Yushun period of the pre-Qin period, lacquer was painted on the food containers and sacrificial utensils. The lacquer art technique before the Shang Dynasty was relatively simple, which mainly contained easy-to-paint colored lacquer and played the role of beauty and protection of utensils. On the basis of painted colored lacquer, the lacquer art of the Shang Dynasty presented the patterns commonly used on bronzes by carving, and inlaid techniques such as jade and shell. During the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, gold slice inlaying techniques began to appear, and thick wooden carcasses were used for the utensils carcasses. In the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period, artificial trees were planted manually, and the fineness of the lacquer process was significantly improved. Bamboo weaving carcasses began to appear during this period, but wooden carcasses still dominated. The thickness of the carcass became thinner, and the Jiazhu (夹纻) technique of using burlap and lacquer gray to make lacquer fetal bones began to appear. The more popular lacquer techniques during this period were colored drawing and cone scribing or engraving.

Qin Dynasty established the Qin Dynasty after unifying the vassal states. Qin's lacquer art has the legacy of the Warring States Period and has a certain regional character. The lacquer art styles of the period of two Han dynasties began to unify. The development of the lacquer art in the Han Dynasty reached a peak period.

Utensils and objects during that period were diversified in shape, mainly with catering utensils. Most of the wooden carcass lacquer coating are red inside and black outside, with red or ochre patterns painted on the black ground. In addition, there are techniques such as lacquer painting, oil paint, gold and silver foil stickers, needle etching and embossed lacquer. The needle etching is filled with gold paint in the seam of

the needle thread, resulting in a pattern effect similar to that of gold and silver interlacing on the brass. The decoration method of embossed lacquer is mostly linear embossed lacquer to form a prominent pattern. Lacquerware after the middle of the Western Han Dynasty was also popular for "silver mouth and golden ear", that is, gold or silver was plated on the rim of the utensils, and gold-plated copper shells were inlaid on the ears of the cup. During the Three Kingdoms, Jin Dynasties and Northern-Southern Dynasties, social unrest and wars were frequent, and the development of lacquer art was affected to a certain extent. During this period, filled gold lacquer and lacquer colored coating were still used as before. Painting techniques began to be applied in lacquer art, and blooming techniques appeared, breaking through the limitations of the previous flat coating techniques.

The Tang Dynasty built on past achievements and strived for new progress, and its economy and culture flourished. Due to the appearance of porcelain and the relatively low price, the position of lacquerware in daily necessities was gradually replaced. Then it moved towards the direction of handicrafts and the craftsmanship became more refined. The technique of lacquer engraving appeared in the Tang Dynasty, and the inlaying technique of mother-of-pearl inlay also improved. The gold and silver flat off developed from the inlay technique of the gold and silver foil pattern in the Han Dynasty is a typical representative of the progress of the lacquer art technique in the Tang Dynasty. "Pingtuo" (平脱) refers to a color method. Specifically, it refers to inlaying a thin lacquer art material on the utensil, painting it all over, and grinding and polishing to reveal the mosaic pattern, while the surface of the utensil remains flat and bright. In the Song Dynasty, there were special agencies to manage the manufacture of royal lacquerware, and the folk lacquer art industry also developed.

There were few lacquerwares in the Yuan Dynasty, and the technique was mainly inlaid mother-of-pearl inlays and carved lacquer. The lacquer crafts of the Ming and Qing Dynasties basically inherited the tradition and the varieties were more diversified. There were factories or workshops producing lacquerware all over the country. There was a heyday in the carved lacquerware process during the Qianlong period, with techniques such as carved red paint, carved black paint and carved colored paint, and inlaid with various materials.

B. Technological innovation and reference and integration of multi-painting techniques

The true independence and development of Chinese lacquer art was in the 1960s and 1970s. Vietnamese lacquer painting occupies an important place in the beginning of Chinese lacquer painting art. Lacquer

painting was gradually accepted by the public in the 1980s and cut a figure. Lacquer paintings were included in the National Fine Arts Exhibition in 1984, and since then they gradually experienced the process from being exhibited together with pastel and murals to an independent exhibition section. In this process, the materials and techniques of lacquer painting have been greatly developed. With the use of new materials such as eggshells, fabrics, etc., a variety of eggshell pasting techniques have been extended, including flat pasting, gradual change, density effect, three-dimensional effect, porcelain-like cracked glaze effect, etc. Various metal powders, paint powders and other particles can be scattered, and can be sparse and dense. The parts of the character's skin are mostly made of coarse aluminum powder or white paint. After drying, the structure of the facial features and fingers are outlined with lines, and then the traditional Chinese painting blooming technique will be used to draw. After using mung beans, leaves, soft plastic cloth, loofah sponge and other materials to graining, it can be applied with foil cover paint and polished to form a texture effect similar to rhinoceros hide, also known as "rhinoceros hide" technique. The light-weight materials technique is made by using finger belly to tap the colored paint, which can produce a strong three-dimensional effect. The gold-blooming technique is somewhere between filled gold and blooming. The technique requires higher skills and requires longer training to master. The technique of splashing paint, exploding paint or flowing paint can create a flexible picture effect. This technique is to first apply turpentine on the paint board (gasoline works best, but there is a certain degree of danger), and then apply the diluted colored paint to let it flow freely. At the same time, it can be splashed on top of the flowing paint to form a visual effect of explosion.

Tianjin lacquer painting also creatively uses aluminum plate as the bottom, also known as aluminum plate lacquer drawing. Its drawing technique is similar to the wooden embryo lacquer plate with aluminum foil as the bottom, but the entire aluminum plate is visually smoother. According to the characteristics of its own materials, modern lacquer painting also absorbs and integrates many techniques from oil painting, Chinese painting, printmaking, gouache and watercolor. The techniques of oil painting cover dyeing and color layer stacking have considerable advantages in shaping the three-dimensional effect. Some lacquer painters use the realistic technique of oil painting to draw the faces, hands and feet of characters, and some use the blooming technique of traditional Chinese painting. Although the technique of printmaking is relatively simple, it can create works with strong visual effects. Lines are the soul of printmaking. Lacquer painting can also draw on printmaking techniques to create a strong contrasting picture effect through a relatively single material and colored paint. In addition, from the

perspective of the epitaxial comprehensive material of lacquer painting, there are also pasting of various materials such as copper wire and aluminum wire as well as stacking of tile ash, etc.

IV. THEME CONTENT OF LACQUER PAINTINGS

A. Evolution of traditional lacquer art

The lacquer pigment was initially applied as a protective medium on the surface of the utensils, so at the beginning of the ancestors' use of the lacquer, there was no ornamentation. In the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Periods, with the massive use of bronze wares, some common ornamentation on bronze began to appear on the objects of painted bronze utensils. During the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, the ornamentation content of lacquerware was more diverse, and the content was extended to birds, beasts, insects and fishes. During the Qin and Han Dynasties, the Three Kingdoms Period and the Jin Dynasties, with the emergence of the painting art, various patterns such as spirit birds, animals, beasts and ghosts began to appear on the lacquerware. In particular, the appearance of figure paintings on silk directly influenced the decoration of lacquer art. Various coffins and screens began to be drawn with pictures of character conversations, playing chess and nobility getting around on Bunian (步辇). The figure painting art of the Tang Dynasty began to usher in a peak. Reflected in the lacquer art, it was the appearance of a large number of figure decoration, such as the common use of gold and silver Pingtuo as well as mother-of-pearl inlaid on the back of the copper mirror to draw figures, flowers, auspicious birds and precious trees. Some are decorated with dermatoglyphic patterns, while others are relatively realistic life scenes. Buddhism began to rise gradually during the Han and Tang Dynasties. Although the existing temples in the Tang Dynasty are rare and mostly repaired many times in later generations, it is conceivable that lacquer paintings representing Buddhist themes may appear in the carved beams and painted rafters in temples of the past dynasties. In the Song and Yuan Dynasties, there were more characters and flowers and plants themes in lacquer decoration, and there were also images of palace pavilions inlaid with mother-of-pearl inlay, which made breath of life more intense. The decoration content of lacquerwares in the Ming and Qing Dynasties was more diverse, including almost everything on silk or paper paintings from characters to landscapes, from flying birds, insects and fishes to auspicious signs, from palace's courtyard to marketplace's pavilions, terraces and open halls and from sceneries to life scenes, etc., all of which had wonderful performances.

B. Development of modern lacquer painting themes

In the 1930s, there were some art artists and painters exploring the field of modern lacquer painting on the basis of traditional lacquer art. In the early 20th century, under the influence of Bauhaus thought, the lacquer art movement that combined craftsmanship and art gave birth to such outstanding paint artists as Jean Du Sac in France and Eileen Gray in England. Although Japanese lacquer art originated from China, it also has new developments and has also greatly promoted the production and development of modern Chinese lacquer painting. Since then, the rise of Vietnamese lacquer painting in the 1960s has also brought more big shock to the world. Under the combined effect of internal and external factors, modern Chinese lacquer painting is decomposed from traditional lacquerware, and then becomes an independent form of painting. The subject matter of its creation has evolved from the traditional relatively unitary to the contemporary rich and colorful.

In the 1970s, a group of artists in China began to use lacquer painting as an independent form of painting. They combined lacquer tradition and modern materials and techniques and incorporated western painting composition forms, most of which represented the current social life, including mountains and trees, flowers and plants, beasts and fishes, pavilions, terraces and open halls, local conditions and customs, production and labor scenes, etc. Besides, characters' performance is also a very important content. The creation of modern lacquer paintings has been booming in China, and the subjects of its expression are very wide. The creation of lacquer paintings has involved lots of themes from the traditional Chinese paintings to oil paintings to prints and even the contents expressed by comprehensive materials.

V. THE AESTHETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF LACQUER PAINTINGS

A. Craftsmanship and painting

Lacquer paintings were formed in modern times where various artistic activities were active, making lacquer paintings integrate many modern aesthetic elements from the independent development. And its richness of aesthetics and the diversity of materials are inherent. Lacquer paintings come from traditional lacquer art, with a strong craftsmanship in the bones. The technicality of lacquer painting is the main form and foundation of lacquer painting creation. From the selection of materials and the pasting and painting of various materials to the polishing and brightening, the entire production process of lacquer painting perfectly reflects the craftsmanship. The artistic accomplishment and comprehensive quality of the creator determine the technical performance of the lacquer painting, which is

directly related to the success or failure of the lacquer painting and the artistic effect. The innovation and development of lacquer art should be based on traditional lacquer art. Traditional lacquer art has strong practicality and breath of life, and it has been precipitated for thousands of years. Therefore, the artistic effect of a lacquer art work depends on its ideological and technical characteristics.

Modern lacquer paintings have strong craftsmanship and decoration, and incorporate traditional painting concepts. Lacquer painting belongs to the visual arts and is also paintable. The painting of lacquer painting is accompanied by the evolution of the history of Chinese painting, and has the form and color characteristics of painting. The subject matter of lacquer painting has a narrative sense of tableau, and its materials and inspiration are derived from life and are higher than life. The picture showing can be realistic or enjoyable, and at the same time, when expressing ideological sentiment and artistic interest, it often expresses emotions through objects. Art comes from life, and the beauty of lacquer works comes from the unity of craftsmanship and painting. In the process of creating lacquer paintings, it's essential to make full use of the diversity of its materials, deeply explore the beauty of traditional lacquer art, fully demonstrate the beauty of painting, and create lacquer paintings with a contemporary meaning.

B. Pattern of manifestation of decorations

In the context of contemporary art, the expression forms and styles of lacquer paintings begin to diversify, and there are innovations in the use of materials and the matching of color elements. Lacquer painting is no longer just a single graphic expression, and the application of new colors and techniques makes the expression of modern lacquer painting more diverse. On the basis of traditional biased decoration, modern lacquer painting pays more attention to discovering the inherent meaning of the lacquer painting and the atmosphere of the times, and its sense of form is more diverse and intense.

The composition of the lacquer painting is highly decorative, which is particularly prominent in Qiao Shiguang's works. The main point of the decorative composition is that there is change in the unity of the picture, and the theme of the work is clear and intuitive. The characteristics of the lacquer painting materials also determine that the composition of the lacquer painting is mainly decorative. The picture is divided according to a certain density relationship and the corresponding picture elements are arranged according to the primary and secondary, so that the picture shows a proper sense of rhythm. The decoration of the lacquer painting is related to the lacquer painting materials. The lacquer painting materials have complete elements of

dots, lines and surfaces. The dotted materials are eggshell powder, lacquer powder, mother-of-pearl inlay powder, etc.; the linear materials are gold, silver, copper and aluminum metals lines as well as cotton and linen and monofilament etc.; the materials that can be formed into a surface shape include gold, silver, copper and aluminum foil, eggshell, mother-of-pearl inlay, patent leather, paper scraps, etc.

Because the color paint of the lacquer painting is basically deep in brightness and purity, it also makes the color of the lacquer painting stable and rich in decoration. In the creative process, the creator often determines the main color tone of the picture based on experience, and then combines the casualness of the texture and the inevitability of general hue to collide with the unique decorative color charm of the lacquer painting.

VI. CONCLUSION

In summary, lacquer painting is still in the early stages of development as a form of painting. At the most authoritative National Fine Arts Exhibition in China, lacquer painting has existed as an independent exhibition unit for many years. At the same time, the lobby of several halls of the Great Hall of the People are also decorated with large-scale lacquer paintings. However, the reference to lacquer painting as a kind of painting has always been quite controversial both inside and outside the industry. On the contrary, in foreign countries, especially the United States and Europe, the art of lacquer painting has a wider acceptance. Perhaps they are not too entangled in the confusion of the distinction between paintings. It's understandable to say that the newcomers are with a lot of criticism. To gradually dispel this criticism, the inheritance and innovation of lacquer painting still have a long way to go. The development prospect of lacquer art can be summarized as "strengthening connotation and expanding extension". The essence of traditional lacquer art must be inherited and developed, and at the same time, the essence should be taken away from its dross, and the beneficial nutrients of other art forms should be absorbed to develop the lacquer painting art with strong oriental art aesthetic characteristics and the characteristics of the times.

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