

# The Way Back to Origin

## Talking About the Current Situation and Hidden Troubles of Fuzhou Lacquer Art

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### ABSTRACT

**Fuzhou is a traditional lacquerware center, and it still continues to enjoy the reputation of being a major lacquer art town. However, what appears to be prosperous can hardly conceal the many hidden worries of the low humanistic quality and industrial structure imbalance of most practitioners. The author of this article expounded his views from the perspective of a Fuzhou lacquer art practitioner.**

*Keywords: Fuzhou, lacquer art industry, ecological applicability*

### I. INTRODUCTION

China's lacquer culture has a long history, and physical information shows that at least 8000 years ago, China had mastered the manufacturing process of lacquerware. Since the periods of the Yao, Shun and Yu, although the scope of use of lacquerware had been expanding, it still existed mainly as a luxury item for the kings and dignitaries. During the Tang and Song dynasties, with the change of social atmosphere and the perfection of Chinese porcelain, lacquerware gradually separated from practical functions and began to develop in the direction of crafts. To the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Chinese folk lacquerware production increased significantly. Thanks to the superior geographical environment and its unique cultural tradition, Fuzhou soon became China's famous lacquer production center, and reached its peak in the Qing Dynasty. Fuzhou bodiless lacquerware was once ranked as one of the "three treasures" of traditional Chinese craftsmanship. As a traditional base of China's lacquer art industry, Fuzhou still has a good reputation as a major lacquer art town.

### II. IT IS DIFFICULT FOR THE "LITTLE CRAFTSMAN" TO "RUN THE COUNTRY"

In the 1990s, with the closure of Fuzhou No.1 and No.2 Lacquerware Factory, which was established and operated under the planned economic system of New China, Fuzhou lacquer art entered the bottleneck period of development again. In this state, lacquer art technicians are constantly being lost, and Fuzhou lacquer art is even facing the predicament of loss. The lacquer art ecology of private or family workshops is mixed in the freely competitive art market, and is full of the mingling of good and bad. The author, as a lacquer

art worker with many years of experience, feels the same. In 2006, Fujian's bodiless lacquerware was listed in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage, and the former second bodiless lacquerware factory was also built by the government as a lacquer art cultural protection base. With the strong support of the government department, Fuzhou lacquer art began a gratifying road to revival, and a large number of lacquer art workers were deeply encouraged. After 2010, Fuzhou lacquer art has formed an industrial ecological chain integrating design, R&D, production, and sales. On this basis, provincial and municipal government departments established intangible cultural inheritance protection bases, the Lacquer Monopoly Streets, Lacquer Art Museum, Zhuzifang Lacquer Art Industrial Block, Fuzhou Lacquer Art Research Institute and other supporting institutions and facilities to promote the benign development of continuity of the lacquer art industry.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, Fuzhou has also held the Fuzhou International Biennial of Lacquer Art, which has greatly enhanced the academic level of Fuzhou lacquer art, and has introduced a plan for the protection and industrial development of lacquer art. Fuzhou lacquer art is active in an international and professional perspective in the world lacquer art stage.

Currently, there are many practitioners in Fuzhou lacquer art. In addition to the family, mentor and professional skills training personnel training system, various schools in Fujian, such as Fuzhou Tourism Vocational School, Fujian Vocational College of Art, Minjiang University, Xiamen Academy of Arts and Design, Fujian Normal University, etc., also mostly set

<sup>1</sup> Chen Ruo'ou, Conception and Practice of Cultivation of Lacquer Talents in Higher Vocational Colleges: Take Fujian Vocational College of Art as an Example [J]. Culture Industry, 2019 (10).

up lacquer art majors, which together with the protection of lacquer art culture and research institutions, they constitute an "official — college" talent training system, in which the composite lacquer art talent training has obvious advantages. However, looking at the current Fuzhou lacquer art ecology, although the appearance is a prosperous, its ecological "pain points" are also more obvious.

In the current Fuzhou lacquer art ecology, there are a large number and concentration of small-scale lacquerware production organizations of individual, family, and enterprise types, which have become an important part of the Fuzhou lacquer art industry in the form of industrial clusters. The production scale of this type of organization is not large. It is mainly based on the order system and semi-finished product processing. The equipment is simple and separate. There is no unified process standard. The production methods and production time are more flexible. This type of ecological business is more frequent customers, which can save marketing costs. At the same time, the order-based production method can also save them from having to consider inventory pressure, and the production and processing of semi-finished products can save them from thinking about product innovation. It should be said that this management method is compatible with the cultural level of most practitioners. Although they have excellent production skills, they lack the ability to improve the artistic connotation of their works. They can only rely on the repeated imitation of traditional techniques, so their production of lacquer ware has never been able to get rid of the embarrassing situation of copying predecessors and falling into the set pattern.

The benign development of art lies in the continuous "tracing" and innovation, which involves not only the unprecedented "technique", but also the persistence of the "Tao". Only by relentlessly pursuing the artistic spirit of "technological advancement" of skilled and magical craftsmanship and being oblivious of themselves, can the craftsmen continue to give birth to the emergence of "big masters". In the history of Fuzhou lacquer art, it is a must to talk about Shen Shao'an in the Qing Dynasty. Shen Shao'an worked hard on the "JiaZhu" bodiless technique and invented the Fuzhou bodiless lacquer art, which eventually made Fuzhou lacquer art famous. Nowadays, Fuzhou lacquer art more shows the inherited weakness of traditional craftsmanship and the loss of lacquerware connotation. Throughout the centuries of world lacquer art, the output of Chinese "big master" talents is too small compared to the east neighboring Japan. Japan established a higher education system of arts and crafts in 1887, which not only cultivated a large number of well-known lacquer artists in Japan, but also laid a solid foundation for Japan to establish the image of a world lacquer art power. In terms of top-level design, the

Japanese government defined lacquer art as "important intangible cultural property" and "cultural protection technology", and awarded the honorary title of "human national treasure" to almost all the inheritors and prominent contributors of lacquer art cultural heritage. It stimulated the benign development of Japanese lacquer art, and gave birth to lacquer masters such as Kiichiro Masumura, Terai Naoji, Matsuda Toritsu, and Kitamura Akira.

"Little craftsman" production mode meets the economic needs of practitioners, but the value orientation dominated by personal will undoubtedly limits the further development and growth of the lacquer art industry in the new era. The development of Fuzhou lacquer art needs to train a group of artists with contemporary artistic thinking and humanistic connotations, in order to seek new breakthroughs with the times. In China's existing higher education training system, although some art colleges set up lacquer art majors, if they only focus on decorative skills and theoretical research, then the symptoms of mental anemia in practitioners will be too difficult to overcome.

### III. THE "APPLICABILITY" IS OUT OF ORDER

In the tradition of Chinese lacquer art, the main body of lacquer art is the "utensil", and the development of "art" is closely related to the practicality of the "utensil". The climatic soil of the "Southeast Mountain Country" breeds the unique cultural characteristics of Fuzhou. The development of Fuzhou lacquerware is connected with the daily work and customs of local people. In art design, Fuzhou traditional lacquerware pays more attention to the neatness, rigor and symmetry of modeling. While pursuing the beauty of modeling, it has both practicality and artistry of utensils. However, in the current context of modern life, Fuzhou lacquer art has fallen into a mismatch of "applicability". In this regard, relevant practitioners and researchers have screamed for a few years ago, but did not attract enough attention from industry insiders. Those who do not plan for the future will find trouble at their doorstep. The lack of "applicability" of Fuzhou lacquer art has become an important shortcoming restricting its industrial upgrading.

Facts show that lacquerware is fading out of people's daily life, and the practical function of lacquer art is giving way to artistic aesthetics. For example, in recent years, lacquer painting has shown a strong development momentum. As a derivative of lacquerware, its rapid development has far exceeded the lacquerware itself. At present, it seems that the lacquerwares that originally existed in daily crafts are most likely to be purely artistic aesthetic objects. The removal of the "applicability" of lacquer wares will

inevitably cause the decline of the lacquer craftsmanship, and at the same time will lose the national cultural character of Fuzhou lacquer art. The famous Japanese folk theorist Soetsu Yanagi once pointed out: "When the beauty of utensils becomes a problem, it is because of problems in society."<sup>2</sup> [2] The social value of traditional handicrafts is not only at the level of decorative aesthetics, but also at the spiritual level of the people. In Japan and South Korea, lacquerware production can always be perfectly connected with the current life, and its decoration method is more imaginative of contemporary people, which is in line with the aesthetic taste of people.

The negative impact of the lack of "applicability" is also manifested in the fact that the industrial chain of Fuzhou Lacquer Arts, which has lost its basic market, has become increasingly incomplete, causing a vicious circle of many problems: The lack of lacquer raw materials and high prices raise the barrier of entry in disguise; The long period of lacquer art production and the arduous and difficult process make the inheritance of lacquer art short.; The use of artificial lacquer in the production of industrial lacquerware lacks effective industry specifications, which directly confuses the market environment; Artistic lacquer art development and life-applicable lacquerware have not yet coexisted harmoniously in the industry structure, and their positioning and development strategies are even more ambiguous. In contrast, Japanese lacquer art has always had a healthy industry ecology, and lacquer art culture has no fault crisis. In the 1970s, after the successful return of lacquerware to national families in Japan, the Japanese lacquer art industry was fully developed. There are three main forms of modern Japanese lacquer art: cultural property form, daily necessities industry form and modern lacquer form. This industry structure, with a clear positioning and diversified development, not only solves the traditional inheritance problem of lacquer art, but also protects the needs of life, while it is also continuously expanding the artistic innovation space of lacquerware, and it has a profound impact on the popularization and spread of lacquer art. .

Overall, the development of Fuzhou lacquer art needs a good industry ecology. Such problems as raw material supply, value positioning, coexistence of products of different grades and other issues should be taken seriously. The author believes that, in addition to the government's crucial policy support and human cultivation, in the market structure, Fuzhou lacquer art should reposition itself, pursue a diverse ecology, use branding and industrialization to open up the market, tap social needs, and conduct differentiated marketing. In the design and development of lacquerware, it is necessary to pay attention to the aesthetic agreement

between tradition and modernity. In the process of "tracing to the source" in the past glorious achievements, it is also necessary to combine modern art theory, reshape the harmonious coexistence relationship between "technique" and "art", and create lacquer art works that have both strong Chinese national character and modern aesthetic interest. There are many classic cases of successful combination of traditional lacquer art and modern decoration abroad, such as the famous jewelry brand "Tiffany" launched a series of lacquered bracelets and pendants carefully crafted by the famous Italian designer Elsa Beretti, and Japanese watch brand "Credor" launched watches of lacquer art limited edition. These lacquer art supplies, which are perfectly combined with applicability and artistry, all highlight the user's personality, taste and life interest, and may be the stone of other mountains to solve the difficulties of Fuzhou lacquer art breakthrough.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The traditional Chinese aesthetic spirit pursues the "unity of man and nature". The natural material beauty of the lacquerware and the exquisite craftsmanship fully demonstrate the seamless integration of "Tiangong (work of nature)" and "Kaiwu (exploration of the work)". The fast-paced modern people are also increasingly looking forward to the poetic dwelling, which gives the earthy lacquer art a display space. Fuzhou has a profound tradition of lacquer art and resource advantages. People have reason to believe that Fuzhou lacquer art can develop better in the process of returning to its origin. Those who do will always succeed, and those who walk will always reach the destination. This article is to encourage the majority of lacquer art practitioners.

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<sup>2</sup> (Japan) Soetsu Yanagi, *Craftsmanship* [M]. Xu Yiyi, trans. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2011, p91-92.