

Life Aesthetics in Japanese Civil Lacquerware and Its Enlightenment to Chinese Traditional Handicrafts

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ABSTRACT

As an ancient traditional handicraft, lacquerware not only reflects our country's historical development, but also carries our country's excellent traditional culture. Through analyzing the beauty of health, beauty of simplicity, beauty of ordinaryness and beauty of simplicity embodied in the craftsmanship, color, shape, and decoration of Japanese civil lacquerware, explore the method of good inheritance of Japanese civil lacquerware. At the same time, it analyzes the problems encountered in the inheritance of Chinese traditional handicrafts, applies the enlightenment gained from the inheritance of Japanese civil lacquerware to Chinese traditional handicrafts, which plays a positive role in promoting the protection and inheritance of Chinese traditional handicrafts.

Keywords: Japanese lacquerware, life aesthetics, traditional handicrafts

1. INTRODUCTION

As a country on the island, with limited geographical resources, Japan turned to the pursuit of wealth in the inner world, which forming the Japanese people's life aesthetics based on simplicity and simplicity, and finally presented a peaceful and healing life atmosphere. On the other hand, Japan attaches great importance to the protection and inheritance of traditional culture. Compared with the protection of traditional culture in China today, which emphasizes the protection of the diversity of traditional culture and helps them to pass on smoothly, Japan pays more attention to whether the tradition can be continued in daily life. Lacquerware as a kind of handicraft with a long history, and its development in the two countries is completely different. Lacquerware is little known in China, but it can be used as a daily necessities in ordinary Japanese family. At present, the separation of "tradition" and "life" still exists in the inheritance of handicrafts in China, while Japan has developed a relatively mature method to integrate tradition into life, and embodies the life aesthetics with its own national style.

2. OVERVIEW OF JAPANESE CIVIL LACQUERWARE

Obviously, "folk art" refers to folk arts, crafts or handicrafts. However, China and Japan have different attitudes towards "folk art". In China, people tend to appreciate and protect them, which is one of the ways to understand the customs and culture of different regions. Under the premise of convenient mechanical production and the modern living environment, if it is not for special collection or aesthetic needs, then few people except rural areas will use simple and rough folk crafts in their daily lives. However, other folk crafts with more complicated craftsmanship or cumbersome and gorgeous decorative effects are included in the list of traditional cultures, and their prices are usually higher than the average price of daily necessities. The father of folk arts in Japan, Soetsu Yanagi, pointed out the nature of folk arts: first, it is an artifact made for the lives of ordinary people; second, it has been made for the first purpose of practicality so far; third, it is prepared in large quantities to meet the needs of most people; fourth, the purpose of production is low price and good quality; fifth, the authors are all craftsmen [1]. From this passage, it can be seen that Japanese folk arts exists to satisfy the daily use of most ordinary people, and it is quite different from Chinese folk arts.

Based on the nature of Japanese folk art, Japanese civilian lacquerware refers to the lacquerware that is used by the public daily, practical and easy to obtain. In particular, utensils made of lacquerware have long been integrated into Japanese daily life, such as miso soup, which is indispensable on the Japanese table. The soup bowl is generally a wooden lacquer bowl, so it is written as “wooden bowl for soup”.

3. LIFE AESTHETICS IN JAPANESE CIVIL LACQUERWARE

3.1. The healthy beauty of craftsmanship

Sooetsu Yanagi proposed that folk art should be healthy: the utensils used every day must be strong and durable. The morbid, gorgeous, and cumbersome attributes are not allowed in folk art. The thick, balanced, and sound attributes are suitable for daily life. To be able to endure rough use and extreme heat or cold, it must not be weak or gorgeous, but must have a strong texture [2]. In his opinion, healthy lacquerware should meet the two conditions of durability and simplicity. Wajima lacquerware, which is well-known in Japan, is known as the strongest lacquerware. The biggest difference between Wajima lacquerware and other lacquerware is the mixing of Wajima's unique diatomaceous earth powder with lacquer. The diatom particles with tiny pores fully penetrate into the lacquer to form a heat-insulating layer and have good heat resistance. After the lacquer dried, the chemical minerals contained in the diatom powder will form a hard paint film to tightly warp the soft wooden object, making it difficult to deform [3].

The famous Wajima lacquer artist Akito Akagi once wrote in the book “Utsukushii Koto”: The shape of the lacquer bowl I made is not original, but deeply rooted in the daily life of the people for a long time [4]. Akito Akagi's lacquer bowls are simple in shape and decoration. He doesn't like adding other painting techniques to the lacquer bowls, most of the lacquer bowls are just painted with plain lacquer using the delicate Wajima lacquer technique (Figure 1). Due to the patience and meticulous treatment of the craftsmen, the seemingly ordinary lacquer bowl not only has good quality of durability, but also has a fine visual and tactile texture.



Figure 1 Soup bowl. Produced by Akito Akagi.

3.2. The simple and elegant beauty of color

For a long time, the color impression of Japan has been natural and elegant. The aesthetic consciousness of the Japan originated from the beauty experienced in nature, and natural beauty is the cornerstone of Japanese aesthetics [5]. Based on respect for nature, the Japanese believe that nature has endowed everything with enough aesthetic connotations, so that excessive repairs and decorations are a kind of destruction to beauty. Therefore, the Japanese customary technique of color matching is to use achromatic colors that can coexist harmoniously with any color such as black, white, and gray. The purity of Japanese traditional colors is generally not high, and there are generally more turbid and dim colors. The low-purity colors are relatively fuzzy, giving people a rich visual experience [6]. Therefore, the color decoration of most civil lacquerware is simply painted with dark pigment lacquer, or add a little gold and other bright colors as decorations. The purpose is to show the state of the utensil itself, rather than its surface decoration (Figure 2). The simple and elegant colors of lacquerware are easier to match with the environment and become an ordinary part of daily life, which is conducive to the long-term service of lacquerware in human daily life.



Figure 2 Tableware of Yamada Heiando.

3.3. The ordinary beauty of shape

Japanese civil lacquerware basically continues the traditional shape, and have a typical Japanese style. But there are also modern innovations, such as the four-leaf clover-shaped lacquer plate and the wavy lacquer plate (Figure 3). Their shape can still clearly demonstrate their use and will not affect its practicality.



Figure 3 The four-leaf clover-shaped lacquer plate and the wavy lacquer plate.

Nowadays, people’s daily utensils all have similar shapes, no matter how the products are updated, innovative and transformed, people’s commonly used product shapes have a certain range of constraints. This constraint is based on life experience and applies to most people. It is also one of the basic conditions for manufacturing products established by conventions. If the shape of the utensils breaks away from this constraint, and becomes an “unusual” utensil because of the pursuit of unusual “beauty”, then it may lose its practical value and no longer be used in life. The ordinary beauty of the shape of lacquerware is to help people focus on life itself, and learn to appreciate the pure beauty of life from ordinary utensils.

3.4. The unpretentious beauty of decoration

In Japanese lacquer arts, the “Negoro lacquerware” extremely with Japanese national characteristics (Figure 4). After long-term use of lacquerware, the vermilion lacquer on the surface wears out, revealing the lower layer of wooden object or primer, and occasionally abstract and interesting patterns will appear, the inspiration for “Negoro lacquerware” may come from this. The texture of “Negoro lacquerware” has a natural affinity, it is precisely because of this feature that Japanese rice bowls and utensils are often made with “Negoro lacquerware”, which meets people's functional and aesthetic needs [7]. “Negoro lacquerware” is inseparable from Japanese aesthetic thoughts such as “wabi-sabi” and “mono no aware”, it presents the incomplete, simple, and timeless beauty, showing the Japanese delicate understanding of the beauty of life and time.



Figure 4 Negoro lacquerware.

In addition to the lacquerware whose surface is as bright as a mirror, lacquerware with a matte texture is also common in Japan. Simply paint black lacquer on wooden object and then paint a layer of uneven white lacquer on top without polish the surface of the lacquer, the surface of such lacquerware has a grainy texture as if it has been eroded for years (Figure 5). The unpretentious beauty of Japanese civilian lacquerware is that it imitates the age of the objects and conveys the sense of scene in life. When using these “old” lacquerware, people will recall the fragments of the past life and cherish the current life.



Figure 5 Matte lacquer plate.

4. THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF JAPANESE CIVIL LACQUERWARE TO CHINESE TRADITIONAL HANDICRAFTS

4.1. Changing attitudes towards tradition

Nowadays, China’s “traditional” inheritance thinking is more like a directional guide, not specific enough and lacking in pertinence. If it is used in practical guidance, it will still be easy to feel at a loss [8]. At present, China can’t treat different traditional handicrafts equally. The first category is the more common folk crafts in rural areas, such as weaving

brooms and dustpans with branches and bamboo sticks; The second category is similar to ceramics, embroidery and other crafts with high popularity and ornamental value; The third category is less popular traditional handicrafts such as lacquerware. For the first category, most people think it is common and outdated, and it is out of place in the modern living space; For the latter two categories, the complexity of the process and the long working hours have led to the embarrassing situation of high prices. In particular, the third category of traditional handicrafts has fallen into a vicious circle of decreasing popularity and fewer inheritors due to the fact that there are few people who know it and the high price. Traditional handicrafts should not be abandoned or vainly praised by the times because of the value distinction of their materials. Tradition originates from life and should be attributed to life, only by changing people's attitude to tradition can it accompany with daily life.

4.2. Improve life participation

The value of utensils lies in their auxiliary function to life, the utensils used daily must first satisfy the practical function, and then satisfy the decorative function. Therefore, if traditional handicrafts are to be integrated into modern daily life, we should first consider their practicality, and improve traditional handicrafts so that they can keep up with the times, make them durable and easy to use in modern spaces. Only after meeting this condition can the decorative effects of traditional handicrafts, regional culture and other icing on the cake can be considered, so as to prevent them from becoming boring tourist souvenirs for most people. Only by making traditional handicrafts really useful can increase their participation in daily life.

4.3. Reduce the burden of magnificence

There are many ways to ensure the diversity of traditional handicrafts, such as retaining the most essential part in the creation and production, or choosing to retain different characteristic craftsmanship in batches, instead of mixing all the elements together, so that traditional handicrafts appear too cumbersome or gorgeous. Appropriate reduction of some gorgeous burdens can not only reduce costs, and enable traditional handicrafts to be produced faster while ensuring quality, but also to appropriately reduce product prices, it's a win-win for both craftsmen and consumers. In addition, simpler decorative effects can avoid popularity to a certain extent, focus on presenting traditional elements and practical values, and are more consumer-friendly.

5. CONCLUSION

Japanese civilian lacquerware is still a common daily necessity today. As an ancient traditional handicraft,

lacquerware can be used in Japan to this day, which shows that the method of protection and inheritance in Japan can not be restricted by time. Looking at the little-known situation of Chinese lacquerware and the different dilemmas faced by other traditional handicrafts, China still has a lot of space for learning and progress in the protection and inheritance of traditional culture and handicrafts. Culture is the cornerstone of a country, and protecting traditional culture requires everyone's efforts, citizens should strive to improve the awareness of cultural inheritance in daily life, and designers need to pay more attention to the cultural connotation of the product rather than the price and decoration. As time goes by, China will explore its own road of cultural inheritance.

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