

An Analysis of Three Carpets with Narrative Themes in the Republic of China

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ABSTRACT

This article combines the local knowledge of folk carpet collectors, as well as other methods such as comparison and historical analysis, to appraise the weaving age and origin of the "Picture Image of Chinese Industry", "The Prime Minister's Will" and "Ma Hushan" carpets, and analyze its pattern characteristics and narrative content. This study not only enriches the methods of studying carpets, but also reflects the characteristics of carpets with narrative themes in the Republic of China.

Keywords: "Picture Image of Chinese Industry" carpet, "The Prime Minister's Will" carpet, "Ma Hushan" carpet, Republic of China carpet.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many privately collected hand-woven carpets (hereinafter referred to as carpets) in China have not been systematically studied. The three narrative-themed carpets collected in the antique market in Urumqi, including the "Picture Image of Chinese Industry" carpet ("Figure 1"), "The Prime Minister's Will" carpet ("Figure 2"), and the "Ma Hushan" carpet ("Figure 3"), have high research value. Based on the long-term accumulation of local folk knowledge, local collectors believe that the origin of these three carpets is Hotan, and the weaving age is the Republic of China period. Generally speaking, the carbon-14 dating method

can more accurately identify the weaving age of carpets, but this method is more used on carpets collected in museums. For folk antique carpets, collectors have their own set of identification standards. What are the criteria for identifying these carpets? Can other more scientific methods be used to identify the origin and age of the above three carpets? These are the main questions to be answered in this article. In addition, this article also explores the narrative content and usefulness of these three carpets, and better reflects the characteristics of the narrative theme carpets of the Republic of China through the study of the cultural connotation behind them.



Figure 1 "Picture Image of Chinese Industry" carpet (photographed by the author in January 2020).



Figure 2 The Prime Minister's Will Carpet (photographed by the author in January 2020).



Figure 3 "Ma Hushan" carpet (photographed by the author in January 2020).

2. COMMON METHODS FOR FOLK IDENTIFICATION OF THE ORIGIN AND AGE OF CARPETS

During the fieldwork, the author found that many antique merchants were able to make a more detailed identification of the origin and age of each carpet in their collection. Through the research and analysis of related processes, the author summarizes the following four identification methods:

The first is to check the patterns of carpets. Generally speaking, any country or region that produces carpets has some representative patterns. For example, the dragon and phoenix patterns are from the mainland, the pomegranate patterns are from Hotan, the Buddha image patterns are from Kashmir India, the cross patterns are from Armenia, and the love-themed patterns are mostly Iranian.

The second is to check the dyeing characteristics of the carpet. This method is to mainly observe whether the carpet yarn is impregnated with natural dyes. If it is, they judge the origin of the carpet based on the characteristics

of natural dyes in various places. Natural dyes are generally made locally. Therefore, the natural dyes used in various places of the world are different. Generally speaking, natural dyes are mostly come from plants, insects and minerals. For example, the natural dyes commonly used in the yarn of Hotan carpets are local specialties — pomegranate, walnut, safflower, red willow flower, raisin, apricot, mulberry, black flower and other plants.¹ There is no doubt that the color of the yarn dyed with local dyes has local characteristics, which is one of the important basis for them to identify the origin of the carpet.

The third is to check the elasticity, thickness, gloss and knitting density of the carpet yarn. Such characteristics of carpet differ from place to place. For Chinese carpets, the yarn of Hotan carpets is more elastic and thinner than that of Qinghai and Ningxia carpets, and its gloss is stronger. The knitting density is one of the standards to measure the quality of the carpet. When weaving the carpet, first, it needs to hang the warp on the carpet loom.

1. Jia Yingyi, Li Wenying, Zhang Hengde, Xinjiang Carpet [M]. Suzhou: Soochow University Press, 2009, p83.

The knitting density of the Hotan carpet is calculated by the number of pairs of warp threads in each meter length. Each pair of warp threads is counted as one streak. Most of the Hotan carpets are 270-streaks, 300-streaks and 360-streaks.² The more the number of carpets' streaks, the clearer the pattern, but the more difficult it is to weave. Due to the differences in the thickness of yarn and craftsmanship in various countries and regions, the knitting density of carpets is also different.

Forth, when identifying the age of carpets, collectors generally consider the dyeing, degree of wear, pattern, knitting density, and sophistication of the carpet. For example, the dyes and patterns used 100 years ago are definitely different from those used 50 years ago. In addition, there are differences in the time when countries start to use chemical dyes, and this difference has also formed the unique characteristics of carpets in different periods.

3. OTHER METHODS TO IDENTIFY THE AGE AND PLACE OF ORIGIN OF CARPETS

There are many ways to identify the age and place of origin of carpets. In addition to the carbon-14 dating method and folk local knowledge, there are other methods such as comparison method and historical analysis method. Which method to use depends on the actual situation of the carpet to be identified. In many cases, multiple methods are used together, which is well reflected in the identification process of the following three carpets.

3.1 "Picture Image of Chinese Industry" Carpet

The basic parameters of this carpet are shown in "Table 1".

Table 1. Basic parameters of "Picture Image of Chinese Industry" carpet

Name of the carpet	"Picture Image of Chinese Industry" Carpet
Size	270cm*180cm
Materials	Wool
Dye	Natural dyes
Knitting density	360 streaks
Characters	Traditional Chinese

2. Jia Yingyi, Li Wenying, Zhang Hengde, Xinjiang Carpet [M]. Suzhou: Soochow University Press, 2009, p93.

- Weaving year and location

According to the "中华"(China)in the Chinese title of this carpet — "Picture Image of Chinese Industry", it can be judged that this carpet was woven during the Republic of China period. Through the contrast method, people can identify the exact age of this carpet, that is, compare the carpet map with the full map of the Republic of China on paper. Through comparison, it is found that the full map of the Republic of China after 1940 is basically similar to the map on this carpet, even the font is the same. For example, many place names such as "Russian Central Asia and West Asia" are written exactly the same on paper and carpet maps. Therefore, it is sure that this carpet was woven by weavers according to the map of the Republic of China after 1940. This shows that the weaving age of this carpet is about 1940-1949.

It is not difficult to see from the "Table 1" that the materials, dyes, and knitting density of the carpet are consistent with the characteristics of many carpets produced in the Hotan area during the Republic of China. Therefore, it can be judged that the origin of the carpet is the Hotan area.

- Pattern features and use of the carpet

This carpet uses animals, plants, and patterns with text to mark the industry and natural resources of the provinces of the Republic of China. The images of agricultural products marked in the industry map include wheat, rice, corn, beans, ginseng, tea, etc.; livestock products include sheep, goats, cattle, yaks, horses, camels, donkeys, pigs, etc.; wild animals include tigers, wolves, deer, elephants, etc.; seafood includes fish and crabs; birds include peacocks, crows, pigeons, etc.; fruits include pineapples and apples; industrial products include wine and ceramics; and minerals include gold, jade, coal, and salt.

From the pattern feature, we can easily come to the conclusion that the carpet is likely to be used by government agencies. This shows that during the Republic of China, some carpets changed from folk daily necessities to an appreciated artworks. This is a sign of a change in the function of carpet.

3.2 "The Prime Minister's Will" Carpet

The basic parameters of this carpet are shown in "Table 2".

Table 2. Basic parameters of "The Prime Minister's Will" carpet

Name of the carpet	"The Prime Minister's Will" carpet
Size	200cm*115cm
Materials	Wool
Dye	Natural dyes
Knitting density	360 streaks
Font	Traditional Chinese

- Weaving year and location

When identifying the age of this carpet, we refer to the publication time of "The Prime Minister's Will". "The Prime Minister's Will" is also called the "State Will", and its official publication time was May 16, 1925. The third plenary meeting of the First Central Executive Committee of the Republic of China held on this day passed the "The Prime Minister's Will" and decided that the party departments at all levels should read "The Prime Minister's Will" whenever they have meeting. Later this became one of the procedures at the beginning of assemblies, meetings and ceremonies.³ The "will" on this carpet has no punctuation marks, which means that this carpet was woven before the full text punctuation was enacted by the National Government's decree in 1937. From the above details, it can be inferred that the weaving age of "The Prime Minister's Will" carpet was between 1925 and 1937.

The method of identifying the origin of "The Premier's Will" carpet is the same as that of the first carpet. Through the analysis and comparison of the characteristics of the carpet material, dyes, and knitting density, it can be determined that the origin of the carpet is also the Hotan area.

- Narrative content and use of the carpet

This is one of the three wills of Mr. Sun Yat-sen. Because "The Prime Minister's Will" has no punctuation, there are different versions of sentence reading. In accordance with the requirements of the National Government Decree No. 212 of April 1, 1937, the full text of "The Prime Minister's Will" is punctuated as follows:

余致力国民革命，凡四十年，其目的在求中国之自由平等。（For forty years, I have devoted myself to the cause of the national revolution with but one end in

3. Wang Junming, A Probe into Sun Yat-sen's Will [J]. China Archives, 2006, (11).

view, the elevation of China to a position of freedom and equality among the nations.) 积四十年之经验，深知欲达此目的，必须唤起民众，及联合世界上以平等待我之民族，共同奋斗！（My experiences during these forty years have firmly convinced me that to attain this goal we must bring about a thorough awakening of our own people and ally ourselves in a common struggle with those peoples of the world who treat us on the basis of equality!)

现在革命尚未成功，凡我同志，务须依照余所著：建国方略，建国大纲，三民主义，及第一次全国代表大会宣言，继续努力，以求贯彻！（The work of the Revolution is not yet done, Let all our comrades follow my Plans for National Reconstruction, Fundamentals of National Reconstruction, Three Principles of the People, and The Manifesto of the First National Convention of the Kuomintang, and strive on for their consummation!）最近主张开国民会议，及废除不平等条约，尤须于最短期间，促其实现！（Above all, our recent declarations in favor of the convocation of a National Convention and abolition of unequal treaties should be carried into effect with the least possible delay!）是所至嘱！（This is my heartfelt charge to you!）⁴

Judging from the narrative content, this carpet is very likely to be used in government agencies, which means that the carpet became a symbol of status and authority during the Republic of China.

3.3 "Ma Hushan" Carpet

The basic parameters of this carpet are shown in "Table 3".

Table 3. Basic parameters of "Ma Hushan" carpet

Name of the carpet	"Ma Hushan" carpet
Size	415cm*220cm
Materials	Real silk
Dye	Natural dyes
Knitting density	400 streaks
Characters	Traditional Chinese

- Weaving year and location

More than ten years ago, an antique dealer bought back this silk carpet from an auction in Paris, France. Although there are some words on it, there is no information on the weaving year and place of origin. By analyzing the existing text information on the carpet, people can identify the origin and age

4. Wang Junming, A Probe into Sun Yat-sen's Will [J]. China Archives, 2006, (11).

of the carpet. On the left side of the carpet are written "中國第三十六師代師長馬虎山贈(Gift from Ma Hushan, Acting Division Commander of the 36th Division of China)" and "銜總領事惠存 (Consul General Tie Keeping)" written on the right. The text information tells people that this is a silk carpet presented by Ma Hushan to the foreign consul general. So, who was Consul General Tie? Why did Ma Hushan give expensive gifts to foreign consuls? When and where was this silk carpet woven? The answers to these questions are hidden in the historical materials.

Ma Hushan was the brother-in-law of Ma Zhongying, the commander of the 36th Division of the Republic of China. After Ma Zhongying left for the Soviet Union in July 1934, Ma Hushan took over his post. In the turbulent years of changing situations, Ma Hushan went against Ma Zhongying's wishes and began to be pro-British and anti-Soviet.⁵ From this historical fact, it can be inferred that this carpet should be a gift from Ma Hushan to the British Consul General in Kashgar, and the "Tie" surname of Consul General Tie should be the Chinese surname of the Consul General. At that time, the Soviet Union also set up a consulate in Kashgar. Could the consul general named "Tie" be the head of the Soviet consulate? The author's answer is no, because there is no written materials verified that Ma Hushan had established close ties with the Soviet Union, so he would not send the precious silk carpets to the Soviet consul general.

When identifying the age of this carpet, the researchers can make a preliminary judgment based on the "acting division commander" in the inscription of the carpet. The carpet was woven during the period from July 1934 to September 1937 when Ma Hushan served as the acting division commander. To be precise, the weaving time of this carpet should be between 1936 and 1937. This is because in 1934-1935, although Ma Zhongying was in the Soviet Union, the 36th Division stationed in Hotan was still under his control. Under such circumstances, Ma Hushan would not dare to build up close ties with Britain without authorization, because it would offend Ma Zhongying and the Soviet Union. Therefore, it is very unlikely that he would give gifts to the British Consul General during this period. But after 1935, Ma Hushan gradually embarked on a pro-British

path.⁶ From this fact, it can be seen that this carpet was likely to be woven between 1936 and 1937. The inscription "Ma Hushan, the acting division commander" and the historical facts that he had been set up saddle factory, sewing house, carpet workshop, leather shoe factory, iron factory, printing and dyeing factory and other factories in Hotan⁷, all prove that this carpet should be woven in Hotan.

- Pattern features and its symbolic meaning

The themes of the patterns appearing on this carpet are derived from the traditional culture of the Chinese nation and have symbolic meanings. From the perspective of the pattern layout, the carpet has the patterns of "万 wan", peach blossom and "寿 shou" that wish longevity, patterns of plum trees and bamboo leaves that symbolize cleanliness and innocence, patterns of badgers and clouds that wish happiness and good luck, and auspicious patterns such as dragons, unicorns, and Tenma. From the perspective of the symbolic meaning of the pattern, this carpet uses patterns representing longevity from the outer frame to the inner frame. The two corners of the inner frame are decorated with plum trees that symbolize nobility, cleanliness and innocence.⁸ The animal sitting on the plum tree is a badger. The pronunciation of badger in Chinese is similar to that of the Chinese character "欢 huan". Therefore, the image of the badger represents joy and happiness.⁹ Three dragon figures appeared in the inner frame of the carpet, one on the ground and two in the sky. The dragon is a miraculous animal in China's myths and legends, having powers such as ascending the sky, rainfall, and walking on the clouds. Dragons come in many shapes. The one who ascended to sky is called Yunlong. The image of the dragon represents prestige, power, beauty, auspiciousness, and exorcism.¹⁰

The legend of Tenma is relatively widespread in the world and is mentioned in several ancient books such as "Historical Records" in China. The strong

5. Cao Wei, Yang Shu, Causes of the two times of Soviet Red Army's actions in Xinjiang in 1930s [J]. *The Western Regions Studies*, 2014 (4).

6. Guo Shengli, Analysis of the Reasons of Ma Zhongying's Visit to the Soviet Union [J]. *Journal of Guyuan Teachers College*, 2006, 27(1).

7. Maimaiti Yimingtuohuti, The Ma Hushan Army's Atrocities against the People of Hotan, An Anthology of Xinjiang Literature and History [M]. Urumchi: Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 1987, p94.

8. Feng Jinmao, Carpet Pattern Design [M]. Beijing: Beijing Arts and Crafts Publishing House, 1992, p98.

9. Wolfram Eberhard. A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols [M]. Translation by G.L.Campbel, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, p23.

10. Feng Jinmao, Carpet Pattern Design [M]. Beijing: Beijing Arts and Crafts Publishing House, 1992, p10.

horses brought from the Western Regions during the Han Dynasty in China were mythologically called Tenma and developed into friends of the dragon. It can also walk in the air, and it appears as a white horse in many cultural circles,¹¹ and it is also the white horse that appears on this carpet. The appearance of Tenma and dragon at the same time indicates good luck. The middle part of the carpet has the image of a unicorn on the cloud. The unicorn is also an auspicious beast in ancient Chinese mythology. Like dragon and phoenix, it is an artistic image that expresses people's ideals. The Chinese also believe that the unicorn is related to the birth of a son, so on many occasions, the image of the unicorn represents good wishes.¹² It is not difficult to see that this carpet brings together many auspicious patterns in traditional Chinese culture. This means that Ma Hushan would bestow his best wishes to the British Consul in Kashgar to express his willingness to build up close ties with Britain.

4. CONCLUSION

The period of the Republic of China was an important period when the theme of carpet patterns in Northwest China changed from traditional geometric figures to narrative themes. Therefore, many carpets of this period have been marked with a profound brand of the times. However, due to the large number of antique carpets in the folk, quite a lot of carpets have not been thoroughly studied. Generally, the carbon-14 dating method can be used to identify the age of the carpet, but it is unrealistic to use this method to identify every piece of folk collection carpets. Therefore, the researchers also need local knowledge, comparison method, historical analysis method and some other methods to identify the age and origin of carpets. Regarding the identification of the age and origin of the three carpets in the Republic of China, the author have not only referred to the folk local knowledge, but also applied methods such as comparison and historical analysis. This shows that identifying the age and place of origin of carpets is a process that considers multiple factors and methods.

From the materials, dyeing characteristics, knitting density and pattern themes of these three carpets, it can be seen that during the Republic of

China, wool and silk were the main materials of Hotan carpets; although chemical dyes also appeared in the Hotan area in the early 20th century¹³, natural dyes were still widely used; judging from the knitting density of "Ma Hushan" carpet, Hotan carpet workshops had the technical conditions for weaving high-density carpets at that time; The diversity of the themes and the patterns shows that the carpets were no longer a daily necessities used by the locals, but had moved towards commercialization. At this time, the aesthetic needs of the customers were the main factors that determine the theme of the carpets. The pattern themes of the above three carpets are respectively related to geography, politics and culture. This is a good embodiment of the marketization of Northwest carpets in the Republic of China.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This article is independently completed by Yidayati Yanitake.

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