



Research on Chinese Carpets by Western Sinologists in the Early 20th Century

Chenghong Li

The college of Arts, Sichuan University, Chengdu, Sichuan, China

13663006777@163.com

Abstract. At the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese carpets were exported to the West and became popular overseas. As an important component of the Eastern art system, Chinese carpets have increasingly drawn the attention of the West. Some Western scholars have noticed the long-standing academic gap in the study of Eastern art that has neglected Chinese carpets, and have begun to systematically study the history, patterns and colors of Chinese carpets, and have published a series of works. “Chinese Carpets and Rugs” by German scholar Adolf Hackmack and “Chinese Rugs” by Canadian scholar Gordon Leitch are two representative works on the study of Chinese carpets in the early 20th century. Through the analysis and research on the origin and development, pattern symbols and dyeing techniques of Chinese carpets, the two scholars explored the historical significance and aesthetic connotations behind Chinese carpets, constructed the basic framework of early Western research on Chinese carpets, and promoted a deeper understanding of Chinese carpet art in the West.

Keywords: Chinese carpet, Chinese art, Adolf Hackmack, Gordon Leitch.

1 Introduction

Since the 18th century, the "Chinese style" has swept across Europe, and the West immediately began to study Chinese art. In the research framework of Eastern art, for a long time, Chinese porcelain, silk, bronze wares and paintings have occupied a core position. British authoritative scholars such as Bosier, Binyan and Anderson have published numerous research results on Chinese porcelain and paintings. At that time, research on Chinese carpets was relatively rare. Although Chinese carpet art began to attract attention from the West relatively late, under the influence of multiple historical events, Chinese carpets have gradually become popular overseas, and the production techniques have developed greatly. In 1900, when the Eight-Nation Alliance invaded Beijing, a large number of carpets from the Qing palace and the homes of the city's powerful families were looted. These carpets were brought back to Europe and America, which sparked a craze among the upper class in Europe and America for Chinese carpets. In 1904, the Qing government participated in the World's Fair held by the same famous in Europe and America. They began to be sold in the European and

American markets. As a result, more private investors set up factories in Beijing to produce carpets, and the carpet industry thus emerged. Tianjin, Shanghai and other places also followed suit and started weaving. Chinese carpets began to go global. Carpet gradually became an important export commodity of China at that time, shifting from mainly domestic sales to mainly export sales. A situation emerged in the carpet industry where the rise and fall of the industry was determined by exports.

Before the outbreak of World War I, Persia and Turkey occupied the majority of the international carpet market share. However, World War I plunged Turkey into the war, forcing the trade routes in the Near East to be disrupted. As a result, a large number of European and American carpet merchants turned their attention to China. A large number of orders and foreign capital flooded into China. The opening of the export market and the increase in carpet demand promoted the rapid development of China's carpet industry. Against this backdrop, Tianjin has become the "Carpet Capital of China". Tianjin is close to the sea, which is convenient for export. The carpet industry in Tianjin experienced a glorious period in the 1920s and 1930s, with its export volume ranking first in the country. Adolf Hackmack recorded the total value of carpet exports from Tianjin in "Chinese Carpets and Rugs". The total value of carpet export trade was only 90,000 taels of silver in 1913, but by 1923, this figure increased to 3,795,000 taels of silver. The prosperity of the carpet industry has attracted many domestic and foreign merchants to set up factories in Tianjin. At the end of the article "Chinese Carpets and Rugs" by Adolf Hackmack, there is a list of major merchants and exporters dealing in Chinese carpets, and most of the carpet manufacturers in the list are also located in Tianjin.

The prosperous development of China's carpet industry has provided convenience for a group of Western scholars who have lived or worked in China for a long time to conduct carpet research. Adolf Hackmack was a German scholar who studied Chinese Carpets in the early 20th century. He lived in Tianjin, China for a long time. His representative work, "Chinese Carpets and Rugs" (German name: "Der Chinesische Teppich"), was first published in Hamburg, Germany in 1921. In 1924, the French Library of Tianjin published the English translation of "Chinese Carpets and Rugs" by L. Arnold. "Chinese Carpets and Rugs" consists of four chapters, a list of illustrations and appendices. It is an important work for the study of Chinese carpets in the early 20th century. The Canadian scholar Gordon Leitch came to China in the 1920s. As soon as he arrived in China, he was attracted by the beautiful Chinese carpets. Gordon Leitch collected a large number of carpets in China and systematically carried out research on Chinese carpets. He published the book "Chinese Rug" in 1928[1]. This article will take these two works as the center, systematically sort out their research contents and academic significance, and approach the study of Chinese carpet art from the perspective of Western scholars' research.

2 The Origin and Development of Chinese Carpets

The history of Chinese Carpets is long and profound. Adolf Hackmack mentioned the origin and development of Chinese carpets at the beginning of "Chinese Carpets and

Rugs". Hackmack believed that carpet weaving activities had already emerged in China as early as ancient times. The emergence of early carpets was closely related to the nomadic people in the north. In Xinjiang, Gansu and Xizang, the main residents were nomadic people. The local climate was extremely cold, and carpets had the functions of resisting the cold and decoration, gradually becoming popular. The earliest carpets originated in Central Asia and were introduced to China through Xinjiang. With the change of dynasties, carpets gradually appeared in all parts of the country and were widely used in China. Regarding the origin of Chinese carpets, Gordon Leitch proposed three theories in "Chinese Rug". One of them is that carpets originated in Egypt and gradually spread to China through trade and wars. The second reason is that carpets originated in the Euphrates River Basin and gradually spread eastward. The third one is that carpets originated in China and developed independently within the country.

Throughout history, Chinese carpets have been influenced by many external factors. Among them, Buddhism has had a profound influence on Chinese carpets. Gordon Leitch said that there are a large number of traces of Buddhist art in the patterns of Chinese carpets. In addition, the cultures of ethnic minorities such as the Mongolian and Manchu, as well as Western Rococo art, have also had an influence on Chinese carpets. Gordon Leitch believes that ancient Chinese carpets were used to be laid on heated brick beds as cushions and also to be hung at the door. Later With the spread of Buddhism, rugs came into use in temples, serving both utilitarian and decorative purposes. Carpets were also frequently seen in the mansions of officials and nobles.

Both Adolf Hackmack and Gordon Leitch believed that Chinese carpets developed greatly during the Qing Dynasty. Emperors Kangxi and Qianlong had a great interest in carpets, and their reigns promoted the development of the carpet industry. Emperor Kangxi once invited painters to Beijing to improve the style and pattern design of carpets. Emperor Qianlong also purchased and collected a large number of foreign carpets. Carpet weavers in Beijing learned the styles and patterns of Western carpets and integrated them with the characteristics of local carpets, making Chinese carpets have distinct features of a blend of Chinese and Western elements. In modern times, both of them mentioned the influence of international trade on Chinese carpets since the late 19th century. Hackmack mentioned in his book that with the expansion of demand in the Western market, the production orientation of Chinese carpets has shifted from traditional daily necessities to export goods. In places like Beijing and Tianjin, factories can customize carpets according to order requirements, and a large number of Chinese carpets are sold to North America. Leitch also believes that during World War I, the export of carpets from the Near East was blocked, which led to a rapid rise in the status of Chinese carpets in the international market. Tianjin, Beijing and other places gradually became important carpet export centers.

Overall, the materials used by Adolf Hackmack and Gordon Leitch are different, but both of them hold the basic view that Chinese carpets can be traced back to the weaving tradition in the early northwest region of China. Chinese carpets are not the product of modern commercial activities but have gradually developed and taken shape over a long historical process. Through systematic research on the origin and development of carpets, Adolf Hackmack and Gordon Leitch laid a relatively clear historical framework for subsequent research on carpets in China.

3 Pattern Design and Cultural Symbolism of Chinese Carpets

The patterns, decorations and exquisite skills of Chinese carpets, such as Beijing palace carpets, show the meaningful national culture[2]. Both Adolf Hackmack and Gordon Leitch believed that the patterns of Chinese carpets are the key to understanding Chinese art. Chinese carpet patterns are not merely for surface visual decoration; they also carry rich traditional Chinese culture behind them.

Hackmack mentioned that the patterns on Chinese carpets predate the carpet manufacturing in China, and most of the patterns originated from the auspicious designs on silk fabrics. These patterns are often used as symbols of happiness, fulfillment and good luck. Hackmack listed the names of auspicious patterns recorded in the Song Dynasty, such as "The Dragon in Water", "Dragon entwined between Flowers", "Dragon and Phoenix", "Dragon in Medallions", "Tortoise-shell Background", "Lotus Flowers", "Floral Symbol of Long Life", "Musical Instruments", "Lion with Ball", "Aquatic Plants and Playing Fishes" and "Tree Peonies". Combinations of written characters signifying happiness and groups of symbols signifying good luck are also given.

Hackmack systematically classified the patterns of Chinese Carpets in "Chinese Carpets and Rugs". He divided the carpet patterns into Geometrical designs, Designs derived from ancient Chinese tradition, Designs derived from Taoism, Designs derived Six types of patterns, including Buddhism, Miscellaneous symbols, Tree and flower patterns, etc., are explained respectively. Youda placeholder0 designs are one of the oldest patterns, mostly in prehistoric times. Their main function is to decorate the borders, and they have extremely strong decorative and symbolic significance. Common geometric patterns include "beaded edges", "Han patterns" and "meander patterns", etc. "Designs derived from ancient Chinese tradition" mainly refers to artistic patterns that reflect Confucian cultural thoughts. The main patterns are The Dragon, The Thunder Line, The Cloud Design, The Water Design, Fire and Lightning, Mountains and Crags, The Male and Female Elements of Being, The Eight Trigrams of Divination and The Sceptre. Among them, The Dragon is one of the most famous patterns, often appearing on royal carpets and symbolizing power and majesty. Most of these patterns are related to animal images and have a strong sense of mystery and religious color, reflecting the ancient Chinese people's awe of heaven, earth and natural forces. Designs derived from Taoism mostly symbolize longevity. The doctrine of Taoism is to pursue eternal life. Therefore, such patterns include The Attributes of the "Eight Genii" and The Phoenix, which symbolize longevity, happiness and good luck. Designs derived from Buddhism mainly uses The symbols "The Lion" and "The Eight Buddhist Emblems of Happy Augury", embodying the doctrines of Buddhism. Hackmack also mentioned that these symbols with Buddhist doctrines do not necessarily mean that the owner of the carpet is a Buddhist.

Leitch mainly discussed the composition form of patterns in "Chinese Rug". The composition forms of Chinese carpets mainly include central patterns, corner patterns and multiple border decorations. These formal structures do not exist independently but are combined with each other. The common forms of central patterns include the combination of round flowers, lotus flowers, treasure image patterns and ruyi cloud

patterns. These patterns have symmetrical centers. The four-corner patterns are used to connect the center and the border, while the multiple borders are composed of multiple borders, creating a visual effect from the inside out. Chinese carpets place great emphasis on the principle of symmetry, among which left-right symmetry is the most common.

Chinese carpet patterns are diverse and rich in cultural connotations. Each pattern not only serves a decorative purpose but also carries profound implications of traditional Chinese culture. The development and inheritance of these pattern designs reflect the Chinese culture's pursuit of beauty and its best wishes for good fortune and happiness.

4 Colors of Chinese Carpets

There is no doubt of the importance of textiles and their colors for humanity[3]. The beauty of the colors of Chinese carpets largely depends on the nature of the dyes and the dyeing methods. Even if the quality of the wool is excellent and the weaving technique is superb, if the dyeing treatment is improper, the finished product still cannot be called superior. In the development process of carpets in China, the issue of dyeing has always been of Paramount importance.

Hackmack pointed out in his book that China mastered the art of dyeing silk and wool very early on. Chinese carpets are not composed of a variety of colors like Persian carpets, but those wool and silk carpets decorated with floral patterns still display exquisite color effects as a whole. The base color of carpets is usually yellow, blue or white, with red or green being less frequently used. In the extant carpet works, dragons are usually painted in yellow. If the phoenix appears together with the dragon, the phoenix is also depicted in yellow, and the background is mostly blue, red or green. Abstract lotus flowers and branches are also represented in yellow, while realistic floral patterns naturally use their original colors. The colors of other designs can be determined by the technicians according to their own aesthetic preferences. As early as prehistoric times, ancient people discovered that some plantsinsects and molluscs could yield colour when mixed with hot water after alittle processing. This was the origin of natural dyes [4]. One of the earliest written documents referring to natural dyes were found in China 2.600 BC[5]. Chinese carpets are mainly dyed with natural dyes, which are mainly derived from plants and minerals. Hackmack listed natural plants for extracting yellow, blue, red, black, white and green colors, and mentioned that at the beginning of the 20th century, China introduced aniline dyes from Germany to replace expensive and difficult-to-produce plant dyes.

Regarding the issue of dyeing, Leitch first mentioned that the dyes used in the early days were almost entirely derived from natural substances, and the process of their extraction and preparation was extremely complex. The most distinctive feature of natural dyes is their subtle tones and rich gradations, which can naturally blend with the inherent colors of wool. The dyeing process is usually carried out in large earthenware vats. Before the wool is put into the VAT for dyeing, it needs to be fully moistened. After the dyeing solution is heated, the yarn is slowly placed into the VAT and constantly

turned over. The dyeing time usually lasts for several hours, and in some cases, it can last up to a whole day. After dyeing, the yarn still needs to be repeatedly rinsed in clean water to remove excess dye and then dried.

The carpet dyeing process is a key procedure in carpet production. The color of a carpet is a core component of carpet art. An excellent carpet cannot do without beautiful colors.

5 Conclusion

The research of Western scholars at the beginning of the 20th century provided an international perspective for the study of Chinese carpets. Since modern times, in the development process of Chinese carpets, Western scholars and Chinese scholars have jointly established a research system for Chinese carpets. The research of early Western scholars established the basic framework for the study of Chinese carpets, which gradually brought Chinese carpets into the field of vision of world carpet history. The research on Chinese carpets by Western Sinologists not only enriches the research content of Eastern art, but also enables us to recognize the artistic features and value of Chinese carpets, promoting their development. The research by Adolf Hackmack and Gordon Leitch explored in detail the historical development, pattern design characteristics and color application of Chinese carpets. Chinese carpets are not only practical home decorations but also carriers of cultural symbols, reflecting traditional Chinese culture and religious beliefs, and showcasing the unique artistic charm and profound cultural connotations of Chinese carpets. The works of the two have significant academic value and laid the foundation for the research of Chinese carpets in later generations. Furthermore, The American scholar Mary Churchill Ripley published a book on Chinese carpets, "The Chinese RugBook", in 1927, further filling the gap of comprehensive research on Chinese carpets in the academic circle. Research on Chinese carpets overseas gradually deepened and developed in the early 20th century.

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