

Study on Painting of Flowers and Birds in Han Opera Costumes

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Abstract:

The painting of flowers and birds in Han Opera costumes is an important painting in Han Opera costume, and the painting meaning auspicious constitutes part of the stage performance of opera. Specifically studying the painting of flowers and birds in Han Opera costumes from the composition content, organizational form and color configuration of the painting theme reflects the aesthetic characteristics of the painting of flowers and birds in Han Opera costumes. The principle of painting modeling is freehand brushwork without shape, that is, focus is less on realistic reality, but more on lively, gorgeous and rich nature, which is of great significance for presenting the formal beauty of costume painting and their inheritance and development.

Keywords:

Han Opera, Costumes, Painting of Flowers and Birds

1. Introduction

Han Opera is a kind of local opera developed by the Han nationality in the Dongting Lake area, with a history of more than 400 years since it was formed in the middle of the Qing Dynasty. The development of Han Opera costumes was accompanied by the rise of Han Opera, and the two complement each other. As a common decorative element, painting of flowers and birds appears in Han Opera costumes, beautifying the characters of the operas, expressing their ideas, spirits and emotions, and carrying the formal beauty and cultural symbolic significance of the costumes. It is China's national art tradition to beautify costumes with painting. Opera costumes are mostly based on costumes of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Therefore, the painting of flowers and birds in Han Opera costumes faithfully inherit and carry forward the characteristics of artistic decorative paintings in ancient costumes, and organically combine paintings with styles and colors according to the plot of the play and the characteristics of the characters.

Paintings are created by people. As a product of decorative culture, costumes are closely related to traditional opera culture and artistic activities. The traditional paintings are extensive and profound, so as a common painting type, the painting of flower and bird is widely used in the modeling of operas mainly for the following reasons. First, the auspicious meaning of the painting of flower and bird is the

consensus of traditional culture. Second, the painting of flower and bird, originating early with many varieties, adapts to the rich modeling effects of the painting on the stage. Third, compared with other paintings, the painting of flower and bird is more suitable for the form of opera performance, which helps the subjectivity of character performance. Therefore, the study on painting of flower and bird in Han Opera costumes is an in-depth exploration of the stage performance art of Han Opera, and also reflects the unique aesthetic concept and national cultural mentality of Hubei, which has further inspired the inheritance and development of today's painting in opera costumes.

2. Content and Implication of Painting

Guided by “auspicious culture”, most of the paintings of flowers and birds in Han Opera costumes are “dragon and phoenix”. The paintings of Han Opera costumes are the concrete reflection of the influence of the ancient Chinese natural philosophy of “harmony between man and nature” and the social hierarchy concept of “the sky above and the earth below”. Some of these paintings symbolize auspicious, some represent prosperity, and most of them are profound. The use of paintings is closely related to the identity, status and character of opera characters. For example, the animal paintings in costumes, dominated by dragon and phoenix, with cranes and auspicious animals, are full of auspicious meanings and are mostly used for the clothing paintings of princes and nobles, while the paintings used in Huadan and Xiaosheng are flowers such as peony, plum, orchid, bamboo, chrysanthemum, camellia and peach flower, which contains personality and spiritual quality.

The dragon painting is from the embroidered dragon robe of the Ming and Qing emperors. Dragon began to contact with the emperor since the Han Dynasty, starting the era of “rightful king”. In the Tang Dynasty, the dragon painting developed into a beautiful and delicate form. After the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, the dragon painting became more and more sumptuous and was monopolized by the emperor as a symbol of imperial power. The dragon robe of the Ming and Qing emperors is bright yellow, with the dragon as the main painting, showing a strict and regular circular shape (coiled dragon). The dragon robe was then introduced into the costume and after a complex evolution, it was finally stylized as: the artistic dragon painting was used as the symbol of dignity, that is, the symbol of power, which was generalized from the exclusive use of the emperor to the general use of the generals and ministers. Dragon is used for imperial quilt, armor, gown embroidered with gold dragons for shooting arrows, dragon jacket, cloak and other types of costumes.

Phoenix, a kind of auspicious bird in ancient totem worship, was used in clothing late. The use of phoenix painting began in the Song Dynasty and continued to the Ming Dynasty. The phoenix painting, introduced into the costume to give the meaning of “the king of birds”, was specially matched with the peony “the chief of flowers”. The phoenix was regarded as the symbol of noble women, that is, the symbol of power and women. In Han Opera, it was mostly used exclusively by the queen and maids of honor of different rank empresses, and then generally used by princesses, infantas, mingfu (a woman in ancient China who was given a title or rank by the emperor), women, etc. Therefore, phoenix paintings have become as important as dragon paintings in traditional Chinese opera, and are widely used in nvlin (Figure 1), palace clothes, female armor, phoenix cloaks and other major costumes.

Beast paintings refer to paintings of large animals such as tigers, lions, leopards, and elephant, which were applied to military uniforms in the Tang Dynasty and were standardized to “complementary submodules” in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The costume of Han Opera inherits the painting tradition of “martial animals”, which is used to show the identity of military officers and is a symbol of military officers’ powerful temperament. The tiger head painting is mostly used for armor (armor belly and the tiger head shoulder), and the lion painting is mostly used for open cloak. The unicorn is a sacred animal in ancient totem worship, and its pattern is also a symbol of good luck. In the Ming Dynasty, it was used for the court dress of the official, marquis, chief and emperor’s son-in-law, indicating high rank. The unicorn painting, attractive in opera costumes, also follows this high level symbol, and is dedicated to such figures as prime ministers. It is a symbol of “high position”.

Mangshuifu, connecting the water with the dragon painting, has a long history, implying “turning over the sea and river”. Shuiwen is used for mangfu (cifu) in Han Opera costumes. It is applied to the lower hem and slightly embroidered with “lying on water” to show water vapor clouds. Some are also raised to the main auxiliary painting. In addition to “lying on the water”, “standing on the water” with a large area is embroidered brilliantly. Endowed with the symbolic meaning of the country, shuiwen is used for the emperor’s and empress’s permanent robes (dragon robes) and the minister’s auspicious robes (mang robes). The shuiwen, introduced into the traditional Chinese opera clothing, is often used as the auxiliary lining of the dragon pattern, commonly known as “mangshui”, seen in mang, gown embroidered with gold dragons for shooting arrows, dragon jacket, etc., mainly for the purpose of decoration and beautification. The mangshuiwen is specially used for decoration of armor, symbolizing the mighty spirit of “turning over the sea and river” by the military general.

The paintings of flowers and plants, with a long history, are widely used for pottery decoration as early as the Stone Age. After dynasties, a complete stylized organizational form has been formed. It is a tradition of national art to compare people with flowers. Han Opera costumes have inherited this allegory and symbolic technique, exaggerating and emphasizing the important role of flowers in the expression of characters’ identity, age, personality, character, temperament, appearance and other comprehensive characteristics, thus creating a distinctive, vivid and lifelike external image of characters. For example, the branches and flowers (mainly plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum) in wenxiaosheng’s flower pleats are commonly used in free painting, which do not only match the civilian identity, age, and handsome face of scholars and xiucai, but also clearly reflect the quiet character, noble character, and distinctive symbolism. The combination of peony flowers and grass represents wealth and happiness in marriage, so they are often used in female armor and palace clothes. The painting of “Three Friends of Winter” belongs to the auspicious category. The combined painting of pine, bamboo and plum symbolizes high moral character by virtue of the cold resistance of plants, so it is commonly used for Xiaosheng’s flower pomegranates, pleats (Figure 2), guimendan’s flower quilts, flower pomegranates, and huadan’s pants and skirts.

The painting of flowers and birds in Han Opera costumes, rich in variety and unique in shape, has the cultural style of “liveliness first” of Han Opera. In addition to decorative clothing, paintings also reflect the identity and character of the characters. Paintings are closely related to the plot and the performance of the characters and complement each other. It can be said that it is the contrast of paintings that adds

visual aesthetic details and clothing texture to the vocal auditory aesthetics. The cultural implication behind the paintings reflects the unique “auspicious culture” of the Chinese nation for thousands of years while focusing on the Chinese traditional image modeling thinking and reflecting the working people’s perception and creativity of simple life. The imaginative integration of paintings and operas is worthy of inheritance and development for future generations.



Figure 1. Nvlin.



Figure 2. Pleat.

3. Organizational Form of Pattern

The painting of flowers and birds in Chinese opera costumes is based on the law of contrast and unified formal organization, and is mainly dominated by suitable painting. Among the suitable paintings, there are mainly four types: circular, long, comprehensive and free type.

Circular paintings in ancient China have the philosophical meaning of “infinity”. The so-called “circular sky and square earth” refers to the connection between the circular and the sky, representing infinite grandeur. The circular painting is usually used for influential figures in costumes, that is, the dragon pattern is organized into a circular, which has the political meaning of dominating the world. The circular itself also has the inherent beauty of line form, namely, soft, smooth and long. Therefore, the circular pattern is characterized by plump and dignified, and has been transformed into happy and auspicious, and thus widely loved by the people and has become the most common pattern organization form of folk auspicious patterns. It is precisely because of the traditional factors of the above two aspects that the Han Opera costumes advocate circular patterns and are widely used. Circular painting is mainly used for coiled dragon, mang, emperor cape, gown embroidered with gold dragons for shooting arrows, dragon jacket, etc. Coiled phoenix is used for nvman, empress cape, coiled lion, coiled flower, etc. It should be particularly noted that the circular patterns under specific circumstances have certain symbolic significance in comparison. For example, the coiled dragon on the mangpao symbolizes quiet personality and solemn temperament in comparison with the travelling dragon with free painting.

Long paintings, pure decorative paintings, are two continuous paintings, which are widely used in horizontal and vertical long parts such as ribbons, necklines, cuffs, hems, etc. With a wide range of applications, strong adaptability, and decorative effects of rhythm and pure decorative, this kind of paintings can almost be used in all kinds of clothes, and is an indispensable part of the costume paintings.

Comprehensive paintings are widely used in “armor” (Figure 3 and Figure 4). The inner shape of the armor is extremely complex, which is composed of various parts with different shapes. Parts with different shapes represent armors with different shapes. There are many geometric shapes, such as circle, trapezoid, rectangle, triangle, etc., so a comprehensive suitable painting is formed, including a circular “tiger head

shoulder”, a trapezoidal “breastplate”, a rectangular “skirt” and an inverted triangle “hanging fish”.



Figure 3. Large Armor



Figure 4. Modified Armor.

Free painting is another form of costume pattern in Han Opera. Because of the existence of free paintings, it forms a contrast and foil to the circular paintings in the suitable paintings, and shows the diversified beauty of paintings. The free paintings of Han Opera costumes are vivid and lively, mainly including dragon paintings, flying phoenix paintings, double lion paintings, unicorn paintings, and more branch paintings. The above free paintings, prominent and eye-catching in clothing, occupy the position of main paintings, making people impressive. Therefore, their markedness and symbolism are more intuitive. Compared with the circular patterns suitable for paintings, they have a strong and distinctive civilian color. For another example, the free paintings on the mangpao include travelling dragon with the dragon body stretched freely. Compared with the coiled dragon, it has a strong sense of movement and momentum, so it is generally used for the characters with rough, straightforward and powerful temperament. Therefore, free painting shows the character symbol.

The layout of paintings is both a form and a means. Han Opera costumes attach great importance to the layout of patterns, and use layout means to create a contrast between the characters' images, and distinguish the characters' identities, personalities and their connections. A basic rule is that the higher the status, the more numerous the paintings. Another rule is that it corresponds to the acting profession. The male flower pleats are the most typical, such as “horn” flowers are used for wuxiaosheng, “edge” flowers for wuxiaosheng, “dot” flowers for wusheng, “scattered” flowers for wuhualian, and “full” flowers for wenchou and wuchou.

The layout of “full” flowers is typical of mang (also including armor, palace clothes, huabao clothes, huakua clothes, nvda clothes and trousers and chousheng flower pleats). On the mangpao, the dragon painting is the main painting, the mangshuiwen is the auxiliary shuiwen, and the babaowen and cloud paintings are the auxiliary paintings, which is equal to the full painting. The “full” flower layout of mang is a symbol of power, indicating the noble status of the emperor, general and minister.

There are two types of “dot” cotton prints: one dot and multiple dots. Those with one dot are only the official clothes. There are a few elements of traditional opera costumes, and many are dominated by those with multiple dots. The “dot” flowers

mainly refer to the coiled dragon, coiled phoenix, coiled lion and large and small coiled flowers in the circular paintings. Taking cape as a typical example, there are ten coiled dragons or coiled phoenixes, and ten coiled flowers in a symmetrical layout. Because of the dense paintings, there is also a certain power symbol, mainly a symbol of temperament, symbolizing the generous and solemn temperament of the characters.

“Corner” flower layout is typical of wenxiaosheng’s flower pleats. That is, at one corner of the lower body, a branch flower is decorated to balance the upper part with the lower part, and the left part with the right part. Because the pattern is simple and natural, it is a sign of civilian identity. “Edge” flower layout is only used as edge decoration, playing a role of decoration and beautification.

The “scattered” flower layout refers to the free layout form other than “full”, “point”, “corner” and “edge”. Distinguished by amount and size, the layout is free, more showing natural and vivid nature. Taking flowers on the face, the face is mostly decorated with free flowing clouds. It is a symbol of character, symbolizing the character’s rough and bold personality, and the heroic and powerful temperament.

The organizational form of paintings of flower and bird in Han Opera costumes is rooted in the form and rules of ancient Ming and Qing costumes. The principle of organizational painting is mainly based on practicality, adaptability and decoration, designed according to different clothing types and character modeling, arranged according to the size, dispersion and density of the organization, and enriched of the organization characteristics of Han Opera costumes in comparison and coordination.

4. Color Configuration of Paintings

It is often said in operas that “it is better to wear out than wear wrong”. This saying does not only refer to the name of clothing, but also includes color. The color application of Han Opera costumes is mainly influenced by the “upper and lower five colors” system of ancient coronal costumes. Epitomizing the symbolism of color, the “upper and lower five colors” system was formed in the long feudal autocratic society and was associated with the cognitive style and values in Chinese traditional culture. The specific content includes the distinction between high and low by the color of clothing, which has a long tradition in Chinese history. For example, Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty stipulated that, except for the emperor being allowed to wear yellow clothes, “gentry and civilian should not wear red and yellow clothes”, which was lasted till Han Opera. The color is distinguished according to the importance of the roles.

The yellow linpao (specially for emperors) have begun to appear in Ming Dynasty operas, and many costumes in the “folk costumes” of Kunqu Opera in the Qing Dynasty have been divided into five colors (yellow, red, green, white and black). The colors of the court costumes are much richer than those of the folk.

The color beauty of traditional Han Opera costume paintings is embodied in that stage costume paintings do not only include the decorative beauty of general daily costume patterns, but also are important means to externalize the role image. The paintings in the stage costumes form a visual effect through the contrast of brightness, purity, hue, and color matching of the stage settings, so that the audience can further define the meaning of the role psychologically when appreciating the paintings, and achieve the beauty of a strong color stage color through the highly decorative and

symbolic color block configuration. The “color block configuration” of paintings is the key link of visual expression of paintings, which has regularity.

Based on the characteristics of opera costume art that emphasizes strong contrast, there are several common paintings of color harmony, involving complementary color harmony, contrast color harmony, and medium difference color harmony. The above three kinds of color harmony are subtle, and the most widely used harmony methods are: neutral color (black, white and gray) isolation and harmony, shiny color (gold and silver) isolation and harmony, and shiny color (gold) space harmony. Chinese traditional art has a long historical tradition in using these harmonious colors as “interval colors”. In murals, color sculptures, architectural color paintings, folk New Year pictures, and handicrafts, the above five neutral color lines or color blocks are often used to harmonize colorful colors. As a result, the paintings of flowers and birds in Han Opera costumes are also deeply affected. The color of neutral colors is in harmony with any color system. Once it is involved in the highly contrasting and uncoordinated hue, it can play a positive role in “interval”, making it visually coordinated, setting off the colors of both sides of the contrast color and making it more beautiful and bright.

In short, the paintings of Han Opera costumes are colorful. They do not only pursue the contrast of warm atmosphere, but also stress the harmonious unity. Meanwhile, they do not only abide by the traditional “five colors”, but also emphasize the separation and harmony of secondary colors. Moreover, they do not only pay attention to the visual psychological effect of color, but also pay attention to the symbolism and implication of color. The overall effect of color should be colorful, bright and warm. No matter what kind of color is used, the application principle is freehand brushwork, that is, focus is less on realistic reality, but more on joyous, gorgeous and rich.

5. Conclusions

The painting form is the embodiment of the connotation of opera culture and aesthetic taste. Through the organizational form characteristics of flower and bird paintings, the internal relationship between paintings and stage presentation is summarized and found. The paintings of flowers and birds in Han Opera costumes are based on the guidance of “auspicious culture”, and most of the paintings are “dragon and phoenix”. The use of freehand brushwork symbolism will match the paintings with the characters in the opera, and distinguish the characters’ images, identities, personalities and their connections, so that the paintings enrich the expressiveness of the opera and pursue a full, magnificent and lively atmosphere.

At the same time, Han Opera costumes also attach great importance to paintings and colors. According to the “upper and lower five colors” system of ancient coronal costumes, the use of color differentiation has become an important means to externalize the role image. Therefore, the costume paintings and Han Opera costumes interact with each other and are closely connected with each other, while the specific paintings and colors have a pretty prominent stage expressive force for the externalization of personality, character and temperament.

The paintings of flowers and birds in Han Opera costumes are aesthetic forms with symbols and meanings. As Li Zehou said, “the reason why people’s aesthetic feeling is different from animal sensory pleasure is that the former contains elements of ideas and imagination. The reason why beauty is not a general form, but a so-called “meaningful form” is that it is a natural form that accumulates social content.

Therefore, beauty is in form but it is not just form. Without form (natural form), there is no beauty, and only form (natural form) is not beauty.” The paintings of flowers and birds in Han Opera costumes are drawn from natural flowers and birds. The composition of paintings breaks through the natural images and reconstructs and combines paintings based on the principle of freehand brushwork. At the same time, as an important part of Han Opera art, the paintings of costumes contain the distinctive life style and flexible variability of Han Opera. The aesthetic style of “elegance in vulgarity and vulgarity in elegance” has so far embodied vitality and creativity. Therefore, it is of great significance for the development of Han Opera to strengthen its research, protection and inheritance, and let the paintings of flowers and birds in costumes further demonstrate its unique artistic charm.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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