

Preliminary Study on the Painted Decorative Characteristics of Traditional Houses and Their Cultural Value in Jingchu Area

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Abstract:

The study summarizes the expression parts and decorative characteristics of the traditional house painting in Jingchu Area while explaining its programmatic composition, folkloric subject matter and color regularity, and clarifying the historical and cultural value of traditional house painting in Jingchu Area as an important component of the vernacular culture of southeast Hubei by examination and measurement of traditional residential buildings in Jingchu Area, as well as the collection and collation of documentary and oral data.

Keywords:

Jingchu Traditional Houses, Architectural Painting, Artistic Characteristics, Cultural Value

1. Introduction

Painting is a means of decorating architectural elements with color. Painted pillars and carved beams and embossed painting are one of the basic characteristics of ancient Chinese architecture and its decoration, with distinctive Chinese characteristics. Jingchu Area, located in the middle and middle of Hubei in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, is the historical Chu cultural center. The historical Chu architecture “high platform and beautiful palace room” is “like the subtle magnificence of the mural, the wide range of magical themes, the colorful carving, which can be described as a masterpiece of the Divine Land.” Painted decoration is an important feature of Jingchu’s traditional house decoration, and it has a long history. There is a description in Chuci Zhaojun: “tall and profound, with a more spacious threshold. Tower upon tower, facing higher mountains. The net household is decorated in red, and the carving is even more square. Looking up at the carved square rafter, draw dragons and snakes. Sit on the porch, facing the winding pool”, which shows the magnificent beauty of the Chu palaces and murals. Although

there are no physical remains of Chu architecture, the written records can witness that the Chu people were keen to decorate their buildings with paintings.

The painted decoration of Jingchu traditional buildings reflects the aesthetic taste formed by the people of Jingchu in the long historical practice, and is also an important component of the local culture of Jingchu Area, which can enrich the theoretical content of traditional building construction techniques and has important guiding significance for the restoration of contemporary traditional buildings and cultural relics buildings.

2. Main Expression Parts and Decorative Characteristics of Traditional House Painting in Jingchu Area

Jingchu traditional house painting is generally painted on the exterior walls and interior wooden components, and the expression can be flat, but also can become three-dimensional because it is applied to wood carving or clay sculpture. The exterior of Jingchu traditional house building generally is clear water wall made of green brick, but not painted, and only the eaves of the wall lintel parts is painted with a foot or so white lime, so as to strengthen the external contours of the building, and decorated with paintings on the white eaves. The painted decorative parts of exterior wall are mainly wall, eaves wall, pillar head, entrance door and door cover. The decoration of color painting makes the traditional dwellings in Southeast Hubei present a romantic aesthetic expression.

2.1. Gables

Jingchu traditional houses are usually brick and wood structures, the roofs are mostly hard hilltops, and the brick walls at both ends are called gables, which play the role of isolation and fire prevention between residences. The beauty of the gables is a major feature of the traditional houses of Jingchu. Different from the form of the gable of the Hui school building, the gable of the traditional Jingchu folk house has several forms of herringbone gable, moire gable and fall-step gable, and the color paintings painted under the eaves of the gable adopt corresponding pattern modeling according to the form of the gable. (Table 1) For example, on the high moire gable wall of Wang Mingfan's mansion in Tongshan County, the decoration of painted phoenix-shaped mouth corners and wing corners has a strong sense of rhythm and dynamic beauty, and the regional decoration style is unique. The fall-step gable of Li Hengshi's former residence in Yangxin County is painted with rich ink-colored plant floral patterns, ruyi and other utensils and opera stories, and the patterns follow the shape, reflecting the unity of color painting and architectural form. The top two ends of the gable wall are shaped like a horse's head, with the upper part convex and the lower part convergent, commonly known as the horse's head wall. A three-bay southeast Hubei traditional residential building generally has a corbie gable on both sides of the front and a pair of corbie gables at the upper end of the gate, higher than the roof. Paintings will also be applied along the contour of the stepped gable and the triangular area between it and the roof on a white background, dotted with ochre red, mainly in flower blue. The tile of the roof is black and white, the form is light and lively and the theme is mostly plants, flowers and birds in geometric patterns.

Table 1. Types of Gables and Painted Decoration Characteristics in Southeastern Hubei.

Gable type	Painted decorative parts	Decorative features
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Herringbone gable				It is a striped composition with concave and convex surfaces, and the painting reinforces the visual hierarchy of the mountain wall.
	Ancestral hall of the Laoyahong Pan in Maqiao Town, Xian'an District	Song Family Residence in Shang'ao Village, Huangshapu Town, Tongshan County	Lu's Old Residence in Yutu Village, Futu Town, Yangxin County	
Moire gable				The painting enhances the rhythmic sense of the gable and has a strong dynamic beauty, and the regional decoration style is unique.
	Wang Mingfan Mansion, Tongshan County	Liang's Ancestral Hall in Yangxin County	Baoshi Village, Chuangwang Town, Tongshan County	
Falling gable				The decorative motifs follow the shape, reflecting the unity of the form of painting and architecture.
	Ancient residence of Xia Fan, the head of Shimen Village, Linqiao Town, Tongshan	Baoshi Village, Chuangwang Town, Tongshan County	Former residence of Li Hengshi in Yangxin County	

2.2. Cornice Wall

The eaves of traditional houses in Jingchu are often painted on the walls about 3cm below the cornices to increase the decorative layers under the eaves. The cornice is stacked in the upper part of the front wall of the house and under the eaves, the bricks of the wall cornice are regularly and orderly picked out and the arrangement of bricks has a variety of forms, mainly used to support and increase the depth of the eaves. This functional structure is also used as a painted expression part. The painted part of the cornice is painted with the stacked step-like layer, so it is generally in a rectangular composition or a long bar layout, which is composed of various exquisite patterns or multiple pictures. The painting strengthens the three-dimensional layering of the cornice, making the layering under the cornice more prominent and the decorative effect richer. The cornice is also decorated with molds, line engravings, and plaster moldings. In some family ancestral hall-type houses, gray sculpture decorations will be made under the stacked eaves, some are made into components similar to brackets, and some are made into decorations similar to water ripples, so that the front eaves of the houses present rich three-dimensional layers to increase the decorative effect of the cornice, strengthen the outline of the gray clear water brick wall, and make the building more exquisite and elegant. (Figure 1 and Figure 2)



Figure 1. *Exquisitely Painted Eaves of Residential Buildings in Chetian Village, Yaojiafan, Tongshan.*



Figure 2. *Vivid Painted Cornice of the Maqiao Town House under the Light and Shadow.*

2.3. Pillar Head

In traditional Chinese architecture, the decorative components that highlight the junction of the eaves and the gable become the pillar head, and the pillar head of the traditional house of Jingchu often concave the main body, with animals, flowers, birds and various three-dimensional shapes embedded in the middle, usually painted with clay sculptures, rich in variety and beautiful shape. The motifs in the pillar head are often based on auspicious motifs, such as flowers, eight treasures, or a set of character stories, and some poems. The painted floral pattern of the old house of the Lu family in Yuyan Village, Yangxin County is similar to a lotus flower, with bright colors and very smooth lines, and the overall style is elegant and generous, so that people can see the skillful hills in the chest of the painter. (Figure 3)



Figure 3. *Painted Head of the Old Residence of the Lu family in Yuyan Village, Yangxin County.*

2.4. Entrance porch, door front and door cover

The gate of Jingchu traditional house is characterized by a trough door, that is, the entrance gate will be retracted for a distance, and the cornice will not retreat for the wall, forming a porch space. The part above the door head is usually decorated with a door forehead made of brick or clay sculpture to make the outer frame of the rectangular door forehead, and the outer outline of the door forehead is generally decorated with painted patterns. For example, in the old residence of the Wang family in Baoshi Village, Tongshan County, the inscription on the door frame has three border lines, each border line is composed of different patterns, and the internal pattern theme is rich. Some dwellings are painted frescoes on the lintels of the porches, namely, the transitional part of the wall and the roof. Liu Senlin pointed out in *Traditional House Decoration Craftsman* that residential murals are extremely rare, and that the number of murals in Lushe's houses is very small. Due to the scourge of war, migration, disrepair, natural weathering and other factors, it naturally "disappears" and it is difficult to find the real work. The murals of traditional Jingchu houses on the lintels of the corridor walls have some remains, and the patterns are clearly distinguishable. For example, murals are painted symmetrically on both sides

of the porch of the old residence of the Song family in Damu Township, Xian'an District, and the Ruyi crossed moire is clearly visible in the rectangular border, and ink paintings are painted in the middle folding fan frame. Grand house Shen house in Tongshan County paints murals in the form of scroll painting, the scroll part is a color sculpture, protruding from the wall, the color of the brocade is bright, and the mural pattern is also very clear. Combined with clay shaped mural expression, this flat painting is more common in the Jingchu Area. Judging from the painting of the eaves lintels in these houses, the combination of fine brushwork and freehand brushwork in traditional Chinese painting makes the lines colored, and even have the charm of literati paintings. At the entrance of traditional houses in Southeastern Hubei, there is also the practice of opening the door directly on the outer wall, and a door cover, also decorated with painting, is set above the gate. (Figure 4)

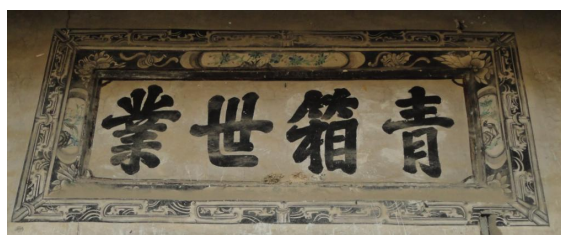


Figure 4. Wang's Old House Door Top Painting.

2.5. Interior wood components

The decoration of the interior wood components of traditional Jingchu houses is mainly based on wood carving, and some wood components are usually painted to protect them, most of which are carved and painted and complement each other, forming quite hierarchical structure. Relative to the universality of exterior painting, wood painting only appears in some of the more important residential buildings. For example, most of the wooden components of the Wu Ancestral Hall in Yangxin County are decorated by carving and coloring, and the wood carvings appear more vivid because of the coloring. Several of the painted algae wells are surviving from the Qing Dynasty, with the themes of five blessings, eight trigrams, and melons falling on the sides of the beams, and two paintings remain on the square, one of which is a picture of a cat dish. The Liang Clan Ancestral Hall in Yangxin County uses a thick white background pattern on the algae wells to draw scattered patterns, with the subject matter being dragon patterns, and the painted patterns are simple in level and elegant in color. From the traditional dwellings in Southeast Hubei, the combination of carved and painted partition doors and lattice windows is not too much, mostly due to the older age of the building and the degradation of the painted colors. (Figure 5)



Figure 5. Painted Wooden Components of the Wu Ancestral Hall in Yangxin County.

3. Artistic Characteristics of Jingchu Traditional Residential Building Painting

3.1. Program of decoration

The painted decoration of traditional houses in Jingchu is characterized by stylization, which is mainly reflected in the decoration parts, composition, decorative patterns and subject content. Jingchu traditional houses are generally painted and have fixed decorative parts, and at the same time, the decorative components are different and have corresponding composition patterns. For example, the lintels and window lintels mainly adopt a three-section pattern, and the pillar heads on both sides of the gable are decorated, and the composition is usually triangular or square according to the specific parts expressed. In the superimposed area under the eaves of the transition between the roof and the wall, the form of the composition will be divided into several pictures along the stacked steps, most of the paintings are strips, the height is generally between 30 and 60cm, and several areas are divided into squares, similar to the “box” and “column center” of the traditional architectural painting in the north, which greatly enriches the appearance and spatial depth of the building. In addition, the stylization of decorative patterns and content materials is expressed in the convergence of decorative effects. For example, the traditional house of Lingxia Village in Maqiao Town and the ancestral hall of the Laoyahong Pan in Maqiao Town, the decorative pattern of the gray plastic part of the cornice is almost identical, and the painting of the whole building is exactly the same in the use of color. The ancient residence of Xia Fan, the head of Shimen Village, Nanlinqiao Town, Tongshan County, and the decorative content of a house in Chetian Village, Jiangyuan, Tongshan County, is almost identical, only slightly complicated and simplified in the gray sculpture. In interviews with local villagers, I learned that in the past, the teachers of folk painters were few, and the painting in neighboring villages and towns may come from the same team of painters. Folk painters can better grasp the stylized patterns, be more skilled in the painting process, improve efficiency, and reduce costs. For example, the same combination of black outlining and stylized grass patterns will appear in Yangxin, Tongshan, Chongyang and other places at the same time, reflecting black and white on the white wall, producing a simple artistic effect (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Highly Stylized Combination of Grass Patterns.

3.2. Folklore of the theme pattern

The people of Jingchu Area used the decorative content of praying for peace and prosperity in architectural painting, and used folk local art techniques such as implicit homophony to present the decorative theme with both shape and meaning, rich in strong ethical color and auspicious meaning. In the Wu Ancestral Hall in Yangxin County, Eastern Hubei, the indoor wooden components are painted in multiple algae wells, including bats, ruyi, eight trigrams, melons, fruit, butterflies, and cat-butterfly

plays on beams. These motifs are conducive to the identification and understanding of the people, reflecting the simple good wishes and clan concepts such as praying for blessings, prosperity, and descendants. Some dwellings have writing on the pillar head without drawing patterns. For example, the Laoyahong Pan's house in Maqiao Town has the words "mountains and clear waters show talent, winter snow and cold plums accompany old pines", reflecting the owner's sustenance for the plot of reading. From the interview, I also learned that the homeowner's family did "come out with a lot of talents".

In addition to opera stories, myths and legends with edifying significance, objects with auspicious symbolic meaning, rare birds and animals, exotic flowers and other decorative subjects also appear in the traditional painting of Southeast Hubei. In addition, there are also subjects reflecting farming life, such as fishing, woodcutting and farming, as well as Taoism and Buddhism. As long as they are auspicious and can pray for blessings, they are drawn in their homes. There are also phoenix decorations that reflect Chu culture, as well as hard line heads and soft wire curly grass, etc., which have the decorative characteristics of beautiful shape and smooth lines. The motifs of traditional houses painted in Jingchu Area reflect the aesthetic characteristics of auspicious folk.

3.3. Regularization of color

Traditional residential buildings in the Jingchu Area are generally painted in five colors and ink color. The so-called "five-color" refers to the use of color painting materials for mineral pigments such as silver vermilion (red), ocean blue, dry alum (yellow), green ore, and ink carbon. The so-called ink color is only applied to the carbon color (Figure 7).



Figure 7. "Ink Color" Painted in Jingchu Traditional Houses.



Figure 8. Painting of the Cornice Wall of a Traditional Jingchu House.

The color of Jingchu traditional house painting has a certain color setting rule. First of all, it is the law of "drawing the line and filling the color". Usually in the exterior wall painting of a house, one or two colors are used as the main color, and it is directly flattened. Before flat painting, the outline is outlined with ink lines, and the boundary effect of the lines makes the color blocks separate and dependent on each other. Secondly, the law of the use of cold and warm color contrast. The most common in "five-color" painting is the contrasting use of vermilion and blue. For example, the painting of the eaves wall of the village of Yaojia Qichetian in Tongshan adopts warmth and blue cold color of red and earthy yellow, making the picture colorful, highlighted, unified and rich in changes under the summary of black and white contours. Third, pay attention to the use of ink color. Black, white and gray account for a large proportion of the picture, where blue and orange are used in embellishment of jumping colors, showing the calm beauty of residential painted

colors (Figure 8). Fourth, the color setting of different parts has certain rules. Those parts with large undulations of concave and convex layers are basically painted in an intact manner, the color is usually more vivid, and the color of the convex surface is more elegant because of age, or because the painter has adopted the method of “gray white for convex surfaces, bright colors for concave surfaces”.

4. Cultural Value of the Existing Painted Decorations in Jingchu Traditional Houses

4.1. Historical and cultural value

Many traditional villages and houses with historical value in Jingchu have been included in the national or provincial cultural heritage protection list. As an important feature of village houses, its house painting is also an important component of Jingchu rural culture. The traditional residential painting art in this area can reflect the social productivity in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the material life of local people, the convergence of collective aesthetics and the plot of revering immortals and ancestors, and also have a specific expression effect on folk customs and social forms. The study of the existing painted art characteristics of traditional houses in Jingchu Area can excavate the cultural information hidden in the painted art, which is conducive to exploring the construction of residential remains, and is an important evidence for historical research.

4.2. Aesthetic value

Folk aesthetics has a universal and stable self-discipline norm, which is collective, inherited, stable, and spiritually utilitarian. The popularization of painted decoration of traditional houses in Southeast Hubei reflects the direct and simple collective aesthetic orientation of the people, and has formed a strong aesthetic appeal of folk art in the long-term historical accumulation, including some of its important aesthetic elements, such as the shape and refinement of patterns, the selection and matching of colors, the selection and integration of forms, etc., reflecting the creator's inner good wishes and rich imagination. Painted decorative art enriches the formal beauty and artistic conception of the folk houses to a certain extent, and stimulates people's aesthetic feelings of traditional houses, presenting the cultural characteristics of the region and has high aesthetic and artistic value.

4.3. Humanistic values

The painted art existing in the traditional residential architecture of Jingchu has the same detailed decorative function as wood carving, brick carving, stone carving, etc., and it is an important expression carrier for people to store wealth, measure success, and highlight social and economic status in the past. The painting of traditional houses in Jingchu pursues “practicality” and “good-looking”, and pays attention to the function of “edification”. According to the decorative patterns and bright or simple colors between the green tile and white walls, those concentrated on family style education, moral teaching, exhortation to learn wisely, pleasant and nurturing and other character stories, as well as calligraphy and literati paintings and other pattern themes, it can be seen that traditional residential painting has profound humanism and folklore, carrying the emotional consciousness and aesthetic feelings of people in that period, and reflecting the local humanistic background and regional culture at that time.

4.4. Modern application value

As a regional cultural heritage, traditional residential decoration occupies an important position in the architectural remains of residential buildings. In the process of repairing ancient houses, it is easy to have the problem of lack of painted detail decoration and quality degradation. The study on the characteristics, pattern themes, craft techniques and other aspects of traditional residential painting decoration can promote the spread and cultural inheritance of folk traditional architectural painting technology on the one hand and on the other hand, based on the construction of beautiful countryside, the restoration guidance and theoretical basis for the rescue protection of residential cultural heritage are proposed. At the same time, the cultural elements in the painting and decoration of traditional houses in Jingchu are extracted and penetrated into the practice of modern rural construction and rural cultural and creative industries, which has a positive role in promoting the development of tourism value and rural cultural industry in Jingchu Area.

5. Conclusions

The painting and decorative art of Jingchu traditional architecture contains the content code and expression system of Chinese traditional cultural information, and also conveys the aesthetic spirit and cultural genetic information of Jingchu Area, which has strong recognition and culture, important historical value, aesthetic value, humanistic value and modern application value.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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