

Historical Restoration and Revitalization of the Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings

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Abstract:

The art of the Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings is a blend of Chinese and Western painting techniques, rich in imagery, multi-view compositions, realistic and allegorical, with delicate lines and bright colours. In addition to folklore, customs and current affairs, and the auspiciousness of the Chinese New Year, the paintings focus on reflecting new things and customs, and are full of the atmosphere of the times. Throughout the traditional Chinese woodblock prints, there are many origins with similar content and themes, but the production techniques and artistic language are unique to each region. And the Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings is the only one of the traditional Chinese woodblock prints that has died out, and is the least surviving of all the woodblock prints from around China, while its own humanistic artistic value still has new viability in the study of contemporary woodblock prints.

Keywords:

Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings, Contemporary Printmaking, Applied Research, Realistic Value

1. The Historical Evolution of the Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings

Tracing the origins of Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings, the analysis of the characteristics of Shanghai's handicraft development as influenced by Jiangnan culture, immigrant culture and Western civilization in various periods before the founding of New China. This is a compilation of representative handicraft species and related landmark events in Shanghai, focusing on how the literati atmosphere of Jiangnan culture, the technology and craftsmanship of Western civilization, and the foreign folk customs and practices of other regions before the founding of New China together constitute the modern characteristics of Shanghai's handicrafts in terms of diversity, change, innovation and fusion, providing sufficient preliminaries and conditions for the modern transformation of Shanghai's handicrafts after the founding of New China.

The main focus of the New Year painting workshops in Shanghai was in the area of the county town of Xiaojiaochang. Located to the west of the Yuyuan Shopping Centre in the present-day Huangpu District, the area was originally used for military exercises. [1] Because of its proximity to the lively Old City God Temple, merchants who made and sold folklore items came here to set up shops. During the Daoguang period of the Qing Dynasty, shops selling New Year paintings from Suzhou's Taohuawu district appeared in the small school. As a result of the lucrative business, some of the shops engraved and printed their own New Year paintings, and hired artists and craftsmen from Suzhou's Taohuawu to draw and produce them. During the Taiping expedition in 1860, many Taohuawu owners and artisans came to Shanghai to escape the war and resumed their work at the school, which led to a rapid boom in the market. During the Tongzhi and Guangxu years of the Qing Dynasty, the market for New Year paintings in Xiaojiaochang flourished, with dozens of shops gathering on a short 200-metre street, forming a street of New Year paintings, among which the more famous ones were Wu Wenyi, Sun Wenya, Yishengzhai, Yixinzhai, Xinji, Taixing and Yuanxing. The famous Hai school painters Wu Youru, Qian Hui'an and Cai Qi actively participated in the creation of the New Year paintings, taking into account the common people and popularization while enhancing the artistic realm, truly achieving a common appreciation of elegance and vulgarity. In 1843, Shanghai was officially opened as a port, and the powers set up their own concessions there, which led to an influx of people, institutions, artefacts, ideas and cultures from all over the world. A new landscape opened up in Shanghai. The prosperous economy created a large number of new officials and wealthy merchants, as well as a new class of citizens, who, in addition to their own material enjoyment, showed a higher expectation of spiritual and cultural consumption, and consequently a demand for cultural and artistic products. Although the history of Shanghai's New Year Paintings is only about 150 years old, and the most glorious stage of their development was only twenty years ago, they truly reflect the great changes of the times and record the scenes of life in Shanghai's rapidly emerging cosmopolitan city. In terms of size, the Xiaojiaochang paintings are small woodblock prints, a timely change in response to the trend towards smaller homes in Shanghai. In their own way, they reflect the changing times and their concern for the changing nature of urban life, and this secularization is becoming increasingly dominant.

2. The Humanistic and Artistic Value of Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings

Shanghai New Year Paintings have developed a number of unique features that distinguish them from traditional New Year paintings from other places, such as the choice of subject matter, composition, colour scheme and painting style. In addition to traditional themes such as folk customs and prayers for good fortune, the paintings have been influenced by modern Western civilization and have therefore begun to focus on the depiction of real social life while maintaining their own regional cultural characteristics. In this regard, the Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings have introduced a series of "new" New Year Paintings in the style of the sea, including life on the foreign shores, news and current affairs, maritime customs, and new fables and stories. In terms of composition, the variety of subjects is a characteristic of Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings, and the wide range of subjects has led to a change in composition, with most of the paintings using a Chinese painting style composition, with the figures at the centre and furniture and ornaments painted around them. In

addition, “full-painting” is also a common form of composition in the New Year paintings of the small school, and is often used in such subjects as marketplace folklore and news and current affairs, showing the process of narration. It is a combination of Chinese and Western painting techniques, multi-perspective composition and a combination of realism and allegory. [2] In addition to folklore, customs and current affairs, and the auspiciousness of the Chinese New Year, the subject matter is also a reflection of new things, new customs, and the atmosphere of the times. Classical myths and legends: The main themes in the Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings are images of gods and goddesses used in traditional festivals, and more popular festivals such as New Year’s blessings and prayers for good fortune.

The functions and connotations of Shanghai’s woodblock prints are diverse. Woodblock prints were often an important tool for moral and ethical education, knowledge of life, and the dissemination of culture and art among the general public. In the small schoolyard paintings are three-dimensional images of Shanghai’s folklore during this period. The artistic value of Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings, with their distinctive artistic features and diverse expressions, form a unique aesthetic system that also contains its own particularities. The active participation of Shanghai literati painters, such as Wu Youru, Qian Hui’an and Zhou Muqiao, makes the paintings rich in subject matter and distinctly literati in artistic form. The colours are in harmony with the subject matter and content of the paintings, and the works are easy to preserve without losing their colour.

3. Historical Restoration and Revitalization of Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings

Elements of contemporary woodcut printmaking can be borrowed from Shanghai Schoolyard New Year’s Paintings, such as the composition of Shanghai Schoolyard New Year’s Paintings: The composition of Schoolyard New Year’s Paintings is mainly full and symmetrical, with a characteristic comic composition and a scattered composition, making the narrative of the picture more complete and orderly in visual effect. The use of this type of perspective is similar to that of the surrealist artists in Western painting who dealt with the sense of space in their pictures.

The diversity of subjects that can be borrowed from contemporary woodcut prints is influenced by the culture of the Sea School, and the most typical of Shanghai’s schoolyard paintings is the painting of the silk industry in Jiangnan. Fiction and opera story painting: In Shanghai’s small school New Year paintings, most of the narrative themes are historical stories, such as “The Romance of the Three Kingdoms”. The theme of the Shanghai school contains two parts: the customs of life in the foreign countryside and the news and current affairs, so it can best reflect the material life and spirituality of the people in the changing times of Shanghai. In terms of creative practice, based on the interpretation and absorption of the artistic values of Shanghai’s small schoolyard New Year paintings, the artist uses the creative ideas of deconstruction and reconstruction to create a series of woodcut prints using contemporary woodcut techniques and creative media, exploring a new path for the development of Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings through artistic practice.

The woodblock prints of Shanghai Xiaojiaochang are not only a record of the material and cultural life of the citizens of the past and a reflection of their spiritual civilization, but they have also evolved in response to the changes of the times and life. This contemporary character, which has always been closely linked to the current

cultural life of the city, is the key to the vitality of Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings. The contemporary nature of Shanghai's urban cultural life has led to a changeable and fluid development, unlike the relatively stable heritage of the traditional rural social environment. The inheritance of traditional handicrafts is a combination of culture and art, and its inheritance and transformation is in line with the development of urban life, both as an end and as a starting point for reopening to life. The contemporary nature of Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings is reflected in its conformity with the laws of urban development, and the modern transformation of Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings is seen as a process of re-mediation, i.e. the new medium acquires some of the form and content from the old medium, i.e. the use of contemporary woodcut printmaking practices and manual techniques to draw on the artistic characteristics and themes of Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings, and to achieve a new life for traditional craft culture.

4. Conclusions

Relates the modern heritage of traditional crafts to the creative transformation of different media, and explores the relationship between the ontological language of Shanghai traditional crafts and the context of media transformation. It explores how Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings have been transformed through media theory and new media technologies to gain aesthetic imagery and cultural identity in modern times. There are limited surviving materials on Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings, and due to the loss of craft techniques and other factors, Xiaojiaochang woodblock prints have almost reached the point of extinction, which to some extent affects the theoretical overview. Due to the short period of prosperity, war damage, and unfavourable preservation, the question of how to preserve and study this folk art treasure will be the subject of our attention. [3] It is important to analyse the artistic characteristics of the Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings from a contemporary perspective and explore the elements that can be used in the creation of contemporary woodcut prints, and to explore the contemporary creative transformation of the Shanghai Xiaojiaochang New Year Paintings from the perspectives of contemporary woodcut creation media theory and creation media technology.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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