

A Comparative Study of Fengxiang Clay Sculpture and Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang”’s Style

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Abstract: Chinese folk art works have quite different styles, showing a flourishing scene. As an outstanding representative of folk culture, Shaanxi Fengxiang clay sculpture and Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang” have great similarities due to the same artistic creation materials. However, due to geographical differences, the clay sculpture in the two places are also very different. This paper begins with analysis of the artistic source of clay sculpture in the two places and representative works. Through the difference of production process, creative content, color application and modeling style, the similarities and differences between the two in terms of artistic expressions are summarized, which provides reference for the inheritance and development of clay sculpture career.

1. Introduction

Shaanxi Fengxiang clay sculpture and the works of Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang” have their own characteristics, reflecting the mature quality of clay sculpture art after experiencing social evolution and environmental change. These colorful clay sculpture make people feel the simplicity of the earth, joy and the folk artists’ simple emotions in their works, which makes clay sculpture always full of vitality.

2. Representative works of Shaanxi Fengxiang clay sculpture and Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang”

2.1. Representative works of Fengxiang clay sculpture

The representative work of Fengxiang clay sculpture is “Niguahu”. The basic styling characteristics of “Guahu” are related to the bronze mask and taotie design of the Shang and Zhou dynasties. Studies have shown that there is a certain relationship between the two. In Fengxiang, Shaanxi, Guahu slices used to exorcise evil spirits, which belongs to embossed clay sculpture and its shape is very exaggerated, forehead and eyes protrude, the eyebrows are the shape of the yin and yang, and the three peppers are inserted in the nose. Pepper is a common crop of Fengxiang, which means that life is booming and using grain, flowers, fruits and vegetables decorate on the tiger’s face, reflecting the eternal laws that nature is endless and four seasons alternate. Local residents purchase clay sculptures at home for praying, nursing, avoiding evil spirits, protecting town houses, and absorbing the blessing.^[1]

In Fengxiang, friends and relatives will give the children “Nizuohu” as toys at every festival and New Year to express their best wishes for the children’s longevity with wealth and honor. After a comparative study by experts such as Yang Xueqin, it is believed that the traditional image of sitting tigers and lions in Fengxiang clay sculpture is closely related to the shape of the bronzes in the Shang and Zhou dynasties.^[2] The shape of the tiger is sitting on the hind legs and standing on the front legs. The image is extremely exaggerated, the face is compact, and the ear is the most prominent part which shows the majesty of the tiger. The body part is decorated with the ornamentation of lotus and peony. The shape of tiger is generous, exaggerated, full of style, and it is exquisitely decorated, which symbolizes a good life of wealth and good fortune.

2.2. Representative works of Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang”

According to the traditional folklore, “Seven-child snatches for the plum blossom” is one of the representative works of Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang”, which was created by Zhang Yuting in the late Qing Dynasty and The size of the work is 35 cm. Plum blossoms bloom at the beginning of the year, with the title of The queen of flowers, which means to be the very best. The work describes the scene of seven children playing together, one holding the plum blossom, and the other six competing to snatch. Children who are elderly are about 30 cm tall and those younger are about 20 cm tall. Each child has a different posture, and the image is vivid and each face is slightly flushed, and even you can see the green skin on their heads. The decorations on their clothing are delicately shaped. The whole work is very cleverly conceived, with a strong sense of life, reflecting a fun scene of children’s game, and also contains the good wishes of seeking fame and fortune.

Zhang Yuting loves the life of the marketplace and loves the working people. He created a special “three hundred and sixty trade” to express the lives of the working people, “Sugar-figure blowing”, which is one of the masterpieces, created by Zhang Yuting in 1889, 28 cm high. This Work created a small trader with baskets, wearing a long gown, who are blowing sugar, holding a mold in his hand, taking a mouthful of sugar. The trader’s facial muscles are vivid, which makes us feel the vitality of life and the rich life atmosphere. Although it is a small piece of clay sculpture, it sees its skill in realistic.

The clay sculpture “Chung Kuel Marrying off his Sister”, created by Zhang Yuting, vividly showed the lively scene of Chung Kuel leading many ghosts and monsters to marry his sister. With many characters, strong sense of movement and grandeur, he used extremely exaggerated expression techniques to sum up the arrogant evil forces in the society as a ugly and ferocious savage ghosts, flattering deadbeat ghosts using gold hairpin to exchange for wine, ghosts taking the lawsuit but confusing right and wrong and indolent and loafing ghosts, and so on, which formed a team to send his sister to marry. These characters are not the ghosts of the Tang Dynasty, but a group of living ghosts living in the world. The author uses these characters to sharply satirize the evils of the wicked people in society.^[3] The image of the character does not emphasize individuality, but inherits the symbolic characteristics of the Chinese tradition, and does not emphasize its “likeness” but emphasizes its “meaning”.^[4]

3. The Art Comparison between Fengxiang Clay Sculpture and Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang”

The most basic characteristics of Chinese folk clay sculpture are shaping and coloring. They have always maintained a unique artistic style in the long history of development. Fengxiang clay and Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang” whether in creation of the theme, or in the styling, are unique folk art symbols. However, the difference between the region and the folklore leads to the obvious difference between the two.

3.1. Classification of Works

3.1.1. Classification of Fengxiang clay sculpture

Fengxiang clay sculpture is mainly divided into three parts. The first category is the facial slices, which is mainly represented by embossed clay sculpture such as Guahu slices, Facebook, and Kirin. The second category is round carvings, mainly based on folklore, characters and animals in historical stories. The third category is hand-playing toys, mainly are small animals, with the Chinese zodiac and non-Chinese zodiac as the main characters. The clay sculptures are giant tigers that are half-high, and small rabbits and small lions.

3.1.2. Classification of the works of Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang”

The works of Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang” can be mainly divided into three kinds. The first is based on real-life characters. The second is that scenes reflect folk customs, such as weddings and funerals, temple fairs, etc. The third is an image that extends from classical literature and folklore. After 190 years of inheritance and development, “Clay Man Zhang” has become an important

branch of Chinese color clay sculpture.

3.1.3. Comparison of works' content

Fengxiang clay sculptures mainly include pendants represented by tiger heads, ornaments represented by standing people, and hand playing toys based on animal models, which mainly express people's desire for wealth and good fortune, and express their best wishes through exorcism and evil spirits. The device is built in the hands of the people, and the beauty is born in the hearts of the people. Beauty and practicality have been completely unified in clay sculpture.^[5] As the name suggests, Tianjin "Clay Man Zhang" is a clay figurine model with characters as the main characters, mainly including realistic figures, scenes reflecting folk customs, classical literature and folklore.

3.2. The using of color

3.2.1. The using color of Fengxiang clay sculpture

The basic colors of the painting are red, yellow and green. On the basis of the basic color, the white color of the powder and the black of the line are added, which is consistent with the traditional Chinese five elements.^[6] The five elements of color symbolize metal, wood, water, fire and earth. These five colors match to produce a saturated and vivid contrast effect, adding happy atmosphere, solemnity and not publicity, showing the vitality of folk art. Fengxiang clay sculpture follows the quaint color matching method of "color matching should be uniform, the same color can not be used closely". Feng Xiang clay sculpture also has a colorless white work, which is mainly influenced by Chinese calligraphy and painting. It has the meaning of having the white space and keeping the black space, which is quite elegant. In Fengxiang, each color has its own unique meaning, green represents longevity, red symbolizes messes of flowers, black means elegant. Dramatic colors, vivid lines, and staggered magical patterns show the life and way of thinking of folk artists.

3.2.2. The using color of the works of Tianjin "Clay Man Zhang"

The works of Tianjin "Clay Man Zhang" has given color to new content, color is objective existence, and its also the mobilization and combination of subjective color. These works attaches importance to the contrast between light and dark. In the color matching, the complementary color is added for comparison. The dark red, blue, green, black, medium yellow and other heavy colors are used to highlight the thick and simple overall effect. In the coloring process of these works sculptors add a little gray and black to the solid color, which reduces the color purity. The characters are more harmonious under various colors, showing the moderate and simple artistic features.

3.2.3. Comparison of color usage

The color of Fengxiang clay is mainly composed of five colors. The main object is the bright primary color. The color contrast is strong and the color area is evenly matched. The works of Tianjin "Clay Man Zhang" pay attention to the contrast between light and dark in the color matching, adopt the steady color, add complementary color, and is more harmonious. In terms of color, Fengxiang clay sculpture and the works of Tianjin "Clay Man Zhang" style are very different.

3.3. Modeling Style

3.3.1. The Freehand style of Fengxiang clay sculpture

Fengxiang clay sculpture is bright in color, with smooth lines and romantic novel patterns. It mainly adopts conformal shape and draws with flowers. What's more, exaggerated deformation makes the sculpture symmetrical, round and balanced. Focusing on symbolism, character shaping follows: "Heroes have no necks, and their performance is mighty; the beauties have no shoulders, and their performance is charming", "the animals' eyebrows should be wrinkled, and their eyes are big; when people see them they should like and afraid of them." The folklore, history and other cultural colors of Fengxiang clay sculpture are more distinctive. The shaping is mostly positive and

their texture is purity and rich, the color is bright, the form is realistic. There is exquisiteness in rough madness, elegant in glamour, and skill in quaintness.

3.3.2. The Realistic style of the works of Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang”

In the view of Zhang Yu, the sixth generation of the “Clay Man Zhang”, What is missing in the present life is the realistic work.^[7]In the long-term career of color plastic art, “Clay Man Zhang” has formed his own unique style. The style is mainly based on realistic style, and the works are vivid and full of aura. The works of “Clay Man Zhang” brings the realism to the fullest. It truly depicts the temperament and postures of the characters, pays attention to the details, exaggerates and rationalizes, chooses properly, and is cautiously colored and ingenious. It incorporates opera culture, folk customs and social life into the works, and the primary task of shaping is making the characters with both form and spirit. It inherits the realistic figurative skills since the Song Dynasty and indeed is the boutique in the history of folk clay sculpture.

3.3.3. Comparison of modeling styles

Fengxiang clay sculpture expresses people’s good wishes for pursuing evil spirits, praying for auspiciousness, and pursuing the auspiciousness of wealth and richness through exaggerated and distorted freehand style. The works of Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang” impressed people through vivid and realistic styles, and promote social virtues, profound and thorough irony of various undesirable social phenomena. The two outstanding folk clay sculptures have their own characteristics, with the “new era, new actions, new responsibility” as the artistic creation vane, contributing to the prosperity and development of Chinese cultural and artistic undertakings.

4. Conclusions

Fengxiang clay sculpture and Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang” are both outstanding representatives of folk clay sculpture under the influence of the northern folk system. Both of them have the same clay foundation but there are huge difference. Due to the difference in the consumption groups of the two types of clay and the different habits of appreciation, the two have great differences in terms of production process, creative content, color application and modeling style. The reason why is that Fengxiang clay sculpture grew up in Fengxiang Liuying Village. Its consumers are rural villagers in Shaanxi. The works reflect the religious beliefs advocated by the peasants, and reflect the sorcery psychology, and express people’s inheritance and pursuit of the original source of life. Tianjin “Clay Man Zhang” is a combination of Chinese folk colored sculpture and Western modeling concepts. The aesthetic standards of the urban consumer group indirectly prompted it to form a vivid and realistic creative style. The works of “Clay Man Zhang” are true embodiment and reaction to the social reality, embodying the skill of Chinese folk clay sculpture.

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