

# Study on the Relationship Between Traditional Woodcut New Year Pictures and Traditional Mural Paintings in Shanxi

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The traditional woodcut New Year pictures in Shanxi have a long history, which is a classic folk art work in China. The branch of culture it represents is the traditional culture branch in the Yellow River basin, which flourished in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, among which the Woodcut New Year pictures in the south of Shanxi are the most famous. This kind of wood-block New Year picture technology is very rich in connotation, including the use of traditional Chinese mural painting powder, powder is born in the Sui and Tang dynasties mural painting an important tool, which shows that powder in the field of Chinese traditional art to participate in the creation of a significant position, artistic value is very high. In this paper, we will specifically discuss the traditional Shanxi New Year wood-block pictures and traditional mural paintings, and deeply understand the basic concepts and characteristics of the two. Finally, this paper studies the internal subtle relationship between the two from three aspects: the remains of the works, the time of painting and literary illustrations.

*Keywords:* Shanxi traditional wood-block New Year pictures, mural painting powder, characteristic expression, relationship, remains of works, literary illustration

## Introduction

Shanxi woodblock New Year picture art has a long history and tradition, it is an important product of the combination of engraving, printing and painting, and is also a folk art expression for the New Year festival. Wood-block New Year pictures express the aspirations and yearning of ordinary people for a better life, so they make good use of painting, engraving, printing and other ways to express some popular themes. In Shanxi woodblock New Year Pictures, the pursuit of traditional art creation technology is high, and the requirements are very strict, among which the integration of traditional mural powder is a highlight, so the relationship between woodblock New Year pictures and traditional mural powder is very worthy of in-depth study.

## **First, the Basic Concept of Shanxi Traditional Wood-block New Year Pictures and Traditional Mural Paintings**

### **(1) Shanxi Traditional Woodcut New Year Pictures**

Shanxi traditional wood-block New Year pictures, developed in the Song and Jin dynasties and flourished in the Yuan and Ming dynasties, have been included in the national intangible cultural heritage list. As a classic folk art form, its artistic expression is quite rich, including not only hall painting, door painting and other categories, but also pay special attention to the portrayal and development of traditional cultural themes. Shanxi traditional wood-block New Year pictures are characterized by distinctive themes, exaggerated and vivid images, fresh and gorgeous colors, etc. Moreover, their decorative value is higher, giving people a deep impression of bold and free (Sun & Wu, 2024, pp. 130-134).

### **(2) Traditional Mural Painting Powder**

Traditional mural powder is an important tool in ancient Chinese painting, which is specially used to sprinkle powder on painting paper to form painting manuscript. Powder book is also one of the important tools for the inheritance and development of Chinese folk New Year pictures, so it has long been paid attention to and studied by scholars of New Year pictures.

From a professional point of view, the use of traditional mural painting powder is from the aspects of painting, manuscript, etc., it exists as an important reference for folk painting. Although mural powder is not originally used for direct painting, it plays an obvious role in enlarging patterns and creating folk paintings based on the presentation of manuscript samples. For example, in the traditional wood-block New Year pictures in Shanxi, powder has a very high application value and plays a very important role in inheritance and development (Zhang, 2022, pp. 48-50).

## **Second, the Characteristics of Shanxi Traditional Wood-block New Year Pictures and Traditional Mural Paintings**

### **(1) Characteristics Analysis of Shanxi Traditional Wood-block New Year Pictures**

In Shanxi, traditional woodcut New Year pictures have a long history and are a symbol of traditional culture. In the New Year picture works, multiple elements are integrated, including natural environment elements, cultural elements and economic elements, among which cultural elements are the most prominent, reflecting the value connotation of local folk customs and folk art in Shanxi. Shanxi traditional wood-block New Year pictures have great momentum, a variety of categories, and have extremely fine craft value connotation and simple painting style, and Shanxi local characteristics are distinct. Therefore, the art of Shanxi traditional woodcut New Year pictures is popular, and in the process of development, it has truly realized the glory of the earth of Sanjin.

From the perspective of artistic expression, Shanxi traditional wood-block New Year pictures pay attention to the outline of white lines, the outline is more bold, very strong. In the process of engraving with the tool, it is very important to grasp the lines in the line engraving, which is mainly based on the full and uniform composition to adjust, forming a variety of composition forms, such as close-up form, full plate form, blank form, etc., in the narrative theme expression and color use is very special. Therefore, the traditional woodcut

New Year pictures in Shanxi show a variety of levels as a whole, and they are quite flexible in terms of art collection and expression techniques, basically forming a unique style of woodcut New Year pictures in Shanxi (Li & Zhang, 2022, pp. 107-111).

## **(2) Analysis of the Characteristics of Traditional Mural Painting**

The traditional powder tool was used in the mural art, and later it was also applied in the traditional New Year pictures, professionally known as “ash flapping” technology, it actually originated from the Gaomi New Year pictures in Shandong Province, which is still alive in China and has been inherited to the Shanxi wood block New Year pictures. In the process of using the powder tool, the traditional murals in Shanxi are mainly developed in combination with drawing drawings, in which the dynamic relationship between the characters in the picture is vivid, such as the depiction of the communication between people and the presentation of the background props is very real and can be modified repeatedly. For example, many of the traditional Shanxi woodcut New Year paintings draw on the Chinese opera New Year painting Sanchakou (Zhang Zongze) from the Republic of China. The figure proportion in this painting is dynamic, quite accurate and true, and the weaving of clothing lines is very in place, and the charm of the figure portrait is more profound. This is also an example of the traditional wood engraving New Year picture inheritance powder tool, which connects the traditional mural painting powder with Shanxi wood engraving New Year picture, forming a rather subtle multiple relationship between the two (Hu, 2022, pp. 19-23).

## **Third, Study on the Relationship between Shanxi Traditional Wood-block New Year Pictures and Traditional Mural Paintings**

The use of mural powder in Shanxi traditional wood-block New Year pictures is very skilled and in-depth, and the artistic and cultural relationship between the two is relatively subtle. The following three points are mainly discussed.

### **(1) The Relationship between the Surviving Works**

In Shanxi, a large number of traditional wood-block New Year picture works remain, and all works are hand-made, full of texture. From the traditional production process of Shanxi woodcut New Year pictures, the entire production process has to go through at least 7 processes, each process has unique techniques. These techniques not only beautify the appearance of the New Year pictures, but also full of charm, which can better reflect the important heritage value of the wood-block New Year pictures, but also show the relationship between the traditional Shanxi wood-block New Year pictures and the mural paintings.

Objectively speaking, the remains of many woodcut New Year pictures are mainly based on the profound cultural connotation of the works. For example, the Romance of *The Three Kingdoms* Woodcut New Year pictures in the late Ming Dynasty not only show the story of Guan Gong on the front walls of the two sides of the local shrine, but also write the title of the list. Moreover, the number of local New Year wood-block paintings remains more, among which the original engravings on the gable wall are completely divided into format design, among which there are as many as 30 murals of the story of *The Three Kingdoms*, each of which depicts a story of *The Three Kingdoms*, divided into 4 layers from top to bottom. Specifically, the following three layers through the mural powder painting 7, the top layer is due to the special structure of the building is

blocked, specially drawn the dividing line, which the invisible grid can frame the boundary of each painting, but the wood-block New Year picture itself and the wall are natural, mixed as one. This kind of expression of the relationship between the relics of Shanxi traditional woodcut New Year pictures is very subtle, because in the woodcut New Year pictures, it directly adopts the traditional mural powder tool, and adopts the ash painting process on the front wall of the work, which initially reflects the cultural charm of the powder book process. Specifically speaking, in the process of the creation of wood-block New Year pictures, the first use of ash manuscript, the original manuscript powder dust treatment, and then the manuscript in reverse; The next step is to make a shell and paste two sheets of thin paper together to make it easy to paint on the block. During the painting process, the expansion space is mainly reserved on the middle shell to avoid the shell being broken after being completely dried. At the same time, reserve a small part of the shell to continue the work.

From the perspective of the application of the mural powder tool, it shows that Shanxi traditional woodcut New Year pictures are quite sophisticated in the use of technology, and basically establish a subtle relationship with the traditional mural powder, each process can not be separated from each other, which also proves that the mural powder is able to retain the woodcut New Year pictures handed down to the present day, its technology is solid and excellent quality. Indirect establishment of relationship with Shanxi traditional woodblock New Year's paintings. (Li, 2022, pp. 174-180)

## (2) Drawing Chronological Relationships

In Shanxi, although the dates of many traditional wood-block New Year pictures are not clear (there is no clear written record), some New Year pictures are confirmed to be created in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The reason why we can understand the approximate age of its creation is mainly by referring to the use of the mural powder tool of the work. For example, in the Shanxi woodcut New Year pictures of the Romance of *The Three Kingdoms*, the mural powder tool of the Shangdang Temple Mural painting is used, so that the painting age of the Romance of *The Three Kingdoms* can be roughly determined.

First of all, look at the list, in the “Romance of The Three Kingdoms” woodcut New Year picture is able to see “Wanli seal” mural powder of the words, it is pointed out that the emperor Wanli God of the “Romance of The Three Kingdoms” classic character Guan Yunchang “seal”, so this excludes the possibility of mural powder this tool was used in China’s Qing Dynasty. From this, it can be inferred that the work was painted in the Ming Dynasty, which is why the image of Guan Yu has long been popular in Shanxi traditional wood-block New Year pictures. From the Ming Dynasty, the image of Guan Yu was completely given the title of “emperor” and spread among the people.

Second, look at the inscriptions, in the “Romance of The Three Kingdoms” woodblock New Year painting works specifically engraved with “Wanli Renwu Year”, because in this era, Guan Yu’s temple was created, and subsequent reconstruction and no inscriptions were retained. Referring to the use of mural paintings and stone tablets in the works at that time, it can be understood that the use of mural paintings was in the 10th year of Wanli, when the image of Guan Yu was pardoned by Emperor Shenzong as “the Emperor of Xitian”. Therefore, the creation time of “Romance of The Three Kingdoms”, a traditional Shanxi wood-block New Year picture, should not be later than the tenth year of Wanli, which also subtle established the relationship between the

mural powder tool at that time and the traditional Shanxi wood-block New Year picture, which is very worthy of further study (Wu, 2024, pp. 75-77).

### (3) The Relationship between Literary Illustrations

In Shanxi, a large number of mural works have established a relationship with the Romance of *The Three Kingdoms*, which is widely used in literary illustrations. This also shows that the literary story of the Romance of *The Three Kingdoms* is deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, so there are a large number of literary illustrations circulating among the people, truly creating the unique relationship between the two plane image systems of wood-block New Year pictures and literary illustrations.

Here, for example, is the “beheaded CAI Yang”, which is the content of the Shanxi woodcut New Year painting “Romance of The Three Kingdoms”. The mural of the same name is painted with a large number of powder tools, depicting the appearance of Guan Yu after the beheaded CAI Yang. In the mural powder, Guan Yu rides on a battle horse with a green dragon crescent knife in his hand and CAI Yang’s head in his other hand, showing his victory to Zhang Fei on the tower with awe. Here, the use of the mural powder tool is linked to the literary illustrations in the novel, and the picture layout relationship is exactly the same as that of the wood-block New Year picture (Gong, Wei, Yang, et al., 2024, pp. 60-69).

From another point of view, the creation of the wood-block New Year pictures for the Romance of *The Three Kingdoms* not only uses the mural powder, but also draws on the literary illustrations in the novel, such as “Going to the Meeting with a single sword”, “Dang Yang Po”, “Fighting Wang Zhong” and so on. Shanxi New Year wood-block pictures are widely used in literary illustrations, which make full use of mural paintings and are more flexible in spreading the literature of The Three Kingdoms.

## In Summary

In this paper, a simple analysis is made of Shanxi traditional wood-block New Year pictures and Chinese traditional mural painting powder tools. Using the creation art of New Year pictures as an intermediate medium, the two realize the interrelation between each other in the three aspects of the preservation of historical and cultural works, the time of painting and literary illustrations, and the artistic creation relationship formed is quite subtle but natural. This paper also hopes to dig deep into the history of Shanxi traditional wood-block New Year pictures, and take this opportunity to deeply understand the fresco powder with a longer history, aiming to carry forward the two cultures.

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