



Chinese Mythological Elements and Contemporary Art Works

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Abstract: "Contemporary art" is an "alternative construction" that seeks a way out in the context of "modernity". It is a work of art constructed using the way of thinking of contemporary people; it is the development of post-modern art and continues after modern art and is derived from it; it is a new concept, new form, and new path. Chinese totem aesthetic art has substantial symbolic value and significance. Among the art categories, dance dramas with mythological themes deeply explore elements of various regions, ethnic groups, and dance types and incorporate traditional dance vocabulary. A large amount of vocabulary is used in dance dramas with mythological themes. This vocabulary not only makes the dance dramas present a unique national style but also sorts out and excavates the cultural relics of different mythological themes, effectively promoting the fullness of dance dramas with mythological themes.

Keywords: *Contemporary art, Totem, Color*

1. Cultural meaning

"Contemporary art" is an "alternative construction" that seeks a way out in a "modern" context. It is a work of art constructed using the way of thinking of contemporary people; ¹it is the development of post-modern art and continues after modern art and is derived from it; it is a new concept, new form, and new path. Then, analyzed from an artistic point of view, the mythological elements and contemporary art works are embodied in the following points:

Folk myths are a genre of folk literature. They are highly imaginary stories created by people in ancient times that reflect nature, the relationship between man and nature, and social forms. Folk mythology is one type of myth, and the other is religious mythology, with supernatural and illusory coloring. Among the art categories, dance dramas with mythological themes deeply explore elements of various regions, ethnic groups, and dance types and incorporate traditional dance vocabulary. A large amount of vocabulary is used in dance dramas with mythological themes. This vocabulary not only makes the dance dramas present a unique national style but also sorts out and excavates the cultural relics of different mythological themes, effectively promoting the fullness of dance dramas with mythological themes. It embodies the cultural history and the essence of the excellent culture of the Chinese nation for more than 5,000 years. The spiritual crystallization of the wisdom of our ancestors and the ideological source and cultural soul embodies the Chinese nation's traditional culture and civilized spirit. We should take the essence and discard the dross. The

¹ Monograph Li Beilei Hao Yun Chinese Contemporary Art: Images, Concepts, Style [M] China: Shandong Education Press 2018.12

essence of Chinese mythological elements is a high-level summary of Chinese mythology and the nature of Chinese traditional culture. It contains very rich meanings and contents.

When modern artists make full use of these elements, they should not only re-copy them superficially and piece them together but should use a modern aesthetic point of view, combine tradition and the style of the times, and inherit the essence of traditional Chinese culture and art, we change the traditional way of artistic expression, use modern artistic concepts and methods to reflect on the connotation of traditional culture and art, and then draw from it the charm of traditional culture.

2. Totem Art

Totems originated from the clan period of matrilineal society. Totems played an important role in primitive society. They were the earliest signs and symbols of social organization. It has the functions of uniting groups, close kinship relations, maintaining social organizations, and distinguishing each other.

Chinese totem aesthetic art has strong symbolic value and significance from ancient times to the present. Such styling features and innovative concepts fully reflect the cultural restrictions accumulated in the lives of ordinary people throughout the ages. The artistic concept of totem aesthetics is very simple, and its simple creation method is based on the passion for a better life and does not even require the guidance of a sound and reasonable art theory. All abstract expressions are the artist's re-creation of real objects. It contains the spirit and philosophical thoughts of the traditional culture of the Chinese nation and has accumulated the most basic cultural consciousness and primitive philosophy of the Chinese nation. As a result, totem culture has a long history in China. Especially among different stone tools and national costumes, the meanings of their respective symbols are different.

In the land of China, the unique iconic patterns and other totem states of each ethnic group are also important elements often used in dance art works. According to historical records, there was no word totem in ancient China. Totem is a modern term. However, classical books have many folk customs and stories about totem art and totem worship. The country's folk totem culture first appeared in the Neolithic period, and the animal patterns on painted pottery are vibrant. Common fish patterns, bird patterns, gecko patterns, frog patterns, etc. The most famous one is the human face and fish pattern on the Yangshao Culture pottery basin, as shown in Figure 2.1 .



Figure 2.1 "Painted Pottery Basin with Human Face and Fish Pattern "

As can be seen from the picture above, the human face and fish pattern is a combination of the human face pattern and the fish pattern in an isomorphic manner. Its meaning is likely to be the merger of tribes with human faces as their totems and tribes with fish as their totems. The painted pottery basin with human face and fish pattern is 16.5 cm high

and 39.8 cm in diameter. It is made of fine clay red pottery, with an open lip and an inner wall. Two sets of symmetrical human-mask-fish patterns are painted with black paint. The human face is round, with bun-like spikes and fin-shaped decorations on the top of the head. The right half of the forehead is painted black, and the left half is black and semi-curved. The eyes are thin and straight as if they are closed. The bridge of the nose is straight, forming an inverted "T" shape. There is a deformed fish pattern on the left and right sides of the mouth. The fish head coincides with the outline of the human mouth. It seems that there are two large fish embedded in the mouth at the same time. In addition, there are also two small fish facing each other on the left and right sides of the human face and ears, forming a unique mermaid combination. Between the two human faces, two big fish are chasing each other. It reflects the working life of the Banpo people. The Banpo people live near the river and rely on fishing for food. Fish is significant to their lives. According to historical records, many fishhooks and harpoons were found at the Banpo site. Fish are also painted on the painted pottery, indicating that Banpo people hope to catch more fish, and the combination of fish and people in patterns is intended to express such a wish.

Since ancient times, one of the most common totems (dragon) of the Chinese nation has been considered to be not only a tribute to the ancestors of the Chinese nation but also an essential essence of the national history and culture. As the dignity of an ethnic minority and the symbol of a nation, the totem will profoundly impact the ethnic minority's politics, economy, culture, ideology, and behavioral patterns. By exploring totem culture, we can learn about the culture, history, customs, etc. of an ethnic minority-which is also of great practical significance for analyzing and exploring a national mythology.

Reviewing the relevant records of totem culture in many ancient books and legends in China has provided a wealth of information for future generations to study totem culture and create artistic works. For example, "The Book of Mountains and Seas" records all the astronomy and geography of distant countries, witchcraft and medicine, insects, fish, birds and beasts, flowers, plants, trees, and aliens. Images of gods, beasts, monsters, demons, and ghosts are described in greater detail in the text. "The Classic of Mountains and Seas" has an irreplaceable and important influence on the creation of mythology systems, totems, religious culture, and art creation.

Therefore, in creating contemporary art, it is necessary not only to retain and inherit the culture and expression of traditional national shapes but also to integrate modern and international art. With new ways of thinking and corresponding intervention in technology, that is, based on a profound understanding of the spirit and culture of traditional Chinese culture and art, combined with the ideas of modern artistic creation forms, only through this way of thinking can it be integrated and have a strong Only with unique national culture and national solid creative works can they be spread to all parts of the world.

3. Mythological element symbols

Mythological element symbols are the consciousness formed by an ethnic group in the process of social development and gradually shared by this group. Its performance methods are mainly manifested in the dimensions of material carriers, text inscriptions, physical practices, and commemorative rituals. The material carrier is the carrier and concrete expression of memory and is the basis of historical memory. The performance method of historical memory points to a specific meaning system, which is a symbolic way of expression. The material carrier is a concrete thing and a symbolic expression; text inscription itself is a symbolic process and result of consciousness; physical practice is an action of the body and a gesture with a specific meaning; the memorial ceremony is An action process that integrates materials, symbols, and bodies to express a specific meaning. Cassirer believes that language and symbolism are the basic characteristics of human culture, and symbolism is the main function of expressing human

consciousness and the basis for understanding human life, language, history, science, mythology, and religion.²

Based on the perspective of mythological thinking, when we think about the artistic works constructed by symbols, we can conclude that the symbols symbolize an entity, and this entity maintains a horizontal combination relationship in a certain contextual category or cultural field.³ As it is said, "Mythological thinking emerges from the depths of ancient times. It is a good teacher that we must believe in. It gives us a magnifying glass. Under this magnifying glass, certain mechanisms governed by thinking activities show huge, concrete, and figurative form⁴." For example, the legends about "gods" in ancient Greek culture deeply impact the entire Western religion and people's lives. During the European Renaissance, many literary and artistic works were created, and mythological themes occupied a large amount of space. Based on this thinking model, looking back at Chinese myths, legends, and related totem culture, these symbols are important cornerstones of Chinese national culture. Some myths and legends, such as "Nuwa patching up the sky", "Kuaifu chasing the sun" and "Houyi shooting the sun", may seem absurd and unbelievable, but their symbolic spiritual effects are indispensable to a nation. We acknowledge historical materialism, but it does not mean our culture is rigid, rational, and materialistic. Symbols are diverse and arbitrary and do not simply symbolize a certain attribute or culture. The Chinese nation has existed for five thousand years precisely because of these. The existence of mythological culture makes it dazzling. All human beings have different cultures due to political, economic, historical or regional attributes and other factors. With the advancement of social science and technology, myths and legends have turned into a dance art commonly appreciated by people and a spiritual belief almost recognized.

Therefore, mythology is extremely rich in content and form. It has distinctive Chinese artistic characteristics and is an important part of Chinese traditional culture. The market and the public increasingly accept contemporary art, so it must be integrated with Chinese folk art to achieve communication and resonance between tradition and modernity. Only by applying the connotation of traditional folk culture in artistic creation can the cultural value of our country's artistic works be enriched. Chinese mythology, with its strong and profound local ethnic characteristics, embodies the national culture and spiritual civilization that have been formed for five thousand years. The elements of Chinese mythology include folk customs from ancient times to the present, reflecting local cultural concepts and fully embodying the value of folk culture. The artistic creation form of Chinese mythological elements is restricted by folk psychology and concepts- providing a broad space for developing my country's traditional culture and art. The source of Chinese contemporary art creation is relatively supported by elements of ancient Chinese mythology, which increases the inner temperament and promotes the construction of cultural connotation and spirit. To this end, we should understand and learn traditional culture, inspire creative inspiration based on it, borrow artistic language, and display Chinese culture in combination with the new era, new ideas, and new characteristics.

4. Traditional colors

The pigments and colors in traditional art are a color experience of people's primitive instincts. It has been tempered in the long history of Chinese art and systematically summarized in conventional Chinese art's rich history and culture, forming a distinctive and dazzling decorative nature with strong artistic contrast.⁵ Suppose ancient Chinese mythological elements' unique meanings and images represent the Chinese nation's vast and mellow cultural

² Cassirer, 《The Philosophy of Signs and Their Historical Significance》

³ Monograph Dance Aesthetics in the Era of Digital Reproduction - Dialectics of History, Language and Life [M] Tang Xumei China: Agricultural Press 2022.01

⁴ A Study of the Symbol Culture of Structuralism in Tao Xiang's Mythological Thought

⁵ Monograph Liu Wen Chinese Minority Culture [M] China: Textile Publishing House 2020.08

heritage. In that case, the uniqueness of the elements we use to experience and express ancient Chinese mythology should represent the uniqueness of the Chinese nation. The traditional color art of the Chinese nation was formed in the long-term historical and cultural development and creation. It inherits the aesthetic taste of fine traditional culture and has strong visual expression and influence. Traditional Chinese color art integrates the five colors, the five elements, etc., and other natural and philosophical concepts so that they are derived and connected and embody inorganic symbolic and spiritual characteristics. Color has penetrated into the moral ethics of philosophy, and its color and language are skillfully applied to the highest realm of art, showing a healthy, bright, charming, and magnificent Chinese national style and color culture.

As a means of statement, color means more hinting and symbolizing. The symbol of color is an artistic symbol with important symbolic interest. It is closely related to China's traditional national cultural life customs, the accumulation of historical culture, and everyone's art appreciation and daily life habits. The use of painting colors that conform to contemporary Chinese traditions to create works can fully reflect and meet contemporary people's various personalized and diverse aesthetic life needs. It is the process and an important way of creating color in Chinese contemporary art.

1) In creating artworks, comprehensively use the characteristics of traditional color concepts and bring them into different characters and geographical environments. Contrasting colors have a greater visual impact, which not only conforms to the traditional Chinese folk requirements for color concepts but also fully demonstrates the artist's pursuit of ideal artistic concepts. From a macro perspective, color has an inseparable relationship in clothing, artworks, jewelry, and other artistic ranks, and each color has its meaning. For example, Van Gogh's work "Starry Night" is shown in Figure 4.1 below.



Figure 4.1 Starry Night _

Analyzing from a traditional color perspective, this painting mainly uses blue and violet but also has the yellow and dark blue tone of the stars, which gives people a heavy feeling and strengthens the darkness of the night. The cypress trees in the foreground use dark green and brown, meaning night's darkness. The use of bright white and yellow to draw the stars and the surrounding halo gives people a warm and bright feeling. Van Gogh used thick and short brushstrokes intertwined into curved rotating lines and wave-like graphics to present a dazzling fantasy scene in the painting. The swirling sky in the painting contrasts with the calm village. An orange moon shines brightly in the large area of cold-toned flowing nebulae, lighting up the silent night house like a beacon. The fantastic colors leave a deep impression on people.

It can be seen from the above works that the matching of colors is critical. The addition of colors has different effects on the works. The works will have no vitality if the color is not chosen appropriately. Color is an essential symbol of artistic works. How to use it in any work? Good color is a test for the artist.

2) In creating dance dramas with mythological themes, traditional colors are based on the design of costumes

⁶ Vincent Willem van Gogh (March 30, 1853 - July 29, 1890), Dutch post-impressionist painter.

and are symbols that reflect the nation or ethnic group. Each ethnic group in China has its own totem symbol, such as the Korean totem "crane", the Tibetan totem "Eagle", the Miao totem "Fish", the Oroqen totem "Bear", etc. Each totem represents the spiritual sustenance and life of each ethnic group. The symbols of mythological elements will also be based on the color of the clothing, which has solid characteristic attributes of Chinese culture, as shown in Figure 4.2 below



Figure 4.2 Miao costumes (totems)

From the picture above, we can see that just one piece of ethnic clothing has many colors. The combination of colors makes the clothes bright and beautiful, and the overall color combination gives people a sense of comfort. In terms of design and matching, the Miao costumes have silver ornaments all over the body and are dazzling with their skillful embroidery and characteristic batik. According to what I learned during my in-depth collection of styles in Guizhou, the main body of their clothing is black, with some other decorations and color combinations, such as embroidery, weaving, cross-stitching, and color matching. Miao clothing is mainly made of five colors (blue, black etc.), red, yellow, and white). The red petals in the middle symbolize the hope of life and a bright future. The white triangle on the edge is like a white cloud, symbolizing truth and happiness. A little yellow represents harvest and the sun's rays, and some inlaid blue lines represent simplicity and gentleness, respectively.

In short, these colors are both a symbol and a certain meaning. The exquisite costumes of the Miao people express their wisdom and diligence and carry their unique cultural content. These colors represent the Miao people's yearning and pursuit of a better life. It adds a dazzling light to Chinese clothing.

In art theaters and exhibition halls, where elegant arts are performed, the theater is often a cultural symbol of a city, a region, or even a country and nation. The auditorium is the core part of the theater, and the color matching must meet the visual and psychological needs of the audience. Good color matching in the theater auditorium can add color and splendor and give people spiritual pleasure, leaving a unique psychological feeling and an unforgettable impression.

For example, using red, orange, and yellow, which are all warm colors, in a theater is a harmonious color. The contrast between warm or cool and neutral colors is called weak contrast. The contrast between warm and cool colors is called strong contrast. As far as I know, most auditorium decoration colors use warm colors or warm colors + neutral colors, followed by contrasting colors of cold and warm colors and cold colors (or cool colors + neutral colors), and the least used are neutral colors. Red symbolizes celebration, liveliness, and auspiciousness in China and the West. Golden yellow is the color of gold, which means wealth and nobility.

For example, the Paris Opera House in France and the Royal Opera House in London, England, use velvet red as the main color (Figure 4.3), with gold veneers embedded in them, making them look magnificent. China's National Center for the Performing Arts and Guangzhou Grand Theater use red and golden yellow (Figure 4.4). Warm colors

paired with neutral colors (purple or green) look fresh and layered.



Figure 4.3 Opera House



Figure 4.4 National Center for the Performing Arts

By understanding Chinese and Western theaters, we can see that cultural ideas deeply influence China and the West and have a certain self-awareness of aesthetic construction. The presentation of contemporary artworks in theaters and exhibition halls is especially for a better understanding of aesthetics. The packaging of works of art can better allow the audience to immerse themselves in the scene. Secondly, the choice of color also requires some control. To respond to contemporary artworks, the choice of color is significant, not only for stage art works, but also for sculptures and fine artworks. In order to match the outstanding effects of the art works, color Matching is also particularly important to truly highlight the artistic value that contemporary art works bring to the audience.

5. Conclusion

In short, with time, the theater has been renovated. In contemporary art creation, it is necessary to preserve and inherit the culture and expressions of traditional folk styles and to intervene with new ways of thinking and technology, that is, based on the understanding of traditional Chinese culture and art. That is, based on a deep understanding of traditional Chinese culture and the spirit of art and culture, combined with the idea of modern forms of art creation, but also to integrate modern art and international art. To adapt to the aesthetic thinking of modern people, the color tone has been adjusted from the previous cold or dark colors to warm colors, giving people a sense of warmth. Only through this way of thinking can we integrate and create cultural and artistic works with a strong national cultural flavor. Artistic features can also spread around the world.