

The Comparison of Chinese Kites Art Deco Schools

LA COMPARAISON DES ÉCOLES DE DÉCORATION DE L'ART DE CERFS-VOLANT CHINOIS

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Abstract: Chinese kite art not only has a long history because of the long tradition of folk culture, but also has its merits because of the colorful local cultures. Kite's decorative arts are in close contact with history of various periods, cultures of all regions and various nations. It also has inextricably link with music, dance, drama, folklore, religion. In the long course of historical development of society, distinctive decorative art of kite gradually has formed all over the country. The main features of kite art schools will be compared in this article.

Keywords: kite; decoration; art schools; comparison

Résumé: L'art de cerf-volant chinois a non seulement une longue histoire en raison de la longue tradition de culture folklorique, mais aussi ses mérites en raison des cultures locales vivantes. L'art décoratif de cerf-volant est en contact étroit avec l'histoire des époques, les cultures de toutes les régions et des nations diverses. Il a aussi des liens inextricables avec la musique, la danse, le théâtre, le folklore et la religion. Au long cours de l'évolution historique de la société, l'art décoratif de cerf-volant s'est progressivement formé dans tout le pays. Les caractéristiques principales des écoles de l'art de cerf-volant seront comparées dans cet article.

Mots-clés: cerf-volant; décoration; écoles d'art; comparaison

According to historical records, during the period of Spring and Autumn Chinese Skillful craftsman Luban had "cut bamboo for the harrier, which flew into the sky no less than three days" who was inspired by the scene of sparrow hawk flying in the sky. Furthermore, his contemporary thinker and scientist Mo Di spent three years to make the wooden kite to fly in the sky. After the invention of paper-making technology in Han Dynasty, kites were made of paper, known as "paper glede." Up to the Five Dynasties, Li Ye had improved the kite by mounting the bamboo flute on the kite's head. When wind blows, kite will hum like a zither's sound, hence it was named "Kite." Kite is the carrier of folk decorative arts. At the beginning of the kite design, the unification of shape, color and pattern will be taken into account, and the long-distance and close-up visual aspects will be considered as well. There are many fixed subjects for traditional Chinese kite. Their shape and color were continuously being reformed and improved in the course of spreading forming various unique styles of kites all over the country.

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Chinese kite art not only has a long history because of the long traditional culture, but also has inextricable links with the music, dance, drama, folklore, and religion of each historical period, various region, and every ethnic group because of the rich local cultures with its own merits. As the kite artists across the country and kite makers in different sectors own different life experiences, different cultures and different levels of knowledge structure, kite production has formed a flourishing art system and different styles of genre. Different kites reflect the aesthetic taste of different countries and regions, are rich with local flavor. Gradually kites have developed a set of their own artistic languages.

Different art schools of kite have many colorful styles, but they have the same function. As the traditional folk arts and crafts, kites and Chinese new year picture are sister arts, which have a wealth of meaning and symbolic significance. New Year's exquisite designs are often adopted on the kite. It was said "picture will be meaningful, meaning will be lucky". By the metaphor and analogy, and the homophonic pun symbol of the art techniques the kite was given the meaning of seeking happiness and luck. It expresses the people's desire to avoid plague and disaster and blessing a better life. It also contains the meaning of promotion to an official position and good luck. Such as "surplus year after year", "crane deer with the spring", "100 bats get together the best".

As the art deco is concerned, distinctive kites are different in raw material, shape, color, pattern. There are many differently decorated styles of kite art school and they will be compared with each other.

1. BEIJING KITES

The Traditional Beijing kite was called Sand Martin Kite. It was drawn from the image of the wings of flying swallow. Its shape is just like the exaggerated dynamic swallow wings emphasizing the strength of the wings and tail of the scissors-shaped stretch. The shape coincides with kite structure and scientific principles. Sand Martin kite's decorative pattern also originates from swallow exaggerating the shape of the eyes and claws with strong ethnic characteristics and ornamentation.

There are many changes for Sand Martin Kite basic forms- "Fat Swallow," "Thin Swallow", "Baby Swallow", and "side by side Swallow". Folk artists in the creative process of Sand Martin Kite endured it with a wealth of emotion, tribute and affirmation of life. Beijing ballad said: "The fat as man, the lean as woman, baby as child, double swallow (side by side) as husband and wife." It is not difficult to see their own characteristics by analyzing the four kinds of sand martins. The Fat has large and strong wings, head and abdomen, large full tail, is a symbol of masculinity. The thin is slender, beautiful and delicate to show the characteristics of woman. Baby swallow has fat body with the unique, naive, innocent property just like a fat baby. The symbolism of the four kinds of Sand Martin is present in the mutual comparison and contrast, and a little more comparison can show the distinctive features and a definite moral respectively. Sand Martin has rich human touch, which is undoubtedly the reason people love it. Sand Martin kites are decorated with either monochrome or multicolor. Colored Sand Martin Kite is made by firstly drawing the sketch line of eyes, mouth and claws, wings and other major structures with color ink, and then filling painting in a variety of color patterns varying greatly. The most common way is to draw pattern on the both wings of the kite. Bat patterns are the most frequently used decorative patterns, such as "five blessings and longevity", "have great luck," "live long and proper", "long and happy life", "enjoy both happiness and longevity," and so on. Bat pattern can also become deformed to be decorated in the tail, abdomen, or even be used to substitute the mouth of Sand Martin. In addition to the bat pattern, many traditional designs have been used to decorate the sand martins, such as in the wings painted white crane is called "Bai He yan Nian (meaning white crane and longevity)", painted nine dragons claimed "a dragon with its nine sons", painted civet cats, butterflies and the peony is known as the "oldest old rich", painted plum, bamboo and chrysanthemum is known as the "four gentlemen" etc. Sand Martin's part between chest, belly and tail is also a crucial decoration area, commonly known as the "waist section" where is painted in two consecutive multi-layered patterns and is called a "multi-road waist section", which is described as "three waist section" when the painted pattern has three layers and two consecutive sides, and "five lumbar section" when five-layers painted. The victory waist section is usually originated from the traditional design patterns such as "10000 continue", "kidnapper Dragon," "cloud hook", "Palindrome", "lotus flower", "side wins," "Pan intestine", "Ruyi Hook". Waist section is compactly designed setting off the white breast and tail of Sand Martin, and has a distinct sense of rhythm.

Another famous decoration of Sand Martin kite is "anti-painting" by which a standardized-designed monochrome kite is negatively painted. This painting is like camera film production, with the originally dark areas painted in light colors and vice versa, therefore here comes another species of Beijing Sand Martin Kite- the "black bottom of the pot". Black bottom of the pot is sand martin painted in black, if painted in red or blue are called "red bottom" and "blue bottom of the pot."

The artistic shapes of Beijing kite generally have seven forms: bar swallow, hard wing, soft wing, couple, beat, strings, tube. Beijing kite has maintained an elaborate skeleton, rigorous painting, elegant, ornamental characteristics of high artistic value and style. Cao Xueqin's legacy was inherited by Beijing kite and traditional kite was decorated with Cao's design. Sand Martin kites mix human appearance with swallow, endlessly praise the beauty of life, vibrant color screen, changeable delicate brushwork, and depict the exaggerated and realistic image, at the same time pay attention to the beauty of the dynamic in the static, and adapt to the changeable and windy weather of the north with good stable release. The representative works Beijing kites are seen in Figure 1, Figure 2.



Fig 1: Beijing kite (fat)



Fig 2: Beijing kite (thin)

2. WEIFANG KITE

Weifang kites, in the long course of development with its unique artistic individuality from generation to generation, together with Beijing-style kite and Tianjin-style kite have become the three legs of a tripod. Weifang kite has gradually formed traditional styles and artistic characteristics of careful selection of material, refine shape, delicate bar-paste, vivid and colorful paintings, wide varieties, flexibility to take off. It has developed into a harmonious united whole art of the subject, form and color, forming a unified style of bar system and painting process with local characteristics. Highlighting theme in exaggerated way and enhancing the visual effect are the characteristics of Weifang kites. Weifang Kite and folk arts such as clay sculpture, embroidery, jewelry, and New year wood-block painting are sister flowers of folk art, they learn from each other and promote each other into brilliance. Weifang kites had become popular since the Song Dynasty, more spreading in Ming Dynasty. Weifang Kite is a combination of locality and traditional art, and also that of practicality and beauty. It is closely linked to the people's way of life and social customs. Weifang Kite owns rich local flavor and lively rhyme, with binding arts collected from other kinds of art, boldly attempting innovation. The methods of color paintings and New-year wood-block painting were often applied to making kite, especially on the kite's shape and structure. Traditional Chinese painting techniques have been used to design kite. These have developed the formation of a sleek, fine bar work, beautifully colored style to become an important school of kite. Its main features are as follows.

2.1. Colorful and wide-ranging subjects

The content expresses people's will and spirit in the guise of fairy tales, flowers, birds, benevolent animals, fish and insects, etc. Kite craftsmen choose the most admired subjects in myths and historical legends to be drawn on the kite, borrowing various forms of nature, such as "Dragon and Phoenix", "good luck" and so on, not only to give people the enjoyment of beauty, but also to comfort their spirit to be satisfied psychologically. Rooted in the masses, the content catering to the aesthetic needs of common people and expression of people's thoughts with ideal kites might be the fundamental reason why Weifang kite spreads as yet.

2.2. General and concise technique of expression

The prominent features in the technique of expression of the Weifang Kite are to imply the main theme by symbol and moral, and to shape the image in a general and concise way. Weifang kite adopts the symbolism technique of expression in the drawings on the New Year Pictures, such as, "fish", the symbol of "annual surplus", the "Bat" meaning "good fortune", "Crane" standing for "long life", etc. People loved the image and drew them on the kites to express their good will.

2.3. Rich, bright, vivid color

Weifang Kite absorbed the comparison technique used in wood paintings, employing red, blue, yellow, green, hue that people like to form a distinctive color style and give a refreshing feeling. Moreover it absorbed hand-painted paintings, layered color painting techniques, resulting in layered, heavy feeling to make kites more vivid and refreshing.

2.4. Simple and easy to spread bar system

Weifang kites rolled easily. It only takes three bamboos to make a flying Chunyan (spring swallow). One line is preferred in the contour. The attitude of making kites is precise, for if the kite is asymmetric it is difficult to fly to the sky and even it does fly and it will stagger to fly down. Therefore those asymmetric-shaped kites will have to be consistent in weight. Weifang kites representative works are shown in Figure 3, Figure 4.



Fig 3: Liangshan heroes Weifang kite



Fig 4: Dragon head kite

3. TIANJIN KITE

The representative figure of Tianjin Kite is Wei Yuantai, which is also called "Kite Wei". His kite is known for innovation on shape, pattern painting, flying techniques. He drills hole, binds button on the kite. He connects kite frame with head, body, wing, and floor using soldering copper hoop. Several-meter long kite can be folded into a box of the size of a paper bag, easy to carry. He made the butterfly kite in the air can be automatically transposed position, aircraft kite can distribute leaflets, and Kitty Hawk Kite can flap with wings, two eyes open and close. Outstanding performance exists in the frame bar techniques and patterns of colors. The shaping of Tianjin Kite is based on the traditional and original with the concept and painting being refreshing. "Kite-Wei" has designed a kind of wind-blowing parachute device with complicated skills but easy to make. The process of making it is that soft grass reed pipe or hard paperboard in diameter of about 10 mm is made into a straight tube to be set on the kite line, and a small parachute is hooked to the handle of a hook made of a steel wire bent into a diameter of about 1 mm. With wind blowing the parachute open, the device is driven up along the kite line. At one meter away from the kite, once the fixed horizontal copper bar meets the hook handle it moves backward to get loose from the hook, at the same time the colorful parachutes fly into the sky. Later, his student, created the "flying string", "bird-type" and the new style of kite.

Tianjin kites are rich in color and local flavor. Tianjin kites representative works are shown in Figure5, Figure 6.



Fig 5: Tianjin kite (butterfly)



Fig 6: Tianjin kite (yuanyang)

4. NANTONG KITE

Nantong kites are mainly developing via two clues, one is represented by Rugao. "Tongzhou zhi" records: "The wind kite from Rugao, based on fruits, vegetables and even pet fish and Buddha is clever. There is a row of nine geese, 13 geese which can be folded to be kept". Rugao kite is variable and distinctive in shape and pattern. Its main feature is the structure of light, fine production, bright colors, pictogram materials. It should be a pity that this kite has been rare. Qian Guiting, the representative "Rugao style" kite, was proficient in the four arts of kite "bar, paste, draw, release" and could make the exclusive one-line kite, which, however, is lost to the world.

The other one is in Nantong city & county, represented by the "kite" kite (commonly known as "board gull"). For a long time, it does not attach importance to refined scholars, is not recorded in the annals of history and rich in rural ambience, with distinct local characteristics, is a local kite to the core. The artistic style of Nantong kites can be summarized as simple shapes, the whistling devices with the symphony in high and low pitches, and elegant fine brushwork painting. The basic styles of Nantong kites can be divided into two categories of "board Harrier" and the "live Harrier". The main features are exquisite production, simple style, and vivid colors. Harrier, integrating carving, bar, calligraphy, painting, embroidery and other craft into one exquisite workmanship, is not only of highly ornamental and collective value, but also performs beautiful and stable flying, and even whistles with a variety of tones to make an harmonious and rhythmic sound, which, like a fascinating beauty in the sky with an elegant voice and countenance, flies from heaven to earth enjoying a lot of fun between people and nature. Nantong kite masterpieces are seen in Figure 7, 8, 9.



Fig 7: Happiness, social status, longevity



Fig 8: Nantong kite



Fig 9: Whistle mouth

5. JIANGNAN KITE

In many areas of Jiangnan, once the lights are down in the Lantern Festival after 18th of the first lunar month, kites are flown one after another. Ching Ming, Chung Yeung Festivals are the climax for kiting. Jiangnan kites have lots of names and various styles. Small soft-winged kite is seen everywhere. In Minnan area, the simplest kite is the "Wadao" block, which, because it is square, is also called "250" in the country. A very popular "gynophores" kite is rolled in Yangjiang County of Guangdong, which, in a height of 3 meters and with the copper top rack and a giant bow, rings with the wind at high altitudes making a voice traveling over ten miles. Another kind is called "Cliff Hawk" kite, three of which can be flown on one line with two on top and one beneath, exchanging position alternately, up and down in beautiful movement, was said to have attracted the birds in the forest who were called upon by the misconception that they were the same species. Yangjiang's "entertainment ants" Kite in a unique style with the head of associated ants in realistic shape, up to 150 sections of over ten Zhang (a Chinese length measurement), dances vividly like a snake up in the air. A small kite called "Cui'e" with more wings uses pulley along the kite line to climb to a certain height, and with suddenly flapping wings, letter incense placed in the armpit kindles the firecrackers fastened on the other side of the kite, and then with a crackling sound "Cui'e" floats down. The representative of Nanjing kite is the traditional woodblock printing kite "Double Fish" and "Road Eagle." Jiangnan kite is beautiful, elegant and full of unique Jiangnan poetic and artistic conception. Figure 10, 11.

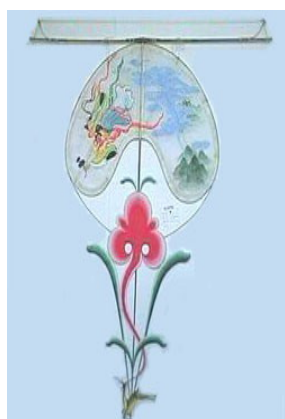


Fig 10: Jiangnan kite



Fig 11: Jiangnan kite (golden fish)

6. TAIWAN KITE

Taiwan kite is known for the soft wing shape. One is to take some wonderful line of natural objects to constitute a kite shape, and the other is an imitation of the natural world. There are 21 kinds of kites, which are peg-top, dragon, octagon, Chinatown, eagle, butterfly, dragonfly, goldfish pick, double fish, petrel, seven stars, seagull, palace lantern, flying tiger, centipede, big butterfly, big colorful butterfly and so on. But the most famous is the butterfly kite.

The features of Taiwan kite's shape are: stressed characteristics, generalization and simplification, deformation and exaggeration. In shaping, the kite artists who design their own kites strengthen the features of shape and structure and give a sense of rhythm and a vivid atmosphere, which allows people to sympathize and associate at the first sight of the shape. The formation of Taiwan butterfly kite style is related to local folk customs and natural environment. According to the folk legend of "goose butterfly kite", kite artists create a moiré strung butterfly kite. Influenced by the butterfly kite, the phoenix and peacock kites are rolled to exaggerate its beautiful tail by being added colorful tassels similar to ribbon to reinforce the meaning of good fortune. Soft-winged Goldfish Kites are mostly decorated with exaggerated big eyes, small waist and long tail with lots of fun. Taiwan's kite representative works are seen in Figure 12, 13.



Fig 12: Taiwan kite (butterfly)



Fig 13: Taiwan kite

Chinese kite, as a special folk art, is related to painting, binding, natural science, folk customs, entertainment and many other aspects. Kite art, as a folklore symbol, achieves the harmonious integration of human, art, and nature. Up to now kite decorative arts combine traditional Chinese aesthetic consciousness with modern shaping element perfectly. Different art schools of kites enhance each other's beauty. Various artistic schools of kites have distinctive features and compete with each other for beauty, reflecting the various aesthetic characteristics of different regions and cultures and inheriting various local folklore cultures. In general, Beijing kite and Weifang kite are representatives of the Northern Kites, from decorative patterns to shaping, appearing vigorous, bold, colorful and strong. The kites in the South seem light, delicately beautiful, fresh in color, elegant, uniquely poetic. Lots of schools of kite art mix together and interact, which jointly form the splendid Chinese kite culture and art.

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