

Research on the Evolution of Horse Images in Korqin Prints

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Abstract

This study explores the artistic evolution and cultural connotations of the horse images in the Khövsgöl woodblock prints. By analyzing the creative characteristics of different periods, it reveals the transformation process of the horse image from concrete representation to abstract symbol. The research finds that the horse images in the Khövsgöl woodblock prints not only maintain the core spirit of Mongolian traditional culture but also continuously innovate their expression forms with the development of the times. This evolution reflects the artists' inheritance and innovation of ethnic culture and demonstrates the adaptation and development of traditional art in the contemporary context. The research provides useful references for understanding the modern transformation of minority art and has implications for the innovation of traditional art.

Keywords

Korqin woodcut; horse image; artistic evolution; cultural inheritance; ethnic art

1. Introduction

The Korqin woodblock prints, as an important representative of Mongolian traditional art, have unique depictions of horses and an evolution process with significant research value. Horses hold a special place in Mongolian culture; they are not only essential for nomadic life but also a spiritual symbol of the national culture (Ulan Tuya, 2023). This study focuses on the evolution process of horse images in Korqin woodblock prints. By analyzing representative works from different periods, it explores the changes in their artistic expression forms and cultural connotations. Existing research mostly concentrates on the symbolic meaning of horse images in Chinese paintings (Zheng Shiqin, 2014) or the comparison of Chinese and Western horse art (Gong Chunhu, 2016), but there is a lack of systematic research on the evolution of horse images in this specific art form of Korqin woodblock prints. This article aims to fill this gap by tracing the development history of Korqin woodblock prints, analyzing the changes in composition, techniques, and symbolic meanings of horse images, providing a new perspective for understanding the changes in Mon-

golian art and culture.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on Horse Images in Chinese Painting

In Chinese painting, the study of horse images has yielded considerable results. From the perspective of historical development, horses as a subject for painting can be traced back to the period of the Two Jin Dynasties, and through the independent establishment of saddle-horse paintings in the Tang Dynasty, a unique artistic tradition was formed (Zhang Xin Yue, 2023). In terms of image representation, researchers have noticed significant differences in horse images in different periods, such as the thin horse images that emerged in the Yuan Dynasty and the Qing Dynasty (Miao Yuteting, 2023), as well as the symbolic meaning of horse images in literati paintings (Zhang Jianguo, 2020). These studies reveal the close connection between horse images and the development of Chinese society and culture.

In terms of expression techniques, the art of Chinese painting of horses has formed a unique language system. Gao Liang (2015) pointed out that Chinese painting emphasizes linear structure and the expressive power of brush and ink, which contrasts sharply with the focus on anatomical structure in Western painting. Gong Chunhu (2016)'s research further compared the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western horse paintings, arguing that although the forms of expression are different, there are similarities in capturing the spirit of the horse. With the development of the times, the representation of horse images in Western art forms such as oil painting has also attracted attention (Peng Jiali et al., 2013), providing new references for traditional Chinese horse painting art.

2.2. Research on Artistic Characteristics of Korqin Ink Painting

Korqin ink painting, as a representative of Mongolian art, has unique cultural connotations and artistic value. Ulan Tuya (2023)'s research systematically reviewed the development history of Korqin ink painting, indicating its close connection with Mongolian daily life. In terms of artistic expression, Korqin ink painting has formed distinct ethnic characteristics, and Wang Yongbo (2018) specifically analyzed its unique composition methods, believing that it integrates the composition rules of traditional Chinese painting, Western painting, and minority art.

Contemporary Korqin ink painting faces challenges in inheritance and development. Bao Jiawei (2022)'s research pointed out that in the face of the impact of diverse cultures in modern society, Korqin ink painting needs to find new development paths. In the field of education, some scholars have attempted to introduce Korqin ink painting into middle school art classes (Chang Lingling, 2018), providing new possibilities for the inheritance of ink painting. Zhang Yanxin et al. (2018) explored the strategies and methods for the dissemination of Korqin ink painting from the perspective of public awareness.

2.3. Summary of Literature Review

By reviewing the existing literature, the following research gaps can be identified: Firstly, research on Korqin ink painting mostly focuses on the overall artistic characteristics or inheritance issues, lacking specialized discussions on specific themes such as horse images (Ulan Tuya, 2023; Bao Jiawei, 2022). Secondly, although the study of horse images in Chinese painting is relatively sufficient (Zhang Xin Yue, 2023; Zheng Shiqin, 2014), these achievements are difficult to directly apply to this specific art form of Korqin ink painting. Finally, existing research has not systematically examined the evolution process of horse images in Korqin ink painting and the changes in its cultural connotations. This study will focus on the evolution of the expression forms and cultural connotations of horse images in Korqin ink painting, answering these questions and providing new perspectives for the study of Korqin ink painting, while enriching the understanding of Mongolian art and cultural development.

3. Evolution of Horse Image in Korqin Woodcuts

3.1. Horse Image of Initial Stage

When the Kolchin folk art of printmaking began to take shape, the image of horses presented a distinct realistic feature. The 1962 work "Milking Cows" created by Yimu Sheleng was a typical representative of this period. The piece depicted the labor scene of the herdsmen and the horses with precise modeling. The Mongolian horses in the picture were robust in body, with distinct muscle lines, and the details of the horse's tail and mane were particularly finely handled. The 1973 work "Giving Birth to Foals" by Shandan also reflected this realistic style. The dynamic capture of the horses was accurate, and they formed a stable triangular composition with the characters.

During this stage, the creation mainly employed woodcut techniques, with a simple and robust knife style. The contrast between black and white was intense, and the volume of the horses was expressed through delicate line arrangements. The use of colors was relatively restrained, with natural tones such as ochre and ultramarine being the main colors, emphasizing the narrative nature of the picture. The horses in the works were often in labor scenes, such as herding horses and transporting goods, reflecting their actual functions as production tools. The composition often adopted a level-view perspective, with a simple background, highlighting the main image. This style of expression was closely related to the artistic creation concept at that time that advocated reflecting real life.

3.2. Style Transformation during the Development Period

With the change in artistic concepts, the horse images in the Korqin woodcuts began to break away from the realistic framework. In Uunqi's 1985 work "The Sisters on

the Grassland", although the horse's image maintained the basic anatomical structure, the lines were more smooth and expansive, and the form was appropriately exaggerated. In Tian Hongtu's 1992 work "The Shepherdess", an attempt was made to geometrically process the horse, and the curves of the head and neck had decorative implications. During this period, the works began to focus on expressing the symbolic meaning of the horse rather than just its practical function.

In terms of techniques, the introduction of screen printing has enriched the color expression. For instance, Baoli Dao's "Return from Pasture" in 1998 uses high-purity color blocks, breaking through the limitations of naturalistic color. The composition also shows more innovations, such as diagonal layout and asymmetrical balance, enhancing the dynamic of the picture. The image of the horse gradually departs from the specific labor scenes and becomes an independent artistic symbol. The theme expression also shifts from simply recording life to contemplating the cultural aspects of the grassland, reflecting the maturity of the artist's artistic language.

3.3. Contemporary Image of Horses

Since the new century, the representation of horses in the Khölgän woodcuts has shown a diversified trend. Ujichev's "Rushing Grassland" in 2016 simplified the image of the horse to the extreme, using repetitive curved lines to depict the galloping of the herd of horses. Young woodcut artists placed more emphasis on individual expression. For instance, Geriletu's "Trace" series in 2020 employed a combination of mixed materials for collage, deconstructing the traditional image of the horse. The application of digital technology has also expanded the possibilities of expression. Some works attempted to combine woodcuts with images.

In terms of cultural connotation, contemporary creations present two main orientations: one is to trace back to tradition, such as Alatanqirgige's "Long Live Heaven" series in 2018, which drew inspiration from Mongolian mythology; the other is to focus on reality and reflect the cultural changes during the urbanization process, such as Mengkebaikal's "Urban Pastoral Song" in 2022. Although the forms of expression vary, the essence that the horse is the core symbol of national cultural identity has not changed. Contemporary Khövsgöl painters, while innovating in form and language, have always maintained a profound understanding and inheritance of the Mongolian horse spirit.

4. Cultural Connotations of Horse Images inKorqin Woodcuts

4.1. Visual Expression of Nomadic Civilization

The horse images inKorqin Woodcuts vividly demonstrate the essence of Mongolian nomadic culture. In Imsheeleng's "Milky Fragrance" created in 1965, the gentle mother horse and the milkers form a harmonious scene, highlighting the practical value of horses in nomadic life. Shandan's "New Soldiers on the Grassland" from

1975, through the combination of a fine horse and a young herdsman, showcases the close bond between humans and horses. These early works truthfully record the significant role of horses as transportation and production assistants.

As the creation evolved, the horse image gradually became a cultural symbol. In Wuenqi's "Sisters on the Grassland" from 1985, the vigorous posture and spirited stance of the horses symbolize the indomitable spirit of the Mongolian people. Baolidao's "Return at Dusk" from 1999, through the returning herd of horses under the setting sun, conveys a yearning for traditional nomadic life. Despite their diverse styles, these works all convey the core values of grassland culture through the image of the horse. In terms of visual language, Korqin Woodcuts artists have developed a unique expression method. Smooth lines outline the elegant contours of the horses, strong black and white contrasts highlight their power, and the repeated appearance of horse herds implies the cohesion of the nation. These artistic treatments elevate the horse image beyond simple representation, making it a visual symbol of nomadic civilization.

4.2. Interpretation of National Spirit in the Modern Era

The horse images in Korqin Woodcuts reflect the social conditions and spiritual pursuits of different periods. Early works such as "Milky Fragrance" and "New Soldiers on the Grassland" mainly showcase the practical functions of horses, embodying the down-to-earth spirit of hard work. In the development period, works like "Sisters on the Grassland" and "Return at Dusk" focus more on the spiritual temperament of horses, reflecting the cultural confidence of the Mongolian group after the reform and opening up.

Entering the 21st century, the interpretation of the horse image has become diverse. Suhebaatar's "The Sky" series in 2017 combines horses with traditional Mongolian patterns, exploring cultural roots. Handaiqin's "Traces" series in 2019 uses abstract horse images to express cultural thoughts in a modern context. Mengkebayaer's "Urban Nadam" in 2021 places traditional horse images in an urban setting, exploring issues of cultural adaptation. These evolutions indicate that Korqin Woodcuts artists have always responded to contemporary issues through the image of the horse. Regardless of the form, the core values of the "horseback spirit" - freedom, bravery, and tenacity - have always run through the creations of different periods, becoming an important bond of national identity.

4.3. Contemporary Development of Artistic Traditions

The evolution of horse images in Korqin Woodcuts demonstrates the innovative development path of traditional art. In terms of techniques, from early woodcuts to contemporary mixed media, the means of expression have been continuously enriched. Handaiqin's "Traces" series attempts to combine digital technology with traditional woodcuts, expanding the possibilities of expression. Suhebaatar incorpo-

rates metal materials in "The Sky", endowing the works with new textures. In terms of cultural dissemination, Korqin Woodcuts has expanded its influence through exhibitions, education, and other channels. In the "Grassland Long Song - ContemporaryKorqin Woodcuts Exhibition" in 2022, works such as "Urban Nadam" sparked widespread discussions, demonstrating the vitality of traditional art in the contemporary era. These practices indicate thatKorqin Woodcuts is exploring a development path that respects tradition while facing modernity.Korqin Woodcuts artists have a profound understanding of tradition. As Wuriqiefu said in a lecture at Inner Mongolia University in 2018: "What we pursue is not the resemblance of the horse, but the visual presentation of the nomadic spirit." This understanding enables the image of the horse to continuously acquire new artistic expressions while maintaining its cultural authenticity.

5. Conclusion

The study on the evolution of the horse images in the Khölgüen woodcuts presents a complete trajectory of this art form's transition from tradition to the contemporary era. Through the analysis of representative works from different periods, we can clearly observe the artistic transformation of the horse image from concrete realism to abstract symbols. This evolution is not merely a simple form innovation, but profoundly reflects the self-adjustment and development of Mongolian culture in modern society. Research shows that the horse images in Khölgüen woodcuts always maintain the stability of their cultural core. Whether it is the horse as a labor tool in the early works or the horse as a cultural symbol in contemporary creations, they all carry the Mongolian people's pursuit of freedom and courageous spirit. Artists continuously explore through art, enabling this traditional theme to continuously gain new expressiveness and contemporary significance. This research provides an important case for understanding the contemporary development of minority art. Khölgüen woodcuts, while maintaining ethnic characteristics, actively respond to the creative practices of contemporary issues, and has inspiring value for the innovation and development of other traditional arts. Future research can further explore the acceptance of such works by the audience and the new possibilities brought by digital technology to traditional woodcuts.

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