

Unveil the Mystery of Beijing Carved Lacquerware

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She was born in Beijing, China in 1947. In 1963, she was admitted to Beijing Arts and Crafts School and started learning ivory carving for four years. Since been assigned to the carved lacquer workshop of Beijing Arts and Crafts Factory in 1968, she had to start learning lacquer carving from the beginning. Nevertheless, the four years experience in ivory carving provided her strong foundation and inspiration, especially in figure formation. She devoted her career into lacquer carving for more than forty years. She was awarded the title of “Master of Chinese Arts and Crafts” in 2006, and “The Representative of Carved Lacquer Artistry of the Fourth Batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritor” in 2012.

What distinguishes Carved Lacquerware from Carved Bambooware, Woodware and Ivoryware is its medium. The medium of Carved Lacquerware is not of a certain mono simplex texture, but a carrier that bears the weight of Carved Lacquerware, a traditional art of the Chinese nation. Starting from the sap that streams out of the lacquer tree, the natural lacquer, to the processed matrix for carving, the carrier is loaded with so much diligence and intelligence of ancient lacquer artisans, which makes itself another important invention in the history of China. On the level of science and technology, from lacquer making to lacquer coating, the whole technical process involves multiple courses of study, in conformity to modern theories of science and technology, and with rich technical contents.

The medium is resourceful in cultural connotations. From visual perception, the redness modulated from lacquer is not the color of any particular kind of red. The required red color must be both pure and implicit; resplendent and elegant. It should not be frivolous, coquettish, or bloody, which is less probable. This visual orientation is embodied in the consensus in the color perception of the Chinese civilization. It is not only aesthetic but also cultural. For this reason, the red color used by “Beijing Carved Lacquerware” was ultimately freeze-framed in the “Royal Scarlet” that contains rich cultural information as well as historical significance. The pure bright red, integrated with lacquer has become, as the years flowed on, all the more moderate and generous, ruddy and rosy, solid and sound. She is attached onto the appearance of the lacquer implements which stress decorous elegance. Incorporated with exquisite and degage modus of carving blade, she has become the most distinct cultural element in “Beijing Carved Lacquerware”, the imperial art and craft with profound historical origin. Such art and craft and its products should inevitably pursue luxury and the grand breadth of spirit as a whole, which must necessarily be of very high technical requirements.

On The First Danger of Carved Lacquerware - Lacquer Making

Recent years has seen gratifying situations in the Arts and Crafts Industry of Beijing after the implementation of the State Council’s “Conservation Regulations on Traditional Arts and Crafts” and the “Conservation Provisions on Traditional Arts and Crafts of Beijing”. Nonetheless, from the perspective of permanent development, there are still some concerns to be worried about the trade.

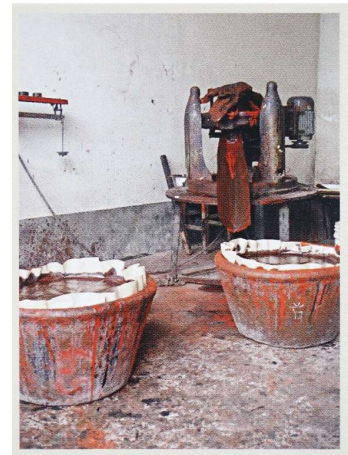
Beijing Carved Lacquerware is a big brand name of the Arts and Crafts Industry of Beijing, as one of the “Four Greatest Stars” that are well recognized

by practitioners in the industry. Enjoying equal popularity as Ivory-carving, Jade-carving and Cloisonne Enamel, Carved Lacquerware should be the pride of the people in Beijing, as a matter of fact, it should more be the pride of all the people in China, for it is the unique Chinese art and craft throughout the world. Ivory-carving in Japan and in the West is just as good as it is in China. France is the hometown of Cloisonne Enamel. And Jade-carving is even more popular. Most of the countries that produce jade stones have their own processing techniques and carve jade art works with different styles. Only Carved Lacquerware was natively born in China with a pure Chinese blood origin. During thousands of years of practice, the Chinese have promoted the art of Carved Lacquerware to an unprecedented height, which is an undisputable fact. Unfortunately, this brand name of Beijing Art is not wholly known by the people inside Beijing, let alone those outside the city.

Not long ago, I went to Hong Kong and Macau to attend some celebrating activities for the 10th Anniversary of Hong Kong's Homecoming to China and exhibited the art of Carved Lacquerware on some public occasions. Without exception, everyone on the spot marveled and applauded this fine and exquisite art. However, it was a pity that almost no one knew what it is. Many, out of curiosity, picked up the scraps and asked me, "What kind of wood is it?" "Is this rubber?" This explained that what we have done in spreading traditional Chinese culture and art is by far insufficient. We still have a long way to go in guiding our efforts towards conserving and inheriting the intangible cultural heritage of Carved Lacquerware. To my point of view, we should devote more efforts in publicizing it in media and promote universality and diversity of publicity and down to the effects. It should even be included in the national primary education and into high school and elementary school textbooks so that the genes of culture and art of the Chinese people will be known by more fellow countrymen.

From the perspective of the current situation of the industry itself, Carved Lacquerware does not allow the slightest optimism. There are just about 100 practitioners in Beijing Carved Lacquerware. Aging and lack of successors of the workforce turns out to be one of the most worrisome problems of the trade.

To start from the craftwork of lacquer making, it is completely passed on by the master's word of mouth and demonstration of examples. The changing factors, including the different environments in which lacquer trees grow and yield lacquer sap, the varieties of the quality of lacquer excipients and the changes in weather temperature and humidity, make the craftwork of producing "coating lacquer" hardly controllable, and the drying characteristics of lacquer, greatly variable. It is absolutely impossible to master these experience and technique without years or even more than ten years of practice. At present, the number of practitioners is pitifully small who are engaged in the work of lacquer making, and all of them are over 60 years of age. Inheritance



Filtering Equipments



Lacquer Coloring Process



<Cinnabar (Carved Red Lacquer) “Manjushri” Plate>

Diameter: 42cm.

2009, was chosen to be “The Chinese National Treasure of Art”.

2011, was exhibited in China (Zhejiang) Intangible Cultural Heritage Expo and rewarded the silver medal.

of lacquer making technique has become a pressing issue that should not be neglected.

The art of Carved Lacquerware has over a thousand years of history. How to pass it on by our generation remains a serious issue. “Lacquer” is of fundamental importance in Carved Lacquerware. It is also the substrate that demonstrates the charm of carving in Carved Lacquerware, and therefore, sufficient attention should be paid to it.

On The Second Danger of Carved Lacquerware - Lacquer Coating

“Lacquer Coating”, commonly known as Coating Paint, is referred to as Lac varnish by practitioners in the trade. The lacquer used for Carved Lacquerware is a “Covering Paint” made from highly purified natural lacquer added with boiled tung oil and dyestuff. As viscosity of the covering paint is extremely high, no spraying equipments can be used in lacquer coating. Only applicable is manual operation, which has its unique working process and techniques that are distinct from other generic coatings. Artisans first dip a mess of silk into lacquer, then rub it hard on the substrate object, apply the paint evenly and finally level the paint hard with a lacquer pin, a special traditional tool used for Lac varnish, to complete one layer of Lac varnish before sending the lacquer substrate into the drying room to dry. The drying room is airtight, installed with sprinkling and thermostatic equipments to maintain fixed indoor temperature and humidity. It takes one layer of Lac varnish 6 to 8 hours to get dry in the drying room. Then another layer of lacquer, and another drying process, so repeatedly until sufficient thickness has been built up for carving. The thicker the coating, the longer the Lac varnishing process takes. One millimetric thickness requires 20 layers of paint. In Beijing region, usually, only one layer can be coated in a day, so it takes nearly 20 days for the layers to build up the one millimetric thickness. The Carved Lacquerware, Screen of Legend of Goddess Luohe River is nearly 10 millimetric thick. Its Lac varnishing alone took approximately 200 days. During this lengthy process, no jerry-build could have existed, since the slightest negligence would result in accumulated undrying lacquer or peeling layers.

Such complicated manual labor, in addition to dirty and inferior working conditions, has left only a few Lac varnish veterans on the job, and with no succeeding workers behind. The technique of Lac varnish is all taught with word of mouth and personal experience. With no apprentices to teach, this technique is undoubtedly at the edge of imminent danger.

On The Third Danger of Carved Lacquerware - Lacquer Carving

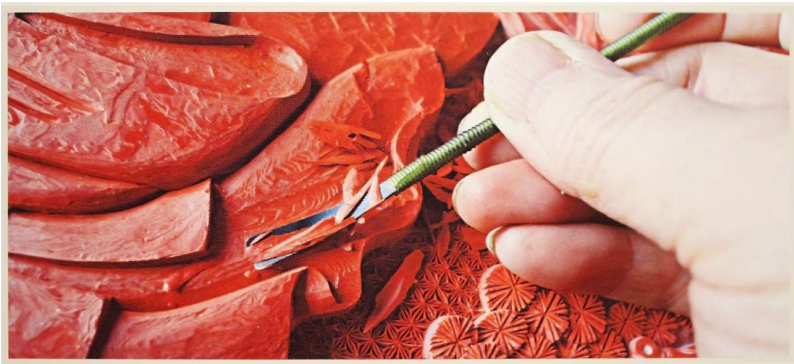
Lacquer Carving is the key process in Carved Lacquerware, as well as the essence of the Carved Lacquerware art. It is divided into upper work and lower work, the former includes skills like pricking, removing, shoveling, slicing etc, which are used to depict the Main Body of decorations; while the latter



Lacquer Coating Process



Lacquer Coating Process



focuses on detailed carving including mosaic, housing cornerstones and dragon scale. Mosaic decorations, also called “the mosaic ground”, for instance, includes as many as 50 to 60 different kinds of carving designs on sky, land and river and as fine and exquisite as silk threads.

Each step of lacquer carving requires a man to temper himself for a long time before he can obtain any real skills.

In addition to being skillful in carving, a good carving craftsman must also know about the art of anaglyphy including internal relations between its gradations, levels, depth, distance and perspectives, and some knowledge and techniques about cubic sculpture as well. It takes a man 10 years or even longer to attain through practice a pair of hands with cleverness and spirit. Nothing shorter! Potentiality of carving techniques is endless. One has to learn to endure the loneliness and poverty in order to learn lacquer carving.

At present, there are less than 100 craftsmen who are engaged in carving in the Beijing Carved Lacquerware industry. They are already old and aging with few apprentices. Ten years from now, the crisis of lack of successors will have become more critical. ■

揭开北京雕漆神秘的面纱

殷秀云（北京工艺美术厂）

关键词：髹漆 雕刻 北京

雕漆与竹、木、牙雕的最大区别是在雕刻的介质上。雕漆的介质不是某一单一的材质，而是承载了中华民族传统雕漆艺术的载体。这个载体从漆树流动出来的乳汁——天然大漆，到加工成为可供雕刻的母体，承载了古代漆工太多的勤劳与智慧，是中国历史上又一项重要的发明创造。从科技层面看，从制漆到髹漆，整个工艺过程涉及学科众多，符合现代科技理论，技术含量丰富。

这个载体文化内涵丰富，从视觉感受来说，大漆调制的红色，不是哪一种红都可以的，它需要的红色既纯正，又含蓄，既艳丽，还要典雅，不能是轻薄的红，也不能是妖艳的红，更不能是血腥的红。这一视觉取向蕴含了华夏文明在色彩观念上的共识，它是审美性质的，更是文化性质的。正因为如此，“北京雕漆”使用的红色，才最终定格在那个蕴含了丰富的文化信息和历史意义的“大红”上面。那纯正的大红，与大漆融为一体，随着岁月流逝，愈加温厚、红润和坚实。她附着在讲求周正、雍容的器物品貌上，配合着精细而又从容的刀法，成为“北京雕漆”这一深富历史渊源的皇家工艺中最鲜明的文化因素。这样的工艺及其制品，在整体上必然是追求华贵、端庄的大气魄，也必然具有很高的技术要求。

说雕漆濒危之一“制漆”

近年来，通过深入贯彻落实国务院《传统工艺美术保护条例》和《北京传统工艺美术保护办法》，北京工艺美术出现了可喜的局面。但是从行业长久发展的角度看，还有一些令人担忧的地方。

北京雕漆是北京工艺美术行业的大品牌，它是行内公认的“四大名旦”之一，与象牙雕刻、玉雕和景泰蓝齐名，应该是北京人的骄傲，实际上它更应该是中国人的骄傲，因为北京雕漆是中国在世界上唯一独有的手工艺术。而牙雕，东洋和西洋的雕刻艺术不比我们逊色，景泰蓝的故乡是法国，玉雕则更为广泛，大凡在世界上生产玉石的国家都有自己的加工技术和不同风格的玉雕艺术品。只有雕漆是中国土生土长，保持中国传统纯净血脉的独苗。中国人在千百年的实践中把雕漆艺术推向了登峰造极的高度，这是不争的事实，但很可惜的是，我们北京的品牌艺术并不完全被北京人认识，更不用说北京以外的国人了。

前不久我曾到香港和澳门参加香港回归祖国十周年的庆祝活动，在一些公众场合表演雕漆制作工艺，在现场，凡是见到的人无不被这种精美的艺术惊叹、叫绝，但遗憾的是几乎没有人知道它是什么，很多好奇的人，捡起我刻下的漆渣问：“这是什么木头？”、“是橡胶吗？”这说明我们对中国传统文化艺术的宣传还远远不够，对雕漆这一非物质文化遗产的保护和传承在导向方面的工作还任重道远。我认为应该加大媒体的宣传力度，提高宣传的普及性和多样性，注重宣传效果，甚至应纳入国家初级教育，进入中、小学课本，让更多国人了解中华民族的文化艺术的基因。

另外从行业本身的现状看也不容乐观。北京雕漆现在的从业人员也就有百十人，年龄老化、后继乏人是最令人堪忧的问题之一。

先从制漆工艺说起，是完全以师傅口传身教来传承的，由于大漆来源于生长不同环境的漆树、大漆的辅料质量存在各种差异，加之天气温度、湿度等因素的变化，使兑制“罩漆”的工艺难于控制，使漆的燥性、有很大差异，要掌握这些经验和技能没有几年甚至十几年的实践是根本不可能的。目前从事制漆的工人更是少得可怜，而且也都是年过六十的花甲老人了，制漆技术的传承已成为不应忽视的紧迫问题。

有一千多年历史的雕漆艺术如何在我们这一代传承下去，这是一个很严峻的问题，“漆”是雕漆的根本，是雕漆展现雕刻魅力的载体，必须给予足够的重视。

说雕漆濒危之二“髹漆”

“髹漆”，俗称涂漆，现在雕漆行内称光漆。雕漆使用的漆是高纯度的天然大漆加熟桐油和染料的“罩漆”。由于罩漆黏度极大，不能借助喷涂设备，只能手工操作。这种手工操作，有独特工序、技法，有别于一般的涂漆。由工匠用丝团蘸漆，用力在胎体上搓揉，均匀一致地把漆涂上，再用漆捻（一种专用的传统的光漆工具）用力顺平，即完成一道（一层）的光漆，后将漆胎送进窰室进行干燥。

窰室是密闭的，内有喷淋恒温设备，保持室内一定的温度和湿度。

光漆一道（一层）在窰室中一般需要6到8小时才可干燥，然后再光一道，再进窰室干燥，如此反复，一直光到雕刻所需的厚度。厚度越厚，光漆所用的时间愈长。一毫米的厚度，一般需要近二十道漆，北京地区一般一天只能光一道漆，因此将漆光到一毫米的厚度就需要近二十天的时间。《洛神赋雕漆屏风》漆厚近10毫米，仅光漆工序就耗时近200天。在漫长的时间里，不能有任何的“偷工减料”，否则稍一疏忽就会出现漆层窝浆不干，或漆层剥落的现象。

如此繁复的手工劳动，加上工作环境脏差，现在北京可数的几个老漆工还在岗工作外，已无后继者。光漆技艺，全凭口传身授，无徒可带，岂不是到了濒危的边缘。

雕漆濒危之三“雕刻”

“雕刻”是雕漆的关键工序，是雕漆艺术的精华，分为上手活和下手活。上手活包括刺、起、铲、片、钩等，主要是刻画图案的主体部分；下手活有锦纹、房座、龙鳞等细部的刻画。锦纹雕刻，也称“锦地”，“锦地”有天、地、水的多种纹饰达五、六十种，精细如丝。

雕刻的每个环节都需要长期实践才能磨练出真功夫。

一个好的雕工，不仅有一手熟练的刀功，还要懂得浮雕艺术的层次、高低、深浅、远近、透视等内在关系，和一些立体雕塑的知识和技法。练就出一双有灵气的手，没有十年，甚至更长的时间，是不可能的。雕刻技艺的功力是无止境的。学习雕刻要耐得住寂寞与清贫。

现在，北京雕漆从事雕刻的人员不足百人，年龄均以老化，青年徒工不多，这样下去再过10年，后继无人的危机将会愈加严重。 ■