

An Analysis of The Artistic Features and Cultural Connotation of The Bronze Mirror Decoration in Tang Dynasty

-- Taking the Grape Mirror of Sea Beast as an example

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Abstract: Bronze mirrors played an indispensable role in the development history of Chinese ancient arts and crafts. It plays a pivotal role in the whole cultural system. Its shape and decorative patterns embody the essence of Chinese traditional culture, and at the same time, it is the product of the comprehensive influence of political, economic and cultural elements in the specific historical period, and with the progress of society and the development of the era, it shows the unique artistic style and characteristics. As an ancient creature image, sea beasts have a close relationship with bronze mirrors. They not only reflect the yearning and pursuit of beautiful things at that time, but also reflect the unique ideas and aesthetic taste of Chinese people. This article takes the decoration theme of the Tang Dynasty sea animal grape mirror as the entry point and probes into its decorative art features and cultural connotation.

Keywords: Bronze mirror, Ornamentation, Sea animal grape mirror.

1. Introduction

The artistic features of bronze mirror decoration will change with the changes of the social and cultural environment in which people live. At the same time, people would also apply their own conceptualization thoughts to the creation of bronze mirrors, so that the bronze mirror contains its special cultural connotation. Therefore, by understanding the historical process track of the bronze mirror, changes in ideological concepts, cultural belief connotation and other aspects, we can better understand the cultural connotation expressed in the bronze mirror decoration. Take the grape mirror of sea animal as an example.

Sea beasts are a common theme of expression in ancient Chinese art, which originates from the traditional Chinese green dragon, white tiger, Zhu finch, Xuanwu four gods and other gods. In the Sui and Tang dynasties, the mysterious and symbolic themes of the gods and the four gods gradually evolved into the lively, interesting and humane auspicious beasts. The shape of the animal is mostly based on the physical characteristics of animals. Some of its shapes resemble balls of flesh (lion), foxes or horses. It is sometimes combined with Luan bird, peacock, bee and butterfly, and is called "Rui Beast", "sea beast" or "Luan Beast". Grapes, also known as peach, originated in Europe, America and Central Asia, and came from the Western regions via the Silk Road during the Han Dynasty. Grape ornamentation was popular in ancient Persia, Byzantine Empire, is the symbol of the Western regions.[1] As early as in the Eastern Han Dynasty, there were records of grape ornamentation on textiles. In the Sui and Tang Dynasties, especially in the middle and early Tang Dynasties, grape ornamentation flourished and was widely used in textile, carving and casting decoration. In cultural history, grapes and pomegranates are similar, with the meaning of "more children and more happiness". Craftsmen combined the Chinese traditional sea animal pattern with grape pattern and extensively applied it to the cast mirror

pattern, which is a reflection of the eclectic characteristics of Tang culture. With the continuous influx of different ethnic groups and local cultures, the Tang Dynasty absorbed fresh species from all over the world. Grape patterns emerged at the historic moment and were then used on the back of the Tang mirror and became well-known to the world.

The sea animal grape mirror developed and matured gradually in the period of Emperor Gaozong of the Tang Dynasty, and was the most popular in Wu Zetian period. It has been circulated for a long time, and imitations have appeared in successive dynasties after the Tang Dynasty. [2] The mirror made of the combination of sea animal pattern and grape pattern is one of the most typical styles of Tang Dynasty bronze mirror, which is called "the mirror that condenses the Eurasian civilization" and "the mirror with many mysteries" by Japanese scholars. Among the Tang mirror works that can best reflect the atmosphere of the prosperous times is the Sea Animal Grape Mirror. Whether it is ornamental composition or aesthetic thought, the Sea animal Grape mirror can be regarded as the peak of Chinese bronze mirror.

2. The Shape and Artistic Characteristics of The Sea Animal Grape Mirror Decoration

The sea animal grape mirror, also known as the auspicious animal grape mirror, is the first bronze mirror in the Tang Dynasty and the most typical bronze mirror variety in the Tang Dynasty. Similar to the animal grape mirror, Luan grape mirror and so on. According to the different shape structure, the sea animal grape mirror are round, square, octagonal and other mirror shapes. Sea animal grape mirror theme decoration is composed of auspicious animal birds and grape vines, the picture is full of rich content, smooth lines and beautiful. The round sea animal grape mirror is divided into two areas inside and outside, with six balanced climbing around the grapevine, plump and smart. The outer area is

covered by grape vines, and there are four balls of flesh running around. Besides, there are also small birds and flowers. The regular composition echoes the full picture, which not only gives people a sense of solemn and bold, but also has gorgeous and smart beauty.

Sea animal grape mirror uses a combination of high relief and low relief technique of expression, bright three-dimensional pattern seems to be cumbersome, but it implies rigor. The well-arranged and well-layered mirror texture not only presents visual beauty, but also brings spiritual impact and resonance. The exquisite decoration of sea animal grape mirror, the exquisite composition and the exquisite craft are a new artistic climax of the Tang Dynasty craft technology.

3. The Background of Bronze Mirror Decoration in Tang Dynasty

After a slow development, the ancient bronze mirror art of China reached its climax and achieved high artistic attainments in the middle and late Warring States period and the middle Eastern Han Dynasty. After that, the development of ancient bronze mirror was silent for several hundred years until the Tang Dynasty, when the bronze mirror ushered in its second peak of artistic development.[3]In the late Sui and early Tang Dynasties, there were numerous wars and social turmoil. In order to promote national prestige and show power, the rulers liked to design bronze mirrors in a tough style. With the establishment of the Tang Dynasty and the great integration of ethnic groups, the bronze mirror decoration began to appear exotic customs. The design concept began to be popular with mysterious animal patterns such as birds, birds and beasts, and most of them took the zodiac or ancient gods and beasts as the theme. Since then, the bronze mirror began its new journey.

The bronze mirror pattern of Tang Dynasty has its cultural and artistic background. Bronze mirror is an ancient Chinese instrument made of bronze to reflect the body. The first bronze mirror unearthed in the tombs of the Qi family has been around 4,000 years ago. The back of the mirror is often engraved with rich patterns and inscriptions, reflecting the political, economic, cultural, scientific and technological development level of each dynasty. [4]The cultural exchange and integration between the north and the South in the Tang Dynasty and their mutual learning greatly promoted the diversified development of Tang culture. In addition, the Tang Dynasty developed foreign trade and transportation, and the prosperity of the "Silk Road" brought a large number of Hu merchants. Western visitors brought their unique style of etiquette and customs, clothing, art, music and various religions, which impacted the traditional dogma and made the Tang culture fearless in introducing, absorbing, innovating and innovating.

The inclusive pattern of multicultural development in the Tang Dynasty made the decorative patterns of Tang mirrors develop and change greatly. Compared with the previous themes, the decorative themes are richer in content, more diverse in form and more profound in meaning. The great power of the Tang Dynasty led the development of the mirror decoration, and finally formed a unique design model.

4. Tang Dynasty Bronze Mirror Decoration Stages

The Sui and Tang Dynasties were the most prosperous period in Chinese history, with comprehensive development

of economy and material culture and frequent exchanges with the outside world. This was consistent with the openness, inclusiveness and prosperity of innovation in art. The bronze mirror takes secular materials in content, attaches importance to people's social life, and the decoration is realistic and lively. It completely gets rid of the rigid and primitive norms of Han Dynasty patterns, and is good at absorbing foreign culture and art, forming a free and bold unique style. The main decoration includes grapes, auspicious beasts, flowers and birds, treasure flowers, zodiac animals, flowers and flowers, dragons and phoenix, characters, hunting, eight diagrams and fairy stories, etc., with extensive content and diversified artistic styles and techniques. The Tang Dynasty had a strong national power and existed for a long time in history. According to the time, the development of Tang mirror decoration was divided into three stages:

(1) Early period -- Sui and Early Tang

At this stage, the shape of the Tang mirror was mainly circular, and the Fu beast knob began to appear and the mirror body was thickened. The composition still inherits the style of the previous dynasty, with strict rules and multi-circle layout. In this period, auspicious animal decoration realized the liberation process of freedom, agility, liveliness and simplicity, and the image became more dynamic, becoming an important mirror of this period. The main performance is: the four gods in the area, with animal face pattern, moire pattern, rule pattern, and so on, some with the 12 zodiac as the content, with flowers and flowers, some in the area of the four gods, outside the area of the zodiac, such as: the four gods 12 zodiac mirror, some auspicious animal mirror area decorated with lions, tigers, leopards, bears and other numbers of auspicious animals, between the flow of moire or rule pattern. At this time, the Tang mirror was also themed with Baoxiang flowers, lined with curly grass and brocade flowers, etc. During the absorption of foreign cultures, there were sea animal grape patterns; During this period, the inscription belt in the area outside the Tang mirror changed the previous design of pursuing fame and becoming immortal, and turned to depicting the beauty of dressing and dressing. The fonts were mostly regular script and official script, with powerful strokes and orderly strokes. The mirror edge pattern is often decorated with serrated, deformed or honeysuckle pattern. At this time, flower and bird ornamentals began to emerge, thus opening the prelude to the bronze mirror of flowers and birds in the Tang Dynasty.

(2) Middle period - Tang Gaozong to Tang Dezong period

This period was the period when the new style of Tang mirror was established and matured. Both the form and the content showed a diversified development trend, and it was the heyday of the splendid Chinese bronze mirror. In the middle of the Tang Dynasty, fancy mirror shapes such as sunflower pattern and diamond pattern became popular, which combined the bronze mirror pattern with the shape more perfectly. In the production aspect, the alloy composition is adjusted, the color is whiter than before, the finish and the reflection effect is better. Inscriptions of this period have disappeared, and there is no obvious internal and external partition on the back of the mirror, which gives a good expression to the free and lively design style of the Tang mirror. At this time, the design themes are wide, styles are different, the organization is perfect, and the content is closer to the secular interest. Some directly draw on the real world activities with a sense of life, such as playing polo mirror and

hunting mirror, so it is not only the inheritance and development of traditional art, but also the reflection and representation of real life. Birds, flowers and plants occupy the main position, forming the elegant, full and soft decorative features. The most popular sea animal grape mirror in Wu Zetian period is a symbol of this transformation, which fully shows the absorption and integration of foreign culture in the Tang Dynasty. There are also a lot of character-oriented patterns, such as mythic stories that express yearning for happiness. The characters are prominent, the composition is brave and sparse, leaving large blank spaces, and the pursuit of balanced forms. The Tang mirror decoration has a high degree of generality and a sense of life art, and the expression technique is delicate. The patterns are often processed by high relief or low relief techniques, and the local areas are transparent carving techniques. The pattern organization is beautiful and soft, delicate and neat, and the structure is properly dense, harmonious and generous.

Flowers and colorful scenes are the prominent features of this period and also epoch-making innovations. What we see is a picture of luxuriant foliage, rare birds and exotic animals, budding and full of rich flavor of life, making people feel a beautiful, light and thriving artistic conception. It is dotted with and reflects this era of political and economic prosperity. Add to the glory of this era.

(3) Late Period -- after Tang Dezong

In the middle and late Tang Dynasty, the Rebellion of An and Shi led to the chaos of local divisions, and the economic depression caused the development of bronze mirrors in this period to decline rapidly, completely losing the magnificent and colorful style of bronze mirrors in the prosperous Tang Dynasty. Shape and system still continue to be round, square and subtype, no seat round button, light mirror body, casting is not fine. The eight diagrams, which have Taoist connotations, are all the rage, and even more so. Besides, under the influence of Buddhist thought at the time, the swastika marking the place of auspiciousness and virtue was the motif of a fair number of bronze mirrors, even floral ones, carved with thin lines or carved with picked lines, were lifeless, simple and uninspired. The decline of the bronze mirror in the Tang Dynasty was the turning point of the development of the whole Chinese bronze mirror, and there was no new climax in the following hundreds of years.

In the history of Chinese bronze mirror, the decoration style of the Tang Dynasty bronze mirror is the most free and flexible in the past dynasties. It is eclectic, unrestrained, exquisite and gorgeous, and is the most outstanding representative of the bronze mirror.

5. The Plastic Art of Bronze Mirror Ornamentation in Tang Dynasty

Influenced by the social customs and modeling habits of the Tang Dynasty, the patterns of the Tang Dynasty can generally reflect the plump and full artistic characteristics. The observation of the bronze mirror patterns of the Tang Dynasty, whether realistic or deformed, will fully show the plump and full artistic characteristics.

(1) Realistic plastic arts

The realistic bronze mirror decoration of Tang Dynasty generally appeared in the early Tang Dynasty and was close to the natural form. Specific to the realistic type of decorative modeling technology is analyzed, we can see that the flower

and bird grain grape grain can generally show the characteristics of fruity, lotus flower type decoration generally has the characteristics of fat, the performance of small clusters of flower patterns have the characteristics of dense clusters. The expression forms of the bronze mirror decoration in the Tang Dynasty all take the natural patterns as the basis, and concentrate on the natural patterns to highlight the typical artistic characteristics, and the characteristics of the artistic objects can be further reflected. At the same time, the observation of birds, beasts and butterflies in the Tang Dynasty bronze mirror can also highlight the beauty of health. For example: sea animal grape pattern,^[5] Sea animal grape pattern is decorated with various auspicious animals in the middle of the grape pattern, which is mostly used in the Tang Dynasty bronze mirror. Sea animal grape mirror is the general name of this kind of bronze mirror, which is mostly used for relief performance. Grape vines are decorated in the inner area around the bronze mirror seat and the outer area of the bronze mirror edge. Branches climb over the boundary between the inner and outer areas, called "intel grape", especially precious. There are four, five, six or eight of them. Some are interspersed with birds and insects such as bees, butterflies and dragonflies.

(2) Plastic arts of deformation

Deformation plastic art is another form of expression of bronze mirror decoration in the Tang Dynasty. It is an ideal type of decoration cast by combining exaggeration, deformation and other forms of expression on the basis of summarizing realistic modeling. Generally, the flowers in the bronze mirror, such as Rui flower, Baoxiang flower and tangled branch flower, are obtained after deformation treatment of realistic decorative patterns.

The twig pattern was developed by absorbing and borrowing the traditional pattern of Han and Wei Dynasties and integrating it into the honeysuckle pattern of Roman period. In the bronze mirror decoration of the Tang Dynasty, the twig pattern has the characteristics of criss-crossing and reciprocating, and can show the characteristics of waving and flowing in the continuous pattern. It is called "Tang Cao" by the Japanese. It is a representative pattern in the bronze mirror decoration pattern heritage in China, and it is still developed and applied in some areas.

Baoxiang pattern is the most typical pattern type in Tang bronze mirror decoration. The mother of Baoxiang pattern is the lotus pattern in Buddhism. Since the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, with the prosperity and spread of Buddhism, Baoxiang pattern has been paid attention to in the field of decoration, and has become an ideal decorative form of flower decoration. Although Baoxiang pattern is the product of the integration of Chinese and foreign art in the decorative pattern, the Chinese localization of Baoxiang pattern is relatively significant, which can show the ideological connotation of "harmony" in the national cultural elements with Chinese characteristics. Under the premise of bringing natural and rich aesthetic feelings to the audience, it highlights the rounded and plump artistic characteristics of the bronze mirror pattern in the Tang Dynasty.

6. The Cultural Connotation and Evolution of Sea Animal Grape Mirror Ornamentation

From the perspective of the Tang Dynasty bronze mirror as

a whole, the decoration on the mirror is an expression of an important aesthetic concept, reflecting the cultural background and connotation of the Tang Dynasty and other important information. The pattern can directly reflect the cultural connotation of the bronze mirror, and the interpretation of the pattern is helpful to understand the bronze mirror culture and its connotation meaning.

As early as in the Wei and Jin Dynasties, the bronze mirror with animal pattern was very popular, but its shape was stiff and rough. While the bronze mirror with animal pattern in the Tang Dynasty was more focused on the shape shaping, and its shape was lively and flexible. The inside and outside areas were added with grape pattern, honeysuckle pattern and other plant patterns, which made the picture more delicate and rich.

The connotations of bronze mirror patterns are closely related to the environment of The Times. The cultural environment of the Tang Dynasty was full of open spirit and creative spirit, so the bronze mirror patterns of the same period were highly personalized, which gradually developed from rigid to free and realistic, and new types of mirrors were constantly emerging. According to the different theme patterns, a kind of bronze mirror composed of sea animal pattern and grape pattern can be subdivided into auspicious animal grape mirror, sea animal grape mirror, auspicious animal flower and bird grape mirror, etc. Among them, sea animal grape mirror is called the typical auspicious animal grape mirror.

Grape mirror is one of the most distinctive mirror types in the Tang Dynasty. According to legend, grape was often believed to be a tree of life by local people in ancient Middle East. Its rich fruits and spreading branches symbolize "more children and happiness" and "long life", with far-reaching meaning and rich connotation. Although the grapes are imported from a foreign country, they are easily used by the intelligent working people, forming a traditional Oriental composition form and moral expression, which is consistent with the traditional Chinese concept and in line with the wishes and needs of the public. This is one of the reasons why the bronze mirror with grape pattern of the sea beast can be enduring in the long history and deeply loved by people.

Through the interpretation of the patterns of the Sea animal grape mirror, we can understand people's longing for a better

life and the simple emotion of pursuing beauty. At the same time, the Sea animal grape mirror also reflects the profile of a powerful empire in the history of Chinese arts and crafts. Its patterns record the flourishing atmosphere and inclusiveness of the art and culture in the Tang Dynasty with its unique graphic form and design language. Political openness, designers have been given full play and affirmation, thus giving birth to new artistic taste and aesthetic taste and derived new cultural symbols.

7. Conclusion

The bronze mirror patterns in the Tang Dynasty show Chinese history and culture, national spirit and national wisdom. They have strong vitality and expressive force, and play an important role in Chinese traditional culture. As a very small epitome of Tang Dynasty culture and art, the sea animal grape mirror decoration provides an important clue for us to find the ideological culture and social style of The Times. At the same time, it is also the product of the collision between Chinese and foreign cultures. As the carrier of ancient Chinese spiritual civilization and the witness of The Times, it has a very important research value for the modern arts and crafts and even the wider field.

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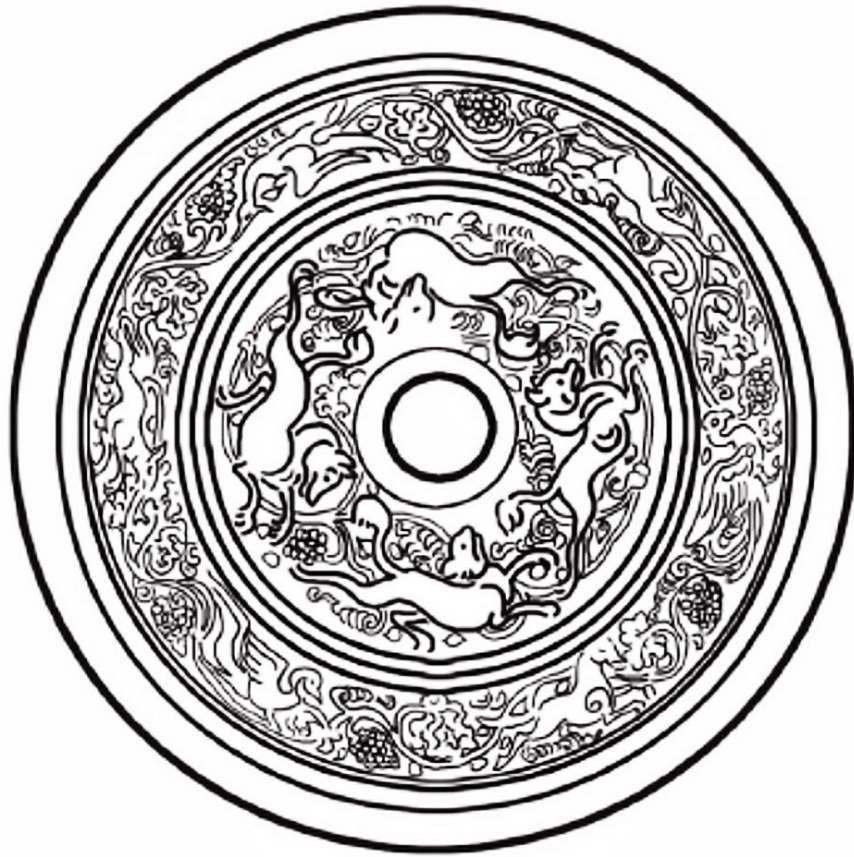
The attachment



Sea animal grape grain mirror



Auspicious animal grape grain mirror(1)



Auspicious animal grape grain mirror(2)