

The Continuation and Transformation of Fujian's Folk Artistic Genes in Lacquer Painting Creation

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Abstract: As the core birthplace of modern Chinese lacquer painting, Fujian has deeply integrated its folk art genes with lacquer painting creation, forming a unique “Fujian phenomenon”. This paper takes representative Fujian folk art forms such as the Huian Women’s Folk Art, Zhangping Farmers’ Paintings, and Xianyou Gilded and Colored Painting as research objects, analyzing the composition and aesthetic characteristics of its Fujian folk art genes, and proposing its continuation path and transformation innovation from the perspective of digitalization in contemporary society. It is hoped that this can provide an effective model for the dynamic inheritance of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: Folk art; Lacquer painting creation; Art gene Introduction

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1. Introduction

Fujian lacquer painting, as the “birthplace of modern Chinese lacquer painting”, has created several milestones in this industry, such as the birth of the first modern lacquer painting, the implementation of the first professional education in lacquer painting, and the holding of the first provincial national exhibition of lacquer painting. The formation of its artistic achievements is inseparable from its continuous adherence to the inheritance and innovation of the regional folk art genes. It covers various forms such as clothing culture, festival ceremonies, folk paintings, and traditional craftsmanship, forming its unique visual symbols, craftsmanship techniques, and cultural connotations^[1]. Under the impact of globalization and diversification, how to effectively inherit and transform the effective genes of folk art has become a key issue that Fujian lacquer painting needs to address in order to maintain its regional characteristics and enhance its artistic value. This article, based on field investigations and analysis of works, systematically explains the core composition of Fujian’s folk art genes, traces the inheritance paths and transformation methods in lacquer painting creation, and provides theoretical references and practical lessons for the sustainable development of contemporary lacquer painting art.

2. Core components and aesthetic characteristics of Fujian folk artistic genes

2.1. Symbol system: Concrete representation and cultural metaphor

The creation of various arts cannot avoid their own characteristics. The symbol system of Fujian folk art has a strong visual recognition and cultural metaphorical nature ^[2]. For example, the clothing of Huian women is characterized by the unique form of “feudal head, democratic belly, economical shirt, wasteful pants”, which has become the visual icon of regional culture. The symbol composition presents distinct aesthetic characteristics and cultural connotations. The main color of their clothing is a dark blue short-sleeved shirt and black wide-legged pants, forming the basic color scheme. Combined with a golden hat and a white background with small floral patterns, it forms a strong contrast between the cold color base and the bright color accents. The high color saturation and the regular combination are naturally in line with the artistic demands of lacquer painting decoration. The short shirt is composed of a waist-restricting design, the flowing form of wide pants, and the arc-shaped contour of the hat, presenting a contrast between “square and round, tight and loose”. The simple rolled edges at the collar and cuffs and the floral patterns on the square scarf form a sparse and dense contrast. From the perspective of cultural metaphor, the deep tones of dark blue and black symbolize the stable character of Huian women in managing their households, while the golden hat is not only a practical tool for shading and rain protection but also symbolizes respect for ocean labor and love for life. The white background with small floral patterns hides the gentle emotions of women. This symbol system is not simply a form of clothing decoration, but the wisdom crystallization of Huian women adapting to the coastal climate and supporting their family livelihoods. Its visual recognition and color combination are in harmony with the material characteristics and decorative aesthetics of lacquer painting.

2.2. Craft techniques: Handicraft tradition and material characteristics

The craft techniques of Fujian folk art are centered around the handcrafted texture as the soul, emphasizing the authenticity of the material and the precision of the craftsmanship. The most typical example is the Fuzhou lacquerware craft, which is a perfect embodiment of this characteristic. As a national intangible cultural heritage, the Fuzhou lacquerware craft has a history of over a hundred years of inheritance and has been optimized through transmission, condensed into 72 processes, and throughout the entire process of the craft, it is carried out by hand. This reflects the aesthetic pursuit of the Fuzhou lacquerware craft. In terms of the logical process of the craft, it uses natural fabrics such as linen and silk mixed with lacquer and lime ash for pasting, repeatedly polishing until it becomes thin and tough, and then, through multiple rounds of painting, coating with clear varnish, and polishing, finally forming classic textures such as “red retouching” and “black retouching”. The finished products are as thin as cicada wings and as shiny as mirrors, combining practicality and artistry. In terms of material application, the Fuzhou lacquerware uses natural lacquer as the medium, combined with natural auxiliary materials such as gold foil, silver foil, and inlaid work, and through techniques such as “gold plating”, “marquetry”, and “inlay”, to maximize the expression of material characteristics. Among them, the warm and lustrous texture of the lacquer can form a wonderful balance with the flexible texture of the fabric base, and the brilliance of the gold foil is complemented by the stability of the lacquer color. It can retain the original beauty of the natural materials and, through manual craftsmanship, give it a humanistic touch. This way of adapting to materials and empowering through handicraft techniques also reflects the essence of the handicraft inheritance and the precise control of material characteristics.

2.3. Cultural connotations: Regional spirit and life philosophy

The formation of folk art is inseparable from the influence of regional living characteristics. The genetic makeup

of Fujian folk art is no exception^[3]. For instance, the folk culture of the Hui'an women is a typical example of Fujian folk art. It originated from the geographical environment of the coastal areas of southern Fujian and was influenced by the coastal factors. The men often went out to fish at sea for a living, while the women took care of the family. This kind of living situation gave birth to the resilient and hardworking spirit of the Hui'an women, which constitutes the core connotation of their folk culture. The Hui'an women not only have to undertake heavy physical labor, such as farming and fishing assistance in daily life, but also take care of the family, support the elderly, and raise children. The historical legend of the "Eight Women Crossing the Sea" to cultivate the uninhabited island further elevates this spirit of hard work and boldness to a regional cultural totem. When facing the unpredictable changes of the ocean and the arduous challenges of survival, the Hui'an women confront difficulties with tenacious willpower and create life with their hard work. In family relationships and community interactions, they adhere to the principles of simplicity, kindness, and mutual assistance, highlighting the gentle nature of southern Fujian women. This spirit and philosophy are not abstract concepts but are the natural manifestations of folk forms, such as their working methods and community ethics. This regional spirit and life philosophy carried by folk culture can provide profound spiritual nourishment for the creation of lacquer painting.

3. The continuation path of Fujian folk artistic genes in lacquer painting creation

3.1. Symbol extraction: Visual transformation of folk elements

Symbol extraction refers to the extraction of visual elements from the visual elements of the folk art genes, followed by their reconfiguration. This reconfiguration is not a simple replication but requires in-depth exploration of their symbolic characteristics to achieve an organic integration of the folk cultural connotation and the artistic characteristics of lacquer painting. First, select cultural symbols. From the diverse symbol system of Fujian folk art, extract the non-core trivial details, precisely capture the visual elements with regional landmark significance in the clothing patterns, object shapes, scene features, etc., forming a concise and distinct symbol collection. During this process, not only must the cultural identification be ensured, but also the creative characteristics of lacquer painting should be taken into account. Second, transform the original form of folk symbols into visual language that conforms to the decorative aesthetics of lacquer painting. For example, transform irregular natural shapes into regular geometric forms, simplify complex pattern structures into smooth line combinations, and moderately exaggerate key shape features to highlight the visual impact of the symbols. This transformation is not subjective imagination but should be carried out under the premise of respecting the cultural connotation. Third, continue to maintain the original colors and emotions of folk symbols. By using multi-layer coating to enhance the thickness and warmth of the colors, using metal foil inlay to enhance the luster levels of the colors, and using materials such as eggshells and lacquer powder to achieve dual expressions of color and texture.

Taking Chen Jinhua's lacquer painting of the Hui'an women as an example, it extracts core symbols such as the dark blue short shirt and the golden hat, strips away the trivial decorations of the clothing, and refines the outline of the hat into a geometric shape. Simplifies the folds of the headscarf with smooth lines, exaggerates the waist-shaping feature to enhance the visual tension. Using the original colors of dark blue, gold, and white, the multi-layer coating highlights the thickness of the short shirt, inlaying gold foil to restore the luster of the hat, and inlaying eggshells to express the texture of the headscarf. It retains the cultural identification while conforming to the decorative aesthetics of lacquer painting.

3.2. Craft tradition: Integration of folk techniques with lacquer art

The inheritance of craftsmanship requires the infusion of “fresh blood”, and “fresh blood” is not merely other techniques, but rather a creative integration of techniques, craftsmanship, and spirit. This integration should be carried out based on the principle of extracting the essence, choosing the best, and applying them appropriately. Through this integration, the deep harmony between the essence of folk craftsmanship and the artistic characteristics of lacquer painting can be achieved.

First, the borrowing of techniques can be done by extracting the core techniques with regional characteristics from the manual skills system of Fujian folk art, such as gold painting and outlining, modeling, and color application. The redundant processes adapted to the original carrier should be stripped away, focusing on the aesthetic core and operational logic of the techniques. During this process, the manual essence and inheritance lineage of folk techniques should be respected, and mechanical copying should be avoided, leaving room for adaptation for the integration with lacquer art.

Second, the integration of techniques, the extracted folk techniques can be combined with the core techniques of lacquer painting, such as lacquer application, inlaying, coating, and scraping and engraving. By adjusting the operation intensity and process of the techniques, the characteristics of lacquer painting materials such as lacquer, gold foil, and eggshell can be adapted, and the expression logic of folk techniques can be transformed into the technical language of lacquer painting.

Third, the continuation of spirit, although it is the integration of folk techniques and lacquer art, it is essentially the continuation of the manual spirit. Whether it is the persistence of the slow and meticulous craftsmanship in folk art or the creation of a hundred coatings to complete an object in lacquer art, it all embodies the pursuit of technical precision and the transmission of humanistic warmth. During the inheritance process, the two should be deeply integrated to achieve the dynamic inheritance of the genetic code of folk craftsmanship through the lacquer art carrier. Taking the integration of Xianyou gold painting and lacquer art as an example, it is done by extracting the core technique of gold painting outlining, stripping away the redundant processes of temple decoration, retaining the essence of the golden thread rhythm, combining it with the lacquer painting techniques such as lacquer application, inlaying, coating, and scraping and engraving, adjusting the outlining intensity to adapt to the characteristics of lacquer, and restoring the luster of gold painting through gold foil inlaying, continuing the meticulous craftsmanship spirit, achieving a deep harmony between the texture of folk craftsmanship and the artistic characteristics of lacquer painting.

3.3. Imagination continuation: The spiritual transmission of folk culture

The continuation of the artistic conception lies in the precise capture and artistic translation of the core spirit of folk culture, rather than a superficial replication of the folk scene. Instead, it reconstructs the spiritual conception of folk culture through the language of lacquer painting, achieving the cross-temporal transmission of regional cultural emotions and humanistic values ^[4]. First, deeply extract the core spirit of folk culture. This can be done by separating the concrete surface elements from the regional spirit and life philosophy carried by Fujian folk art, focusing on core spiritual traits such as tenacity and pragmatism, respect for culture and etiquette, and national sentiments, as well as the emotional core contained in folk culture, such as reverence for nature, cherishing family affection, and uniting the community. Second, achieve the transmission of the artistic conception through the systematic construction of visual language. By leveraging the characteristics and advantages of lacquer painting, it can be combined with the core spirit of folk culture to create a special artistic atmosphere, such as using the warm and thick texture of lacquer to convey the profound essence of folk culture, using the luster of

gold foil and inlay to echo the festive and harmonious characteristics of folk art, and using the texture layers formed by pile lacquer and scraping to simulate the simple texture of the folk scene. Third, convey the artistic conception and resonate with contemporary cultural spirit. By combining the core spirit of folk culture with the emotional needs and value pursuits of contemporary audiences, the lacquer painting works can not only carry the cultural memory of traditional folk culture but also trigger emotional resonance and ideological identification among contemporary audiences. This transmission of the artistic conception is not a one-way cultural output; instead, through the infectious power of artistic conception, the spiritual value of folk culture is integrated into contemporary life, becoming nourishment for the spiritual world of contemporary people.

Taking the transmission of the folk artistic conception of Putian-Fujian Opera as an example, it is achieved by extracting the core spirit of “respecting culture and etiquette” and the national sentiments in the opera, and separating specific plot scenes. The warm texture of lacquer is used to highlight the cultural depth of folk culture, gold foil inlay is used to echo the festive characteristics of the opera, and the texture layers formed by pile lacquer and scraping are used to simulate the simple texture of the opera stage. Combined with the contemporary audience’s need for recognition of traditional ethics, the work not only carries the memory of opera culture but also triggers contemporary emotional resonance.

4. Transformation and innovation of Fujian folk art genes in lacquer painting creation

4.1. Expansion of themes: From folklore representations to contemporary narratives

The expansion of themes requires breaking away from the replication of superficial representations such as folk costumes and festival scenes, and achieving a profound leap from concrete depictions to contemporary narratives. This will prevent lacquer painting creation from being confined to traditional folk scenes like the work of the Hui’an women or the performances of Puxian Opera, but instead enable the exploration of the spiritual core behind them, integrating regional cultural traits with contemporary social issues. This can be achieved by extracting abstract cores such as tenacity, community cohesion, and cultural roots from folk culture, and transforming them into discussions on the awakening of female power, the inheritance of traditional skills, and ecological protection, thereby giving these traditional themes a resonance with the new era and breaking the original single panoramic depiction in lacquer painting creation. By adopting a micro perspective and individual narrative methods, through the fragmented recombination of folk elements, a more emotionally charged narrative structure can be constructed. At the same time, contemporary social hot topics should also be integrated, linking folk symbols with era-related issues such as rural revitalization, cultural confidence, and cross-cultural communication, so that lacquer painting works can retain the cultural identity of Fujian folk while also becoming an artistic carrier that responds to the times.

4.2. Technological innovation: The modern transformation of traditional techniques

Technological innovation refers to breaking the inherent boundaries of traditional techniques and achieving a creative integration of folk techniques with modern lacquer art. It is not a simple improvement of traditional skills. It can be done by maintaining the core position of traditional materials, such as lacquer, while introducing modern materials, such as environmentally friendly synthetic lacquer, resins, and metal composite materials. This not only compensates for the limitations of traditional materials but also enriches the texture layers and visual effects. In terms of process reorganization, folk techniques such as gilding, molding, and painting can be

combined with techniques such as lacquer painting application, inlaying, and coating to achieve cross-border integration, innovating the operation procedures and combination methods, and generating new techniques that combine folk texture with modern aesthetics. Especially in the digital age, lacquer painting creation must be able to optimize the creative process by leveraging digital technology. For example, through computer-assisted design, precise control of the composition and color ratio of folk symbols can be achieved, and then combined with traditional manual techniques to be presented, thereby enabling traditional techniques to rejuvenate in the modern technology and aesthetic context^[5].

4.3. Cross-border integration: The diversified construction of the artistic ecosystem

The creation of lacquer painting should not be confined to a niche community. Instead, it should adopt a cross-border integration approach to establish a key innovative path for the diversified artistic ecosystem, breaking the inherent barriers between traditional lacquer painting creation and life, industry, and dissemination, and achieving the comprehensive activation of folk art genes. This can be achieved by promoting folk lacquer painting to move from exhibition halls to daily life and public spaces, integrating lacquer painting elements into architectural decoration, home design, and cultural product development. Through utensils, accessories, indoor wall decorations, etc., folk aesthetics can permeate daily life. At the same time, it can also participate in urban public art projects, empowering rural revitalization and cultural tourism district construction through murals, sculptures, etc., and expanding the physical boundaries of artistic expression. In terms of dissemination, it can better close the distance with young audiences through live creation, digital exhibition halls, and short video interpretations, thereby realizing the cross-circulation of folk lacquer painting and building an open and diverse artistic ecosystem.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the symbolic system, craftsmanship techniques and cultural connotations in the folk art gene provide rich inspiration and a solid foundation for the creation of lacquer paintings. The contemporary exploration of lacquer painting art has enabled folk culture to acquire new forms of expression and dissemination channels. Looking to the future, we can focus on researching how to extract more representative artistic genes from the rich folk resources of Fujian, avoiding the repetition of similar themes and superficial symbols.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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