

The Inheritance and Development of Different Ethnic Religious Cultures in Chinese Folk Art

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Abstract: This article discusses the religious culture of different ethnic groups in China and its inheritance and development in folk art. It first summarizes the characteristics of the religious culture of major ethnic groups in China and their manifestation in folk art. It then analyzes the ways and means of inheritance of religious culture in folk art, including family inheritance, folk festivals, religious activities, and the influence of intangible cultural heritage protection policies, and studies the changes and adaptations in inheritance practices through specific case studies. The article also delves into the current state and challenges of the development of religious culture in folk art, proposing a development model that combines innovation with tradition, as well as opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and cooperation. Lastly, it theoretically explores the mutual influence and possible symbiotic development of religious culture and folk art, summarizes the main points of the article, and looks forward to future research directions.

Keywords: Chinese Ethnic Groups; Religious Culture; Folk Art; Inheritance and Development; Symbiotic Mechanism

1. INTRODUCTION

China is a multiethnic and multi-religious country, where various ethnic groups have formed a rich and colorful religious culture over a long historical development process (Saroglou, 2011; Sulong et al., 2019). These religious cultures not only profoundly influence the thoughts and behaviors of ethnic group members but are also widely inherited and developed in folk art. Ethnic groups usually refer to communities of people who share common historical, cultural, linguistic, or religious characteristics. In China, the main ethnic groups include the Han nationality and many minority ethnic groups, such as the Tibetan, Hui, Mongolian, and others. These groups have formed their unique religious cultures through long-term historical evolution (Weller, 2014).

Religious culture refers to cultural phenomena related to religious beliefs, including aspects like religious doctrines, rituals, and art. The religious cultures of various ethnic groups in China have distinct characteristics. For example, Han religious culture is primarily reflected in traditional beliefs such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism (Greif & Tabellini, 2010; Oostveen, 2019). These beliefs play essential roles in moral education and social integration in Han society and profoundly influence the development of Han folk art. For instance, in Han folk painting, sculpture, and opera, we can see numerous works reflecting themes of Confucian filial piety, Taoist ideas about immortals, and Buddhist karma. In contrast to the Han, the religious cultures of minority ethnic groups are more diverse and unique (Tang, 2021).

For example, the Tibetan culture of Tibetan Buddhism, the Hui culture of Islam, and the Mongolian cultures of Tibetan Buddhism and Shamanism are all fully reflected in their respective folk arts. The folk arts of these minority ethnic groups not only have distinct ethnic characteristics but also contain rich religious cultural connotations (Sun, 2023). Religious culture plays an important role in ethnic identity. For many group members, religious belief is a crucial symbol of their cultural identity and an essential part of their spiritual life. Therefore, in the process of inheritance and development of folk art, religious culture often becomes a significant theme and source of inspiration for artists (Glăveanu, 2013). Through the creation and exhibition of artworks, artists not only express their understanding and insights into religious beliefs but also convey the cultural traditions and values of their ethnic groups. In the process of inheritance and development of religious culture among different ethnic groups in China, folk art plays an important role. On one hand, folk art serves as an important carrier of ethnic culture, passing down the essence of religious culture through generations. On the other hand, folk art continually innovates and develops, combining religious culture with the spirit of the times to create works that feature new artistic forms and expression techniques. These works not only enrich the cultural treasury of ethnic groups but also provide people with more spiritual nourishment and aesthetic enjoyment. The religious culture of different ethnic groups in China has been widely inherited and developed in folk art. This religious culture deeply influences the thoughts and behaviors of ethnic group members and provides rich themes and sources of inspiration for folk art creation. In future developments, we should further strengthen research and protection of ethnic religious culture and folk art, promote their

communication and integration, and make greater contributions to the prosperity and development of Chinese culture.

2. THE EMBODIMENT OF RELIGIOUS CULTURE IN FOLK ART

The embodiment of religious culture in Chinese folk art is a deep and extensive research field. As a multinational and multi-religious country, China's folk art naturally incorporates rich religious elements, which not only add profound cultural connotations to the artworks but also become important carriers of disseminating religious culture(Xu & Hamamura, 2014). In folk art works, the use of religious elements varies widely, including both concrete religious symbols and abstract religious concepts. For example, in Tibetan Thangka paintings, common patterns such as Buddhist figures, ritual implements, and mandalas are a direct representation of Buddhist culture(Bakhtiyorovich & Shodikulovich, 2021). These patterns not only have high artistic value but also serve the important function of spreading Buddhist teachings and promoting the spirit of Buddhism within Tibetan society. Similarly, in Han Chinese paper-cutting art, symbols and characters conveying good fortune, longevity, and prosperity often appear, reflecting the pursuit of auspicious and harmonious living found in Taoist and Confucian thought, perfectly combining Han Chinese folk beliefs and aesthetic concepts(Rastogi et al., 2023). The dissemination and influence of folk art on religious culture cannot be overlooked. On one hand, through the display and circulation of artistic works, religious culture can be spread more widely(Lebedev, 2020).

For example, at various temple fairs, people can enjoy various forms of folk art performances, as shown in Figure 1, such as dragon and lion dances, face-changing performances, etc. These performances often embody rich religious elements and meanings, allowing the audience to appreciate the beauty of art while also feeling the charm of religious culture. On the other hand, folk art also profoundly impacts religious culture. Artists often reinterpret and recreate religious elements based on their understanding and insights during the creative process, thereby endowing religious culture with new connotations and vitality. This interactive relationship between art and religion not only enriches the forms and connotations of folk art but also promotes the inheritance and development of religious culture(Madsen, 2010).



Figure 1: Folk Art Performances

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that with the changes of the times and the development of society, the religious elements in folk art are constantly evolving and updating. Some traditional religious symbols and patterns are gradually presented by modern artists using new techniques and forms of expression, making folk art not only retain its traditional charm but also exude a new aura of the times. This innovative way of inheritance not only helps the long-term development of folk art but also injects new vitality into the inheritance of religious culture. The manifestation of religious culture in folk art is multifaceted and profound. It not only provides rich creative materials and sources of inspiration for artistic works, but also becomes an important channel for spreading and promoting religious culture. At the same time, folk art's dissemination and influence on religious culture is also reciprocal and dynamic, as they mutually promote each other's inheritance and development through interaction. Therefore, in-depth research on the inheritance and development of religious culture in folk art is significant for better understanding and appreciating folk art, and for inheriting and promoting religious culture.

3. INHERITANCE OF RELIGIOUS CULTURE FROM DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS IN FOLK ART

3.1 Ways and Channels of Inheritance

The inheritance of religious culture from different ethnic groups in folk art is a complex topic involving history, culture, art, and sociology. This inheritance not only concerns the continuity of culture but also reflects the different ethnic groups' commitment to and promotion of their faith and values. In this process, various methods and channels of inheritance together constitute a rich and diverse system of transmission (Huidong et al., 2024; Wilcox, 2018).

First, family inheritance and the master-apprentice system hold an

important position in the transmission of folk art. In many traditional folk art fields, the passing down of skills often relies on generations within the family. This mode of inheritance not only ensures the authenticity of the craft but also invisibly strengthens the cohesion and sense of identity within the ethnic group. Meanwhile, the master-apprentice system, as a more flexible mode of inheritance, also plays a significant role in the field of folk art. Through apprenticeship, students can grasp the essence of the craft and experience the true meaning of art and the profound cultural heritage of their ethnic group through interactions with their masters.

Second, folk festivals and religious activities provide a broad stage for the transmission of folk art. In various festival activities, folk art often serves as an important cultural carrier, presenting its unique charm to the public through performances and exhibitions. These events not only enrich the cultural life of the masses but also inject new vitality into the transmission of folk art. Especially during certain religious activities, folk art carries profound faith connotations, becoming an important way for believers to express their devotion and reverence. Moreover, the impact of intangible cultural heritage protection policies is also an important factor that cannot be ignored. In recent years, as the country's emphasis on the protection of intangible cultural heritage has continued to increase, a series of related policies have provided a strong guarantee for the inheritance and development of folk art. These policies not only enhance the social recognition of folk art but also provide substantial support in terms of funding, technology, and talent, effectively promoting the inheritance and innovation of folk art. In practical terms, we can see many successful cases. For example, in the inheritance of paper-cutting art in certain regions, the combination of family inheritance and the master-apprentice system has allowed this skill to maintain its unique style and exquisite techniques across generations. Furthermore, through participation in various festival activities and religious ceremonies, paper-cutting art has been disseminated and showcased to a wider audience, attracting more people's attention and participation. With the support of intangible cultural heritage protection policies, paper-cutting art has also received guidance and assistance from professional institutions, further enhancing its artistic value and cultural connotations. The inheritance of religious culture from different ethnic groups in folk art is a multi-dimensional and complex systemic project. Through the interaction of various methods and channels of inheritance, folk art continues to be passed down through history, constantly revitalizing itself. In future development, we should continue to focus on

and explore effective ways of transmitting folk art, contributing to the promotion of cultural diversity and social harmony.

3.2 Case Studies of Inheritance

China is a multicultural and multi-religious country, where the transmission and development of different ethnic and religious cultures in folk art present a rich and colorful scene. This article aims to explore the changes and adaptations of religious culture in the transmission of folk art through specific case studies, revealing the internal laws and development trends of this cultural phenomenon. In many forms of folk art, elements of religious culture often play an important role. Taking Tibetan Thangka art as an example, Figure 2 shows that this art form originated from Tibetan Buddhism and was gradually developed by the Tibetan people through long-term religious practices (Ma et al., 2021). Thangka, with its exquisite painting skills and profound religious connotations, has become an important part of Tibetan culture. In the process of transmission, Thangka art has not only maintained its core religious values but has also gradually integrated modern aesthetic elements, allowing this traditional art form to radiate new brilliance in the context of the new era (Shijun, 2021).



Figure 2: Thangka

In addition to Tibetan Thangka art, the Uyghur Nagara drum music is also a typical case of the combination of religious culture and folk art. Nagara drum music is a unique musical form created by the Uyghur people under the influence of Islamic culture (Borah & Utter, 2023). With its vigorous rhythm and enthusiastic atmosphere, it is beloved by the Uyghur people. In the process of transmission, Nagara drum music has not only inherited the spiritual core of Islamic culture but has also gradually absorbed musical elements from Han and other ethnic groups, forming today's distinct musical styles, as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3: The Uyghur Nagara Drum Music

These cases indicate that the changes and adaptations of religious culture in the transmission of folk art is a complex and interesting process. On one hand, religious culture, as a core element of folk art, provides a profound cultural foundation and spiritual support for folk art; on the other hand, with the changing times and social development, religious culture is constantly merging with folk art, giving rise to new forms and expressions of art. It is worth noting that the changes and adaptations of religious culture in the transmission of folk art are not smooth sailing. Under the impact of modernization, many traditional folk arts face survival crises. Some young people have gradually lost interest in traditional culture, leading to a lack of successors for some precious folk art skills. Additionally, the trend of commercialization has caused some folk arts to lose their original cultural connotations in order to cater to consumer demands. Therefore, how to promote the innovative development of religious culture and folk art while protecting traditional culture has become an urgent issue that needs to be addressed. In addressing this issue, we can take multiple approaches.

First, the government and all sectors of society should increase support for folk art, providing artists with a better creative environment and conditions.

Secondly, educational authorities should strengthen the promotion of traditional cultural education, enhancing young people's recognition and sense of belonging to traditional culture.

Finally, artists themselves should continuously innovate in art forms and content to attract more audience attention and affection. The transmission and development of different ethnic religious cultures in folk art in China is a topic full of challenges and opportunities. Through in-depth study of

specific cases, we can better grasp the internal connections and development laws between religious culture and folk art, providing useful references and insights for promoting the harmonious coexistence and innovative development of both.

4. THE INTERACTION BETWEEN RELIGIOUS CULTURE AND FOLK ART'S RELATIONSHIP

4.1 The Mutual Influence of Religious Culture and Folk Art

The relationship between religious culture and folk art is a complex and profound subject. The interaction between the two is reflected not only in their mutual influences but also in how they have evolved and developed together throughout history.

Firstly, the inspiration and constraints of religious culture on folk art creation are evident. Religious culture, as a deep-seated belief and spiritual support, provides rich creative material and sources of inspiration for folk art. Taking Buddhism as an example, its spread in China not only brought a large number of Buddhist artistic forms, such as Buddha statues and Bodhisattva statues, but also gave rise to a series of Buddhist murals and sculptures. These works reflect the doctrines and beliefs of Buddhism, while also integrating the aesthetics and artistic styles of the Chinese ethnic group, thus forming a unique folk art style. However, religious culture also imposes certain constraints on folk art. The doctrines, beliefs, and rituals of religion often impose limitations on the content and form of artistic creation, requiring folk art to adhere to certain religious norms and values during the creative process.

At the same time, folk art also plays an important role in promoting the dissemination of religious culture. Folk art, with its vivid and imagery presentation, spreads religious culture to all corners of society. For example, through various folk art works with religious themes, people can gain a more intuitive understanding of religious doctrines, beliefs, and historical culture. These works not only enrich people's spiritual cultural life but also deepen their understanding and recognition of religious culture. However, the dissemination of religious culture by folk art also has certain limitations. Due to the limitations of cultural background, aesthetic concepts, and the acceptance levels of audiences, the forms and contents of folk art may not be able to fully and accurately convey the essence and spirit of religious culture. To further explore the interaction between religious culture and folk art, we can analyze from multiple dimensions.

Firstly, from a historical perspective, religious culture and folk art interweave and influence each other throughout history. In different historical periods, the influences of religious culture on folk art and the transmission of folk art to religious culture exhibit different characteristics. For instance, during the Tang Dynasty, when Buddhism flourished, Buddhist art became an important theme in folk art, promoting the widespread dissemination of Buddhist culture. In modern society, with the advancement of technology and the development of globalization, the way folk art transmits religious culture has also undergone significant changes.

Secondly, from a regional perspective, the interaction between religious culture and folk art varies across different regions. China is a multiethnic, multi-religion country, where various religious beliefs and folk art styles differ widely. For example, in Tibetan areas, Tibetan Buddhism has a profound impact on Tibetan folk art, while Tibetan folk art, with its unique style and forms, disseminates Tibetan Buddhist culture. Furthermore, from an artistic perspective, religious culture and folk art also influence each other in terms of artistic creation and aesthetic concepts. Religious culture provides rich creative material and sources of inspiration for folk art, while folk art also disseminates and interprets religious culture through its unique artistic forms and expressions. This mutual influence has led to a high degree of fusion and unity between religious culture and folk art in artistic creation. The interaction between religious culture and folk art is a complex system with multiple dimensions and layers. They influence and constrain each other, evolving and developing together throughout history. By deeply exploring this interaction, we can better understand the status and role of religious culture and folk art in traditional Chinese culture, as well as how they have jointly shaped the rich and diverse cultural landscape of the Chinese nation.

4.2 The Possibility of the Co-Development of Religious Culture and Folk Art

In exploring the possibility of the co-development of religious culture and folk art, we first need to understand the intrinsic connections and mutual influences between the two. Religious culture, as an essential component of human spiritual life, often carries deep faith and values. Folk art, on the other hand, directly reflects regional culture and folk customs, showcasing distinct local characteristics and ethnic flavor. Against the backdrop of cultural diversity, constructing a co-development mechanism between religious culture and folk art is particularly important. The core of

the co-development mechanism lies in mutual respect and integration. The symbols, rituals, and belief systems in religious culture can provide rich creative materials and sources of inspiration for folk art. Simultaneously, in the process of innovation, folk art can also draw on elements of religious culture for organic integration and innovation, thus enriching its artistic expressiveness and cultural connotation. This co-development mechanism not only helps to protect and pass down religious culture and folk art but also fosters their mutual development and innovation. Taking Tibetan thangka art as an example, it is a unique artistic form of Tibetan Buddhism that carries profound religious cultural connotations while showcasing exquisite artistic skills. In the creation of thangkas, artists skillfully combine Buddhist beliefs with folk art, depicting Buddhist stories and figures through delicate brushwork and rich colors. This artistic form is not only loved by the Tibetan people but has also gained widespread acclaim globally. The success of thangka art is a prime example of the co-development of religious culture and folk art. Of course, achieving the co-development of religious culture and folk art is no easy task. It requires us to delve deeply into the intrinsic connections between the two, understanding their commonalities and differences, and on this basis, to pursue organic integration. At the same time, we also need to focus on the sustainability of cultural transmission, ensuring that this co-development mechanism can function effectively for a long time. Incorporating elements of religious culture into the innovation of folk art not only enriches the connotation of artistic works but also makes them more ethnically distinct and culturally deep-rooted. This fusion is not a simple patchwork or imitation but a clever combination and innovation grounded in a deep understanding of religious culture and folk art. For instance, in arts such as embroidery and paper-cutting, we can skillfully integrate symbols, patterns, and other elements from religious culture, creating art pieces that are both ethnically distinct and rich in modernity.

5. THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS CULTURE AMONG DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS IN FOLK ART

The development of religious culture among different ethnic groups in folk art, as shown in Figure 4, is a complex and diverse topic. In the current social context, the status and trends of the folk art market are undergoing profound changes, and the role of religious culture in this is also facing numerous challenges and opportunities.

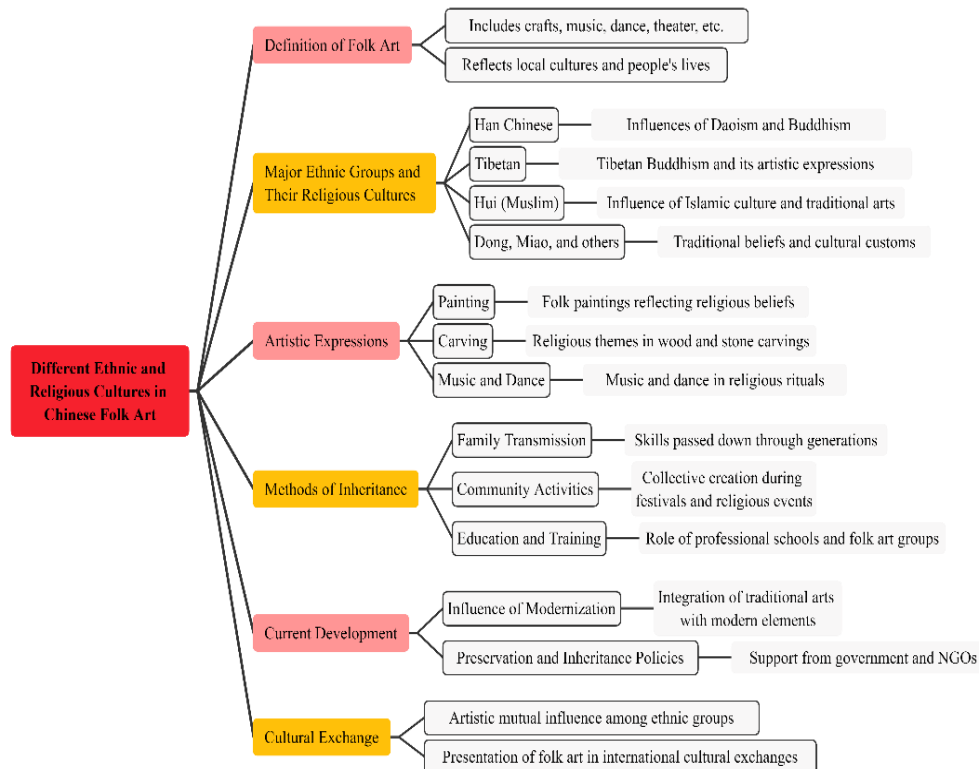


Figure 4: Different Ethnic and Religious Cultures in Chinese Folk Art

Firstly, from the current situation of the folk art market, with the advancement of globalization and rapid technological development, the traditional folk art market is gradually facing challenges. On one hand, the modernization of lifestyles and changes in aesthetic concepts have led many young people to lose interest in traditional folk art, resulting in decreased market demand; on the other hand, some folk art production techniques and methods of transmission are also at risk of being lost, leading to a gradual reduction in market supply. However, at the same time, we also see some positive trends. For example, with the country's emphasis on the protection of intangible cultural heritage, more and more folk art projects have received policy and financial support, injecting new vitality into the market's development. In addition, some folk artists and inheritors are actively exploring innovative ways to combine traditional art with modern elements to attract more young consumers. In terms of the difficulties faced by religious culture in the development of folk art, they are mainly reflected in several aspects: first, the conservativeness and exclusivity of religious culture create obstacles in the integration process with modern society.

Second, the use of religious cultural elements in folk art creation is often subject to many restrictions, such as in subject choice and forms of expression; third, sensitive issues and controversies that may arise during

the communication of religious culture also restrict its widespread application in folk art. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, religious culture still has irreplaceable value and significance in folk art. It is not only an important source of creation for folk art but also an important link that connects different ethnic groups and transmits historical culture. In response to the above difficulties, we also see some opportunities for religious culture in the development of folk art. On one hand, with the country's advocacy and respect for cultural diversity, the exchange and integration between different religious cultures are gradually becoming possible, providing a broader space for the development of folk art; on the other hand, the use of modern technological means also provides favorable conditions for the extraction, preservation, and dissemination of religious cultural elements. For example, through digital technology, we can make high-definition copies and displays of precious religious art collections, allowing more people to appreciate their unique charm; at the same time, utilizing the internet and social media platforms, we can also achieve rapid dissemination and exchange of religious culture.

6. CONCLUSION

The inheritance and development of different ethnic groups' religious culture in folk art is a profound and multidimensional topic. When discussing its development strategies and suggestions, we inevitably touch upon the development model of combining innovation with tradition, opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and cooperation, as well as suggestions for policy support and industrial planning.

Firstly, the development model that combines innovation with tradition is the core of the inheritance and development of folk art. Tradition is the foundation of folk art, the essence accumulated over the years. However, tradition is not rigid and unchanging; it needs to keep pace with the times and integrate new elements and concepts to revitalize itself. Innovation is the driving force for the development of folk art. Through innovation, folk art can break the constraints of tradition and expand into broader development spaces. Therefore, we need to encourage and support innovative practices in folk art based on respecting tradition, such as using modern technological means to reform and enhance traditional folk art, or combining elements of traditional folk art with other art forms to create new artistic styles.

Secondly, cross-cultural exchange and cooperation present rare

opportunities for the inheritance and development of folk art. China is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, and different ethnic groups' religious cultures have left profound marks in folk art. With the deepening of globalization, cultural exchanges among various countries and regions have become increasingly frequent, providing convenience for us to learn from and draw on the folk art of other countries and regions. Through cross-cultural exchanges, we can discover the commonalities and differences among folk arts from different cultural backgrounds, thereby deepening our understanding of the characteristics of our own folk art. At the same time, cross-cultural cooperation also provides abundant resources and sources of inspiration for the innovation of folk art, helping us break habitual thinking patterns and explore new creative ideas.

Finally, policy support and industrial planning are crucial for the inheritance and development of folk art. The government should strengthen its support for folk art, develop and improve relevant policies and regulations, and provide strong institutional guarantees for the development of folk art. For example, a special fund can be established to support the protection, inheritance, and innovation of folk art projects, or folk art industrial parks can be created to promote the agglomeration and large-scale development of folk art. Additionally, the government should enhance the regulation of the folk art market, crack down on infringement activities, and protect the legitimate rights and interests of folk artists. In terms of industrial planning, the government should guide and support the integration and development of folk art with modern cultural industries, promoting the market-oriented and industrialized development of folk art. This can not only enhance the vitality and influence of folk art but also inject new vitality into economic and social development.

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