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On the Contemporary Transformation of Traditional Artistic Spirit

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Abstract:
Chinese traditional art, as a vital bearer of cultural history, has enormous historical and aesthetic significance. However, in the current period, the spirit of traditional art faces enormous difficulties and opportunities as a result of globalization, technical breakthroughs, and transformations in aesthetic paradigms. This study investigates the intrinsic spirit of traditional art and its contemporary change, focusing on how old creative principles adapt to modern situations while retaining their basic essence. This study explains how classic art might maintain its vitality in contemporary artistic discourse by exploring cases of artistic reinvention across various media and cultural environments. The study aims to advance our understanding of the dynamic link between tradition and innovation in the evolution of artistic expression.

Keywords:
Chinese artistic spirit, Globalization, Aesthetic education, Artistic reinvention

1.Introduction

In the sweeping tide of globalization, China, an old culture, faces ongoing opportunities and challenges as a result of increasing cultural collisions and integration. As contemporary art blurs boundaries, the pathways for transferring traditional culture through art become more diverse. This multiplicity of distribution methods strengthens the impact of the artistic spirit ingrained in cultural traditions. Traditional art is becoming increasingly significant as the globe faces epochal shifts. In addition to managing public cultural progress in the modern era, it carries the cultural heritage and national ethos required for the survival of Chinese culture.

The core of traditional art is a dynamic dialogue between the past and present that is based on historical continuity and cultural identity. The wide range of artistic mediums and the rapid advancement of modern technologies are causing a considerable shift in traditional artistic forms. This study investigates how ancient art continuously reinvents itself in contemporary contexts rather than being timeless. This multidisciplinary analysis aims to identify the basic aesthetic principles of traditional art and determine how they have been modified for application in contemporary artistic endeavors.

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2.Defining Chinese Artistic Spirit

Condensed into the core of national culture, the Chinese artistic spirit not only reflects important historical legacies but also finds fresh life in modernity among remarkable cross-cultural exchanges.

Peng Jixiang's "Chinese Art Studies" identifies six aspects of the Chinese artistic spirit: "Dao" (the Way), "Qi" (vital energy), "Xin" (heart-mind), "Wu" (dance), "Wu" (enlightenment), and "He" (harmony) [1]. In ancient Chinese art, the ultimate objective of "Unity of Heaven and Humanity" (天人合一) is embodied in the highest aesthetic ideal, "Great Harmony with Heaven and Earth" (大乐与天地同和).

The importance of "yijing" (意 境 , artistic conception) in Chinese artistic spirit is emphasized by Zong Baihua in "The Birth of Chinese Artistic Conception": "The development of Chinese artistic conception requires the transcendent sublimity of Zhuangzi's ideas and the poignant depth of Qu Yuan's works. While the latter makes art as elusive as "moonlight on water" or "blossoms mirrored in glass," transcending material forms, the former permits a deep immersion into the essence of reality, catching the core. In addition to defining the aesthetic qualities of Tang poetry, this interaction between form and void also contributes to Song-Yuan painting's distinct charm. [2]

Historically, Chinese artistic conception rejects the subject-object dichotomy. "Unity of Heaven and Humanity" remains its philosophical core, evident in painting’s "shifa ziran" (师法自然 , emulating nature) and poetry’s "yuqing yujing" (寓情于景 , embedding emotion in landscape). Such harmony between humanity and nature constitutes the unique allure of Chinese art and the bedrock of cultural confidence.

However, modern Sino-Western cultural encounters have profoundly impacted traditional art. The hegemony of Western realism in aesthetic education has marginalized traditional masterpieces and their humanistic ethos. Revitalizing national aesthetic competence thus becomes imperative for sustaining traditional artistic spirit, requiring attention not only to artistic forms but also to cultivating aesthetic literacy.

3.Artistic Spirit Transformation Relies on Aesthetic Competence

Artistic spirit hinges not solely on mediums but on aesthetic competence. Contemporary inheritance demands not only preserving forms but perpetuating the capacity to perceive beauty.

3.1. National Aesthetic Competence: Foundation of Cultural Confidence

Centuries of cultural collisions, from the May Fourth Movement to the New Art Movement, disrupted traditional art’s transmission. Western realism’s dominance relegated traditional works to "esoteric" obscurity, undermining cultural confidence. As Liang Qichao asserts in Art and Life:

"Aesthetic instinct is innate, yet sensory neglect breeds numbness. A numbness individual grows dull; a numbness nation loses vitality. Art’s purpose is to reawaken numbness, transmuting dullness into fascination" [3].

Liang’s thesis highlights aesthetic competence as the linchpin of cultural confidence. In a globalized era, fostering this competence through education and cultural initiatives is critical to revitalizing traditional art’s

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relevance.

3.2. Reviving Antiquity: Reclaiming Aesthetic Instinct

Amidst cultural fragmentation, "reviving antiquity" (博古) via modern media is essential. This transcends mere replication; it involves reanimating the cultural ethos underpinning traditions.

China’s museum sector exemplifies this revival. By 2022, museum numbers surged to 6,183 (double 2012’s count), with 1,222 national-tier institutions. Thematic exhibitions and digital programs like "National Treasure" and "Chinese Poetry Conference" democratize access to tradition, embedding cultural spirit into public consciousness.

In contrast to merely looking back or copying, "reviving antiquity" (博古) entails creativity and change founded on a deep comprehension of the ancient artistic ethos in conjunction with the aesthetic requirements and technological capabilities of the modern day. This change is evident in both the profound understanding and passing down of ancient cultural essence as well as in the creativity of artistic forms. We can increase cultural confidence in our national history by allowing more people to comprehend and enjoy the allure of traditional art through contemporary distribution channels and varied transmission techniques.

In order to foster the cultural spirit that underpins traditional art, we should make the most of modern distribution channels and a variety of transmission techniques. This will enable the power of this "aesthetic instinct" to become a crucial source of cultural confidence for the country.

3.3. Innovating Anew: Expanding Aesthetic Frontiers

The concept of "reviving antiquity through innovation" (博古萌新) in aesthetic sensibility represents not only the accumulation but also the flourishing of aesthetic capabilities. "Innovation" (萌新) is essential for the transmission of cultural spirit in the new era. It does not imply the wholesale abandonment of traditional artistic models or the pursuit of superficial novelty for attention. Rather, it signifies the dissemination and promotion of traditional artistic spirit through new methods, grounded in the perspective of the modern era.

"Innovation" also involves articulating the national narrative of the new era through a Chinese lens within the globalized world. Whether it is Xu Bing's indecipherable Book from the Sky or Han Meilin's Book from the Sky exhibited in the Forbidden City, the dots, lines, planes, density, lightness, dryness, and wetness of Chinese traditional culture collectively compose a new "fantastical tale" for this era. Book from the Sky evokes not only the curiosity of reading but also the beauty and representation of form beyond the function of textual communication. This ingenious "representation," which reawakens the audience's ability to "see," resonates with the traditional cultural spirit of appreciating the charm of calligraphy. The "revival of antiquity through innovation" in aesthetic sensibility is not merely a breakthrough in artistic content; the diversification of creative mediums has also enabled artists to transcend the two-dimensional confines of traditional art. Whether it is Cai Guoqiang's Sky Ladder or Peng Wei's Double Happiness series, artists have expanded their creative canvases to encompass the heavens and the earth, using traditional elements such as fireworks and shoes to narrate artistic stories imbued with the spirit of Chinese culture. By embracing the approach of "reviving antiquity through innovation"—that is, innovating on the foundation of traditional artistic

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spirit while incorporating elements and aesthetic demands of the new era—traditional art can be revitalized with new vitality and relevance.

4.Folk Aesthetics: The Soul of Cultural Continuity

The contemporary inheritance of traditional cultural spirit involves not only the preservation of the beauty found in high art but also a focus on the aesthetics of folk traditions. As a vast, multi-ethnic nation, China boasts an extensive and diverse traditional culture. The exploration and protection of local and ethnic intangible cultural heritage are of paramount importance. The transmission of traditional artistic spirit must also emphasize the beauty of folk customs. In a multi-ethnic country like China, with its profound and varied traditional culture, the discovery and preservation of regional and ethnic intangible cultural heritage serve as crucial pathways for inheriting traditional artistic spirit.

Take Yunnan as an example. In the Bai ethnic region of Dali, residential architecture often adopts the "three-bay, one-screen wall" (三坊一照壁) and "quadrangle with five courtyards" (四合五天井) tiled-roof styles. The Bai people revere the tiger, colloquially referred to as the "big cat," and thus transform the tiger's image into a "tile cat" (瓦猫), placed atop roofs and gates to ward off evil and attract good fortune. Positioned at the center of the main house's ridge, the tile cat symbolizes the homeowner's prayer for family safety and the expulsion of malevolent forces. The tile cat, a divine beast-shaped ornament crafted through ingenious design, integrates the local people's traditional culture, religious beliefs, and aesthetic consciousness. As a unique roof decoration, it is particularly common in traditional architecture in regions like Yunnan. It is not merely a practical artifact but also a deeply ingrained cultural and philosophical symbol in the lives of the local people.

With the evolution of urban architecture and shifts in aesthetic preferences, the tile cat, despite being one of the Bai ethnic group's intangible cultural heritages, has seen a decline in both the number of artisans preserving its craftsmanship and its practical usage. It has become a "creature of the past" for the Bai people. However, with the increasing emphasis on protecting ethnic intangible cultural heritage and the development of cultural tourism in the new era, the tile cat has begun to capture the attention of tourists. Whether in Dali's Xizhou or Heqing, tile cat workshops have emerged. Beyond preserving traditional craftsmanship, these workshops offer popular experiences for the younger generation to create and take tile cats back to their modern homes. The tile cat is no longer just a mascot perched on rooftops but also a disseminator of Bai beliefs. Its image has regained vitality, becoming a "social media sensation" through new media platforms.

5. Dissemination, Interaction, Exchange: A Global Imperative

Chinese culture has a rich and lengthy past, and in order to preserve national traits while also embracing a global viewpoint, the ancient artistic essence must be transmitted and transformed.

The opening ceremony of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics was a prime illustration of the traditional creative spirit, with its countdown design inspired by the twenty-four solar eras. The metamorphosis of the artistic soul requires transmission, engagement, interchange, and inheritance in the present day. With the

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recent explosion of the Chinese film industry, numerous masterpieces incorporating traditional Chinese creative themes have been produced. Viewers both domestically and internationally have praised the animated film Ne Zha for its unique storytelling style and particularly Chinese features. Its success is due to its smooth blending of traditional Chinese mythology with contemporary filmmaking techniques, which highlights the distinct allure of Chinese culture to a worldwide audience, in addition to its gripping plot and excellent production value.

In light of globalization, it is essential to examine and communicate China's artistic spirit from a global perspective. In order for more people to recognize and value the beauty of Chinese art, it is necessary to actively share and disseminate traditional culture in addition to safeguarding our innate artistic soul. At the same time, we may learn from and absorb the positive aspects of different cultures through communication and exchange, which will give us new ideas and drive to innovate and advance the ancient artistic spirit.

In addition to preserving our innate artistic spirit, cultural confidence is openly expressing the artistic spirit of traditional culture as citizens of the Chinese people. Like the poetic imagery of "the Yellow River's waters descending from the heavens" in the opening ceremony, dissemination, interaction, and exchange do not mean giving up on traditional art but rather reinterpreting its spirit through new media in the modern era.

6.Conclusions

The transmission and evolution of the Chinese artistic spirit necessitates the combined efforts of society as a whole. By improving aesthetic capabilities, developing dissemination techniques, appreciating the beauty of folk traditions, and strengthening dissemination, interaction, and exchange, the Chinese artistic spirit can shine brighter in the new period.

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