

The Application of Meishan Cultural Symbols in Painting

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Abstract

Meishan culture, a distinctive regional culture in southern China, has a long and rich history, encompassing diverse folk beliefs, artistic expressions, customs, and social structures. This paper explores the history and origins of Meishan culture, delving into its core elements and its transmission and development in modern society. By analyzing the extraction and transformation of Meishan cultural symbols and their application in art forms like painting, the unique value of Meishan culture in the modern context is revealed. Visual symbols of Meishan culture, such as paper-cutting, Nuo opera masks, and textile patterns, have been integrated with modern artistic forms, preserving their traditional characteristics while gaining new vitality in the context of globalization. This paper argues that the modern expression of Meishan culture not only enhances its dissemination and promotion across a broader spectrum but also offers valuable insights for the preservation and innovation of other local cultures. The transmission and innovation of Meishan culture demonstrate the importance of cultural diversity and the limitless possibilities of cultural integration. Meishan culture will continue to serve as a significant example of Chinese culture, providing abundant cultural resources and inspiration, contributing to the protection and development of cultural diversity.

Keywords: Application; Meishan Culture; Cultural Symbols; Painting

Introduction

Meishan culture, a unique and rich cultural tradition from southern China, boasts a diverse history rooted in indigenous folk beliefs, artistic expressions, and social structures. Emerging from the early civilizations of the Meishan region, this culture has continually evolved through interactions with other cultures, maintaining a balance between tradition and modernity. This paper aims to explore the significance of Meishan cultural symbols, particularly in the realm of visual arts, and their transformation and application in modern painting. By analyzing the historical roots and contemporary expressions of these symbols, the article will highlight how Meishan culture offers valuable insights into cultural preservation and innovation, ultimately contributing to broader discussions on cultural diversity in a globalized world. Through this exploration, readers will gain a deeper appreciation of Meishan's artistic heritage and its potential to inspire new forms of creative expression.

The history of Meishan culture can be traced back to prehistoric times, approximately 15,000 years ago. The unique geographical environment and climate of the early Meishan region made it an ideal place for human activity. During this period, a culture based on hunting and agriculture gradually took shape. Archaeological discoveries in various sites in the Meishan region, including stone tools and pottery, reflect the production, lifestyle, and cultural creativity of the early inhabitants.

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As time progressed, Meishan culture was influenced by external cultures. During the Warring States period, the expansion of the Chu Kingdom southward brought with it metallurgy, pottery, shipbuilding, and other advanced technologies, contributing to the social and economic development of the region. The cultural integration during this period laid the early foundations of Meishan culture, characterized by diversity and inclusiveness.

Meishan culture further developed its unique characteristics during the Qin and Han dynasties. Due to its remote location, Meishan remained somewhat isolated from central governance, allowing it to maintain its original form and develop unique religious beliefs and social systems. According to historical records, the Meishan cultural area included present-day Anhua, Xinhua, and Shaoyang in Hunan Province, and was predominantly inhabited by the Yao ethnic group, among others. During this period, Meishan culture continued to preserve its distinctive cultural elements while interacting with external cultures, such as unique religious beliefs, folk legends, and social organization forms.

By the Tang and Song dynasties, Meishan culture entered a new phase of development. Particularly in the Northern Song Dynasty, when the policy of "Opening Meishan" was implemented, Meishan was incorporated into the central governance system, leading to deeper exchanges and integration with Central Plains culture. The subsequent settlement of large numbers of Han Chinese in the Meishan region and the gradual assimilation of the Yao people left a lasting impact on Meishan culture, even as it retained its core elements and cultural characteristics.

From a historical perspective, the formation of Meishan culture is closely related to its unique geographical environment, the long-term practices of ethnic minorities, and the continuous interaction and integration with Han culture. Meishan culture is not only a product of the combination of primitive rice cultivation and indigenous religious beliefs but also a distinctive manifestation of the spread and development of Han culture in southern frontier regions. Over centuries, through continuous absorption and integration, Meishan culture has developed into a unique cultural system, characterized by deep historical roots, distinct regional features, and strong vitality and development potential.

Overall, Meishan culture is an important part of China's cultural diversity, demonstrating the process of cultural fusion and coexistence in a specific geographical context. It represents the historical memory and cultural heritage of the Meishan region, providing valuable material and case studies for research on cultural exchanges and integration in southern China. As a typical example of local culture, Meishan culture still preserves its rich folklore, religious practices, and artistic expressions, offering deep cultural resources and inspiration for modern cultural innovation and development.

Core Elements of Meishan Culture

Meishan culture, a unique regional cultural tradition in central Hunan, encompasses diverse folk beliefs, religious practices, artistic expressions, and traditional crafts. As a fusion of ethnic minority cultures in central Hunan and Han culture from the Central Plains, Meishan culture is characterized by distinct regional features and cultural connotations, reflecting the coexistence and harmony of multiple cultures in the central Hunan region.

Folk Beliefs and Primitive Shamanism

One of the core elements of Meishan culture is its unique folk beliefs and primitive shamanism, which have formed distinctive religious traditions and spiritual belief systems over the long historical process. The Meishan region, home to various ethnic groups such as the Yao and Miao, developed a rich and diverse folk belief system through long-term cultural exchange and integration with Han culture. The Meishan people practiced nature worship and totem worship, with widely circulated stories about dragons, snakes, and tigers, which symbolized their reverence for nature and were integral to their lives and culture. In Meishan, shamanism was not only a religious belief but also a cultural practice with practical significance. The Meishan Nuo ritual, regarded as an important means of exorcism and blessing, remains prevalent in many areas. As a form of Nuo culture, Meishan Nuo opera is both a religious ritual and a form of entertainment, reflecting the Meishan people's reverence for nature and supernatural forces. The masks, musical instruments, and props used in Nuo opera carry deep religious and cultural symbolism, making it one of the most representative artistic forms of Meishan culture.

The formation of Meishan religion further accentuates the features of this shamanistic culture. Originating from shamanism and incorporating Taoist rituals, Meishan religion developed into a unique religious system. The primary deity worshipped in Meishan religion is Zhang Wulang, a protective figure in folk beliefs, embodying strong regional characteristics and cultural identity. The pantheon of Meishan religion is complex and diverse, reflecting the cultural fusion and evolution in the Meishan region.

Artistic Expression and Intangible Cultural Heritage

Meishan culture is expressed through a wide variety of artistic forms and intangible cultural heritage, which reflect the creativity and imagination of the Meishan people and serve as vital carriers of cultural transmission. The rich artistic traditions of Meishan include national intangible cultural heritage such as Xinhua mountain songs, Meishan Nuo opera, paper-cutting, black tea, and martial arts, along with architecture, carving, storytelling, and cultural customs, all of which possess unique cultural value and historical significance.

Xinhua mountain songs, a representative form of folk music in the Meishan region, have a long history, dating back to the pre-Qin period, and flourished during the Tang and Song dynasties. Known for their high-pitched and lively melodies, Xinhua mountain songs vividly express the daily life, labor, and emotions of the Meishan people. The diverse melodies, including high-pitched and flat-pitched songs, reflect the distinctive characteristics of the mountainous and plain areas of Meishan. The lyrics cover a wide range of topics, including love, labor, customs, and historical legends, embodying the Meishan people's reflections on nature and life while conveying rich folk cultural information. The impromptu and spontaneous performance style of Xinhua mountain songs, characterized by its strong local flavor, has made it an integral part of cultural life in the Meishan region. In modern society, these mountain songs have transitioned from traditional rural settings to broader stages, becoming a popular art form in and around the region.

Meishan Nuo opera, a traditional performing art of the Meishan region, combines theater, dance, and music, typically used in religious ceremonies for blessings, exorcism, and entertainment. Originating from ancient shamanistic culture, Meishan Nuo opera has evolved over centuries into a distinctive performance system. Performers wear masks and traditional costumes, mimicking the actions of deities and expressing reverence for nature and supernatural forces. The unique performance style of Meishan Nuo opera, incorporating local dialects, folk songs, and dramatic movements, reflects strong local color and ethnic characteristics. The artistic value of Meishan Nuo opera lies not only in its performance style but also in its portrayal of ancient folk beliefs and traditional social structures, making it an essential reference for studying Meishan's cultural and religious history. In recent years, Meishan Nuo opera has been revived and protected in modern society, appearing in cultural exchanges and art festivals both domestically and internationally, showcasing the diversity and richness of traditional Chinese culture.

Meishan paper-cutting is another significant component of Meishan culture, representing a traditional folk art with deep cultural and artistic value. This art form, blending Han and minority cultural elements, has developed its unique patterns and styles in the Meishan region. Paper-cutting plays a crucial role in life events, such as birth, marriage, and funeral ceremonies, and is an integral part of daily life in Meishan. The patterns, ranging from simple geometric shapes to complex depictions of animals and plants, reflect the Meishan people's rich imagination and craftsmanship. The vivid and distinctive style of Meishan paper-cutting, including both monochromatic and multicolored designs, and even three-dimensional works, illustrates the romantic and innovative aspects of modern art. With the increased focus on intangible cultural heritage protection, Meishan paper-cutting has gained more attention and significance. Today, this traditional craft is not only preserved and passed down locally but also integrated into modern design, decoration, and fashion, showcasing its renewed vitality and artistic value.

The black tea-making techniques in Meishan are a key part of Chinese tea culture, particularly the production of Qianliang tea and Fuzhuan tea, which are unique expressions of Meishan culture. These techniques reflect the Meishan people's wisdom in tea cultivation, harvesting, fermentation, and processing, as well as their respect for and adaptation to the natural environment. Meishan black tea, known for its distinctive flavor and health benefits, especially Qianliang tea, often called the "King of Tea," involves a complex production process that includes tea selection, drying, pressing, and packaging, demonstrating the ingenuity and creativity of the Meishan people.

In addition to these, other traditional crafts in Meishan, such as carving, woodworking, and pottery, also hold significant positions in local culture. These crafts are not only material carriers of Meishan culture but also reflections of the artistic creativity of the Meishan people. In modern society, these techniques have been revitalized and promoted, becoming important targets for intangible cultural heritage protection, and through various cultural promotion and exchange activities, they are gradually gaining national and international recognition.

Customs and Regional Characteristics

The core elements of Meishan culture also include its rich and diverse customs, which reflect the life wisdom and regional characteristics of the Meishan people. The dietary habits of the Meishan region are a crucial aspect of its culture. Due to its mountainous terrain, the region's cuisine is marked by distinctive local flavors, such as a preference for spicy, sour, rice noodles, and mixed dishes, with raw fish and raw vegetables being particularly unique. Traditionally, Meishan people place great importance on festivals and family gatherings, with traditional Meishan cuisine including a wide variety of dishes such as ten meats, ten vegetables, and ten drinks. These dietary customs not only showcase the Meishan people's life wisdom but also their love for food and life.

Specific customs and festivals also form a core part of Meishan culture. Traditional festivals such as the Ghost Festival, Tomb-Sweeping Day, and Dragon Boat Festival are significant in Meishan, where people engage in rituals and celebrations to honor ancestors and deities. The religious nature of these activities is evident in rituals such as "singing to Taigong" and the Nuo rites dedicated to Zhang Wulang, all of which are important folk practices in Meishan culture. These activities are not only integral to the cultural life of the Meishan people but also vital to the transmission of Meishan culture across generations.

Social Structure and Cultural Concepts

The core content of Meishan culture also reflects its unique social structure and cultural concepts. Meishan society has traditionally been based on clans and families, with a strong emphasis on clan consciousness. The family is the basic unit of Meishan society, with clear hierarchical structures and power dynamics within clans. Elders play an important role in village affairs and cultural transmission. The Meishan people value family and clan harmony, emphasizing collectivism and common interests, which has profoundly influenced the formation and development of Meishan culture.

Meishan cultural concepts emphasize "people-oriented" and "self-reliance through unity" values. The Meishan people admire heroism and loyalty, considering "courage, responsibility, honor, and fidelity" as fundamental life principles. These cultural concepts have deeply shaped the social ethos and cultural atmosphere of the Meishan region. The ethnic consciousness and collective spirit in Meishan culture have, over time, fostered a strong sense of regional identity and cultural mindset.

In summary, the core content of Meishan culture is rich and diverse, encompassing folk beliefs, artistic expressions, customs, social structures, and more. It not only reflects the cultural fusion and coexistence of multiple ethnic groups in the Meishan region but also showcases the unique cultural charm and human spirit of this area. This diversity provides a solid foundation for the transmission and development of Meishan culture, as well as abundant material and inspiration for its innovation and dissemination in the modern cultural context.

The Transmission and Development of Meishan Culture

Meishan culture is a historically rich and culturally profound regional culture in central Hunan, originating from the ancient Meishan area. As an ancient and mysterious folk tradition in southern China, Meishan culture is not only an important branch of the Chu culture but also a testament to the historical and cultural integration of multiple ethnic groups. Over time, Meishan culture has undergone several transformations and developments, and its transmission and promotion continue to hold significant cultural and social importance in contemporary society.

The transmission of Meishan culture is mainly reflected in two aspects: the preservation of intangible cultural heritage and the maintenance of ethnic traditions. Many elements of Meishan culture, such as Meishan Nuo opera, Meishan mountain songs, Meishan paper-cutting, and Meishan martial arts, have been preserved as intangible cultural heritage. On the other hand, cultural heritage has been passed down through generations, oral histories, and folk customs, becoming an integral part of Meishan culture. During this transmission process, Meishan culture is continuously enriched and developed through imitation and the accumulation and dissemination of performative knowledge. Imitation is not merely a replication but a creative recreation based on social behavior, allowing Meishan cultural symbols to evolve during transmission. For example, the mask performances and religious rituals in Meishan Nuo opera are both recreations of traditional culture and adaptations to modern society.

Furthermore, the transmission of Meishan culture exhibits strong community and collective characteristics. Religious activities, festivals, and folk rituals within the community are important carriers of Meishan culture's transmission. These activities not only facilitate the continuation of culture but also enhance community cohesion and cultural identity.

As society progresses and globalization influences, Meishan culture has undergone multiple developments and innovations while being transmitted. In recent years, Meishan culture has gradually moved from a local culture to the national and even global stage, with its unique cultural symbols and artistic forms gaining broader recognition.

The integration of Meishan culture with the tourism industry has become a key avenue for its development in recent years. The Hunan provincial government and related departments have promoted the deep integration of Meishan culture with tourism through academic seminars, the construction of Meishan cultural parks, and cultural exhibitions. This integration has not only facilitated the spread of Meishan culture but also brought new economic growth opportunities to the region.

In the context of intangible cultural heritage protection, many elements of Meishan culture, such as Meishan Nuo opera and Meishan paper-cutting, have been designated as national intangible cultural heritage. Through legislation, education, media promotion, and other means, the government and cultural departments actively protect and promote Meishan culture. These efforts not only sustain the vitality of Meishan culture but also strengthen people's recognition of traditional culture.

Types and Characteristics of Meishan Cultural Symbols: Visual Symbols

Visual symbols are an essential part of Meishan culture, conveying and transmitting rich historical, cultural, and religious meanings through various forms of artistic expression. These visual symbols are primarily manifested in Meishan's paper-cutting, painting, carving, textile patterns, Nuo masks, and other artistic forms, embodying both unique aesthetic value and profound cultural significance.

First, Meishan paper-cutting stands out as the most prominent visual symbol of Meishan culture. As an ancient folk art, it carries the unique cultural connotations and lifestyle of the Meishan region. This paper-cutting art includes two main types: "Jianhua" (cut flowers) and "Cuohua" (engraved flowers), serving a wide range of purposes from life rituals to daily decoration. For example, in the ancient Meishan area of Anhua, paper-cutting plays a vital role in people's lives, from a baby's birth to weddings and funerals. The patterns used in Meishan paper-cutting are rich in symbolism. For instance, the "Double Happiness" pattern symbolizes loyalty and happiness in wedding celebrations, while in religious rituals, more three-dimensional styles are often used, such as paper houses and wreaths. These have evolved into a unique form known as "Xiangyi Paper-cutting," which retains the original features of Meishan paper-cutting and reflects its primitive and folkloric characteristics.



Picture 1: MEISHAN Color paper cutting

Source: Meishan paper-cutting inheritor Ms. Xiang Liangjing provided the picture

Second, Meishan's painting art is another crucial aspect of its visual symbols. The distinctive style of Meishan paintings, influenced by local geography, historical background, and ethnic integration, includes traditional New Year paintings, woodblock prints, and hand-painted works characterized by bold colors and compositions, often themed around mythology, history, and folk beliefs.



Picture 2: Tantou New Year Pictures

Source: Provided by Liu Zhou, teacher of Hunan Vocational College of Art

Nuo masks are another vital visual symbol in Meishan culture. Meishan Nuo opera, performed during rituals for blessings and exorcism, uses masks as its core props. These masks vary in design, some depicting anger or solemnity, while others show humor or whimsy. The craftsmanship of the masks is exquisite, with bright colors like red, black, yellow, and white, each carrying specific symbolic meanings.



Picture 3: Nuo Opera Masks and Nuo Opera Performances

Source: Lengshuijiang Municipal People's Government Website Culture

Additionally, textile patterns also play a significant role as visual symbols in Meishan culture. Traditional textiles from the Meishan region, especially handmade cloth and embroidered items, are often decorated with geometric patterns, animal and plant motifs, and mythological stories. These patterns are not only visually appealing but also carry symbolic meanings, such as dragon and phoenix patterns representing authority and good fortune, fish patterns symbolizing prosperity, and geometric shapes like diamonds and squares symbolizing stability and safety.



Picture 4: Meishan printing and dyeing patterns and embroidery patterns
Source: Hunan Intangible Cultural Heritage Network

These visual symbols play a crucial role in Meishan's social life and belief systems. They convey the cultural connotations and beliefs of the Meishan people through various forms of artistic expression, reflecting the distinct regional characteristics and aesthetic values of Meishan culture. These symbols are not only a unique feature of the local culture but also serve as a window into the Meishan people's worldview, values, and aesthetic sensibilities in specific historical and social contexts.

Transformation and Representation of Culture Symbols: Application in Artistic Creation

The transformation and representation of cultural symbols, especially their application in artistic creation, are key to the modern expression of Meishan culture. As society progresses and modern art evolves, how to transform the visual symbols of Meishan culture into artistic works and cultural products suitable for modern society, while maintaining their authenticity, has become a pressing issue for cultural inheritors and artists.

The visual symbols of Meishan culture are reinterpreted and represented in various art forms such as painting, sculpture, and stage performance. These visual symbols not only exist as aesthetic elements in artistic works but also serve as cultural symbols that convey the unique cultural information of the Meishan region. For example, Meishan paper-cutting and martial arts movements have been reinterpreted and represented through modern art. Paper-cutting, as a traditional art form, can be combined with modern fashion design to become a new form of artistic expression. Through modern decorative art, fashion design, visual art exhibitions, and other channels, these symbols are revitalized and gain new life in the globalized context.

In the application of painting art, the transformation of Meishan cultural symbols is particularly evident. The totems, patterns, and mythological images in Meishan culture are widely used in modern paintings. For instance, traditional Meishan symbols like "Heaven," "Earth," and "Man" have been adopted by modern artists to create artworks with ethnic characteristics. By reconstructing these traditional symbols and employing modern painting techniques such as abstract expression and conceptual painting, artists imbue these symbols with new aesthetic connotations and cultural meanings. This transformation of symbols not only enriches the artistic forms of modern painting but also opens up new avenues for the dissemination and promotion of Meishan culture.

In the artistic transformation of Meishan cultural symbols, the concepts of representation and innovation are key. For example, some unique movements and postures in Meishan martial arts are reinterpreted in modern stage art and film productions. By staging and dramatizing these movements, the visual effects and expressiveness are enhanced, allowing these traditional cultural symbols to gain wider recognition and dissemination in modern society. Such artistic transformation preserves the uniqueness and authenticity of traditional culture while enhancing the contemporary relevance and appeal of the symbols.

Another successful example of transformation is the representation of symbols in digital art creation. The development of modern technology provides more possibilities for the transformation of cultural symbols. Through digital technology such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), the symbols of Meishan culture can be presented more intuitively and vividly. The traditional symbols of Meishan are transformed into 3D models or interactive media content, allowing the audience to experience the unique charm of Meishan culture in an immersive way. This transformation not only expands the audience for Meishan culture but also breathes new life into it in modern society.

In the field of education and research, the representation of Meishan cultural symbols helps systematically pass on these symbols to new generations. Educators can use visual symbols from Meishan culture to design teaching materials and develop cultural courses suitable for different age groups, helping students better understand the history and values of Meishan culture. In art courses, students can learn traditional techniques such as Meishan paper-cutting, mask making, and painting, and reinterpret these symbols with modern significance through their creations.

Overall, the transformation of Meishan cultural symbols in modern artistic creation not only enriches the content and form of artistic expression but also provides new avenues for the dissemination and promotion of Meishan culture. This transformation preserves the authenticity of culture while giving it new vitality through innovative methods, allowing Meishan culture to thrive in modern society.

Theoretical Foundations of Painting Applications

In the transformation of Meishan cultural symbols and their application in artistic creation, the theoretical foundations of painting applications are crucial. They not only determine how cultural symbols are represented and reinterpreted but also influence the methods of modern interpretation and dissemination of these symbols. As a visual art form, painting can transform the symbolic language of Meishan culture into specific visual language, conveying cultural information and values through visual perception.

Three commonly used methods in painting applications—compositional interpretation, content analysis, and semiotics—provide different perspectives on the application of Meishan cultural symbols in painting. Compositional interpretation focuses on the detailed observation and analysis of the visual elements in a painting, such as composition, color, and lighting, to reveal the underlying emotions and cultural connotations of the image. Content analysis systematically categorizes and quantifies paintings to explore the application patterns and cultural meanings of symbols in art. Semiotics, on the other hand, emphasizes the relationships between symbols, understanding how these symbols function and signify within specific cultural contexts.

In the application of Meishan cultural symbols in painting, these three methods complement each other. Through compositional interpretation, artists can accurately capture the visual characteristics of Meishan symbols. Content analysis allows for a systematic understanding of how these symbols are applied in different works. Semiotics provides a deeper understanding of the cultural connotations behind the symbols and their representation in painting.

Semiotics is a key theoretical tool for understanding the application of cultural symbols in painting. It emphasizes the relationship between symbols and the concepts they represent, as well as the construction of meaning within specific cultural contexts. In the creation of paintings inspired by Meishan culture, artists use the extraction and representation of Meishan symbols to create a series of visual symbols rich in cultural significance. These symbols are not just representations of images but carriers of cultural connotations.

Based on Stuart Hall's theory of representation, the symbols in paintings not only reflect the objective reality of the world but are also reinterpreted and recreated through a cultural lens. When artists use Meishan cultural symbols in their paintings, they are expressing their understanding and interpretation of Meishan culture through visual language. Through semiotic analysis, the symbols and symbolic systems in paintings are not merely means of artistic expression but also media for generating and transmitting cultural meaning.

The painting symbols in Meishan culture reflect specific historical and cultural contexts, showcasing the lifestyle, belief systems, and aesthetic pursuits of the Meishan people. In this process, the theoretical foundation of painting applications involves elements of symbolism, constructivism, and semiotics, which guide the visual expression of Meishan cultural symbols and ensure their effective representation and innovation in contemporary painting. Symbolism theory posits that painting is not just an imitation of reality but a means of conveying spirit and emotion through symbols. In the painting expression of Meishan culture, symbols often carry deep symbolic meanings. For example, totemic images such as Chiyou, Fuhan Yang, and Zhang Wulang not only represent ancestor worship but also bear rich cultural symbolism. Therefore, in painting creation, artists often use exaggeration, deformation, and other techniques to recreate these symbols, highlighting their symbolic meanings and spiritual connotations.

Constructivism emphasizes the organization and arrangement of visual elements within the composition and structure of the artwork. In the painting applications of Meishan culture, this theory guides the integration of traditional symbols with modern compositional techniques. For instance, the symmetrical and balanced composition typical of Meishan paper-cutting patterns provides inspiration for modern artistic creation. In contemporary painting, artists can deconstruct and reconstruct these traditional symbols, employing modern techniques such as abstraction and collage to create works with new visual impact. Constructivism also stresses the coordination and balance of colors, lines, and shapes, aligning with the visual expression of Meishan cultural symbols, thereby better reflecting their cultural characteristics and artistic charm.

Semiotics, as a crucial theory in modern art studies, offers a framework for understanding and interpreting cultural symbols. In the painting application of Meishan culture, the core concepts of semiotics help to uncover the cultural connotations behind visual symbols. Semiotics posits that cultural symbols are not merely visual elements but part of a meaning system. Symbols in Meishan culture, such as Nuo masks and totemic images, are significant in

conveying cultural meanings. Through painting, these symbols can be reinterpreted and represented in new contexts, allowing for a broader understanding of their meanings and cultural implications.

Symbol Selection

The selection of symbols in the painting creation process directly affects the effectiveness of the artwork and the accuracy of cultural communication. Different symbol choices can convey different cultural messages and artistic styles, making symbol selection a crucial aspect of painting creation.



Picture 5: Meishan District Wind and Rain Bridge
Source: Meishan Cultural Park and Meishan Cultural Museum

Symbol selection in painting creation holds significant symbolic and directive value, first requiring the extraction and transformation of symbols. Meishan culture is rich in visual symbols, such as Nuo masks, mountain song lyrics, and paper-cutting patterns, all of which provide artists with a wealth of visual resources. These symbols carry specific meanings and cultural connotations in traditional culture, but in painting creation, artists extract and simplify these symbols, transforming them into visual elements with modern artistic styles. In this process, artists not only retain the original cultural characteristics of these symbols but also give them new forms and modes of expression. For instance, the shapes of Nuo opera masks can be abstracted in painting, enhancing their artistic expressiveness and visual impact. Meanwhile, traditional patterns in paper-cutting can be reinterpreted through various compositions and color combinations to create unique visual effects.



Picture 6: Professor Chen Feihu's environmental design work "The Rhythm of the Bridge - Connecting Meishan Culture on the Water"

Source: China's 14th National Art Exhibition Art Design Exhibition

The transmission and application of intangible cultural heritage play a crucial role in painting creation. According to Christoph Wulf, the intergenerational transmission of intangible cultural heritage is facilitated through imitation and creative recreation. In painting practice, this principle is applied to the creative transformation of Meishan cultural symbols. Artists not only recreate traditional elements of Meishan culture through painting but also use artistic techniques for innovative expression, allowing these symbols to gain new life in a modern social context. This process involves preserving traditional symbols while reinterpreting them in modern artistic creation, offering new visual forms and cultural connotations. This transformation allows traditional cultural symbols to continue to carry cultural value in contemporary settings.

Creative Directions in Painting Practice

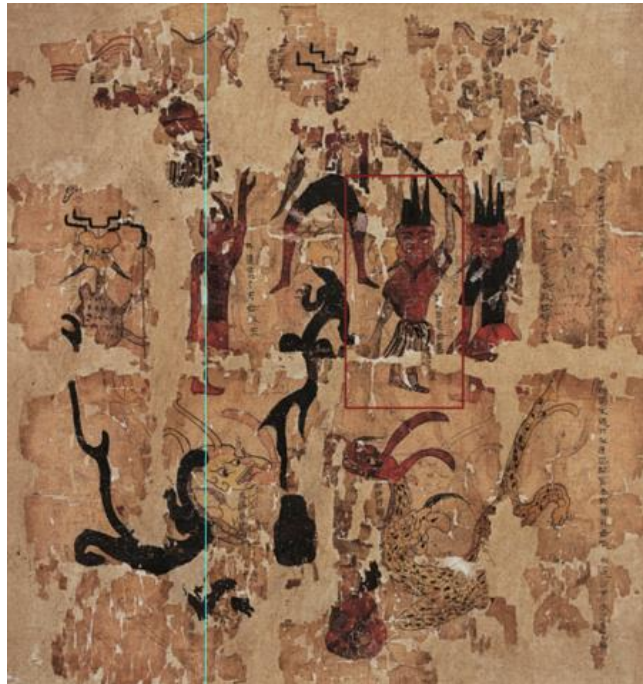
The practice of painting Meishan cultural symbols can be divided into two main directions: one focuses on the creation of paintings inspired by Meishan culture, and the other on painting activities in the Meishan region. These two directions are both independent and interrelated, collectively promoting the application of Meishan cultural symbols in painting.

The first direction emphasizes artistic creation, where artists draw inspiration from Meishan culture to create a series of works rich in local flavor. These works express the artists' understanding and interpretation of Meishan culture by extracting and innovating its symbols. This form of creation not only enriches the content of painting but also provides new avenues for the dissemination of Meishan culture.

The second direction emphasizes practical activities, including wall painting, painting restoration, and other community or public space-based activities that integrate Meishan cultural symbols into daily life through artistic means. This approach not only raises community awareness and recognition of Meishan culture but also enhances the effectiveness of cultural symbol dissemination.

Application of Cultural Symbols in Various Painting Forms

The application of cultural symbols in various painting forms is a crucial path for the transformation of Meishan culture's visual symbols. In modern artistic creation, cultural symbols can be applied not only in traditional painting forms such as Chinese painting, watercolor, and oil painting but also in emerging art forms like abstract expressionism, installation art, and digital painting.



Picture 7: Meishan Ancient Paintings
Source: Hunan Provincial Museum

In traditional painting forms, Meishan cultural symbols often appear as concrete images. For example, in Chinese painting, mythological animals from Meishan culture, such as dragons, snakes, and tigers, are given distinct personalities and symbolic meanings, reflecting reverence for natural forces. In oil painting, artists can use rich colors and fine brushstrokes to depict the complexity and diversity of Meishan cultural symbols, making them more visually striking and artistically compelling.

In abstract expressionism, the application of Meishan cultural symbols is manifested in the reinterpretation and recreation of traditional symbols. For example, artists can abstract traditional Meishan symbols such as paper-cutting patterns and Nuo masks into geometric forms or color blocks, creating a new visual language. In this new context, Meishan cultural symbols are no longer confined to their original cultural backgrounds and symbolic meanings but can serve as pure visual elements, infusing modern artistic works with new formal beauty and cultural significance.



Picture 8: Meishan Buildings and Fengyu Pavilion
Source: Photo by the autho



Picture 9: Liao Qingsheng's Cloudy Landscape Paintings
Source: People's Daily reported

In emerging art forms like installation art and digital painting, the application of Meishan cultural symbols is more flexible and diverse. For instance, using virtual reality (VR) technology, the symbols of Meishan culture can be transformed into interactive and immersive digital art, allowing viewers to experience the unique charm of Meishan culture in a virtual space. Installation art can physically construct spaces that bring the symbols of Meishan culture, such as dragons, tigers, and snakes, into three-dimensional, dynamic displays, giving them new life in the context of modern art.

Modern Expression of Cultural Symbols

In modern expression, the application of Meishan cultural symbols requires innovation while respecting tradition. Contemporary artists, by blending various artistic styles and techniques, enable Meishan cultural symbols to gain broader dissemination and recognition in new contexts. The modern expression of cultural symbols is not only about preserving and passing on traditional culture but also about innovative cultural re-creation, allowing them to maintain their uniqueness and vitality in a globalized world. The application of Meishan cultural symbols in painting is not a simple replication of traditional symbols but a fusion of tradition and modernity. This fusion is reflected in multiple aspects of artistic creation, including material selection, painting techniques, and symbol redesign. Through this fusion,

traditional Meishan cultural symbols gain new vitality in modern painting, preserving their historical and cultural value while meeting the expressive needs of contemporary art.



Picture 7: The author's mixed media paintings

In practical painting, artists can combine modern painting techniques such as oil painting, watercolor, and printmaking to integrate Meishan cultural symbols, creating unique artistic styles. The application of modern materials, such as digital painting and mixed media, also provides more possibilities for the expression of Meishan cultural symbols. This fusion of tradition and modernity not only enriches the forms of expression for Meishan culture but also expands its application in contemporary art.

The significance of applying Meishan cultural symbols in painting is not only in cultural transmission and innovation but also in its contribution to the development of contemporary art. By applying Meishan cultural symbols in painting, artists inject new vitality into contemporary art and provide new avenues for the transmission and development of Meishan culture.

First, the application of Meishan cultural symbols in painting promotes the dissemination and development of cultural symbols. Through the powerful and direct form of painting, Meishan cultural symbols are disseminated more widely. This dissemination is not limited to the Meishan region but extends nationally and even internationally, enhancing the recognition and influence of Meishan culture.

Second, the application of Meishan cultural symbols in painting drives the development of contemporary art. By modernizing traditional symbols, artists continuously explore new techniques and artistic forms in their creations. This exploration not only enriches the content of contemporary painting but also expands the creative approaches of artistic production.

Finally, the application of Meishan cultural symbols in painting provides new models for cultural transmission and innovation. In the context of globalization and modernization, traditional cultural symbols face the risk of being forgotten or homogenized. Through painting, Meishan cultural symbols are constantly innovated while being transmitted, maintaining their vitality. This model offers valuable insights for the transmission and development of other traditional cultural symbols.

Conclusion

Meishan culture, as a distinctive regional culture in southern China, has demonstrated its rich connotations and strong vitality throughout history. From its historical origins to modern development, Meishan culture has been transmitted and promoted through diverse cultural symbols and artistic forms. This paper systematically explores the historical background, core content, and transmission and innovation of Meishan culture in modern society. By analyzing the extraction, transformation, and application of cultural symbols in theory and practice, the unique value and significance of Meishan culture in modern society are revealed.

The core content of Meishan culture encompasses folk beliefs, artistic expressions, customs, and social structures. The folk beliefs and primitive shamanism in Meishan culture, such as Nuo opera and paper-cutting art, retain a strong local flavor while reflecting the spiritual beliefs and life wisdom of the Meishan people. These cultural symbols, constructed and transmitted through generations, highlight the diversity and inclusiveness of Meishan culture. These cultural symbols include ancient myths, religious rituals, and modern artistic expressions. Through these symbols, Meishan culture is not only passed down within the local community but also gains new vitality in broader cultural contexts.

This paper analyzes the process of extracting and transforming cultural symbols, particularly how visual symbols from Meishan culture are reinterpreted and represented in modern society through artistic creation. The selection and transformation of symbols not only provide rich creative material for modern painting but also offer new paths for cultural transmission and promotion. In painting creation, the visual symbols of Meishan culture are expressed in various forms of art, presenting a unique cultural charm. This transformation and representation of symbols enrich the expressive techniques of contemporary art and endow Meishan culture with new meanings and value, allowing it to be widely disseminated in contemporary contexts.

The modern expression of cultural symbols plays a crucial role in the transmission and innovation of Meishan culture. In the context of globalization, the survival and development of traditional culture face new challenges and opportunities. By integrating with modern artistic forms, Meishan culture retains its historical accumulation and cultural characteristics while adapting to the demands and aesthetic standards of modern society. The use of various forms of expression, such as painting, sculpture, installation art, and digital art, allows Meishan culture to be reshaped and promoted in the new era. This modern expression not only enhances the influence and appeal of Meishan culture but also provides valuable insights and references for the protection and development of other local cultures.

In general, Meishan culture, as an important part of China's cultural diversity, reflects the fusion and innovation of diverse cultures in modern society. Through systematic extraction and transformation of symbols, Meishan culture has been richly represented and applied in contemporary artistic creation, with its unique cultural symbols gaining new vitality in a new historical stage. In the future, as society progresses and cultural exchanges deepen, Meishan culture will continue to play a unique role, contributing actively to cultural diversity and development in a globalized world.

Through in-depth research and summary of Meishan culture, we not only see the revival of a local culture in modern society but also recognize the necessity and possibility of cultural transmission and innovation. As a bridge between history and modernity, Meishan culture symbolizes the resilient vitality and boundless creativity of traditional culture. In the future, we should continue to explore and promote the value of Meishan culture, using various artistic forms and modern technological means to allow it to shine even brighter in contemporary society.

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