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DOI 10.31483/r-112876

**RESEARCH ON THE INHERITANCE AND INNOVATION  
OF BIRCH BARK HANDICRAFT SKILLS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE  
OF COMPARATIVE ART**

***Abstract:** comparative Art, centered on the conscious comparison of diverse research subjects, provides artists with a liberating, expansive, dialectical, and innovative creative realm, grounded in the principle of comparison. This approach furnishes a robust theoretical foundation for artistic endeavors. Using Tao Dandan, the custodian of birch bark craftsmanship listed on Heilongjiang Province's intangible cultural heritage, as a case study, this paper delves into the aesthetic, heritage, and innovative dimensions of her works. It illustrates how emerging ethnic minority inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, exemplified by Tao Dandan, employ comparative art methodologies in their creative practices. Additionally, it explores their approaches and reflections on borrowing and innovating birch bark techniques from diverse cultural contexts.*

***Keywords:** Comparative Arts, Birch Bark Craftsmanship, Inheritance and Innovation.*

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## **ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ НАСЛЕДИЯ И ИННОВАЦИЙ В ОБЛАСТИ БЕРЕСТЯНЫХ ПОДЕЛОК С ТОЧКИ ЗРЕНИЯ СРАВНИТЕЛЬНОГО ИСКУССТВОВЗНАНИЯ**

*Аннотация: comparative Earth, основанный на сознательном сравнении различных предметов исследования, предоставляет художникам свободную, обширную, диалектическую и инновационную творческую сферу, основанную на принципе сравнения. Этот подход обеспечивает надежную теоретическую основу для художественных начинаний. Используя в качестве примера Тао Дан-дань, мастера берестяного дела, внесенного в список нематериального культурного наследия провинции Хэйлуцзян, в статье рассматриваются эстетические, исторические и инновационные аспекты ее работ. В работе показано, как представители новых этнических меньшинств, получающие нематериальное культурное наследие, на примере Тао Дан Дана, используют методологии сравнительного искусства в своих творческих практиках. Кроме того, в статье рассматриваются подходы и размышления о заимствовании и обновлении техник работы с берестой из различных культурных контекстов.*

*Ключевые слова: искусствоведческое сравнение, берестяное мастерство, наследование, инновация.*

*Take the intangible cultural heritage  
inheritor of Tao Dandan*

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1. *The methodological significance of the perspective of comparative art in the study of birch bark handicrafts.*

Comparative art theory, originating as a distinct field since World War II, gained traction among Chinese scholars in the 1980s. Mr. Li Xinfeng, a pioneering figure in Chinese comparative art studies, elucidated its essence in his seminal 1989 article, "The Function and Vision of Comparative Art". In it, he not only reviews international developments but also delineates the objects, methods, functions, and horizons of comparative art theory. At its core, comparative art entails consciously comparing diverse artistic phenomena, aiming to explore all domains influenced by human artistic endeavors. This approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of art, from macro-systems to individual microcosms, fostering connections within the art system and with broader cultural and spiritual realms. Relying on the core method of "comparison" in comparative art theory, Mr. Peng Jixiang, a well-known scholar, proposed that comparative art studies should be inspired by the research methodology of comparative literature, and use "parallel research" [1] and "cross-cultural research" [2] to study the research methods of different countries, different cultures, and different cultures in art theory. This study conducts comparative research on artistic phenomena, genres, artists, and works across diverse ethnic backgrounds to discern commonalities and historical-cultural roots underlying their distinct achievements. Focusing on Tao Dandan, a custodian of birch bark craftsmanship in Heilongjiang Province, the research explores how contemporary ethnic minority artists adapt and innovate birch bark techniques from different cultural backgrounds, using a comparative art research approach.

2. *Aesthetic value of the intangible cultural heritage inheritor Tao Dandan birch bark handicrafts.*

2.1. *Overview of the results of the pottery Tao Dandan birch bark craft works.*

Heihe City, located in the Xiaoxing'an Mountains of northern China, is one of the "Twin Cities of China and Russia", and is also an important birthplace of birch bark skills in China. The city has the largest number of birch bark artists with the highest level of craftsmanship and the most complete range of preserved varieties, and has close exchanges with foreign countries. The Oroqen, Daur, Manchu and other northern

ethnic minorities have been passed down from generation to generation here. Among them, Tao Dandan, as one of the representative figures, through years of hard study and practice, has not only won a number of honors in the local area, but also promoted birch bark handicrafts to the international market, becoming an outstanding inheritor and promoter of this skill. Through the persistent study of birch bark handicraft skills, Tao Dandan's works have reached the representative level of birch bark craftsmanship in terms of production quantity, skill level and communication influence, and she uses her exquisite skills to revive the ancient birch bark skills in modern life.

## *2.2. The expression of the art of handmaking the birch bark of the Tao Dandan in the times.*

Tao Dandan, raised in a skilled Manchu household, harbored a deep affinity for ethnic minority crafts from childhood, influenced by her elders' mastery of paper-cutting, painting, carving, and animal skin techniques. Initially driven by a desire to modernize traditional crafts through entrepreneurship, she sought to preserve and transmit her parents' heritage to younger generations. However, her exploration of birch bark craftsmanship revealed its potential not only to sustain livelihoods but also to enrich home decor with culturally resonant accessories. Through Tao Dandan's creations, many discovered the unique artistry of Oroqen and Evenki communities, while her fusion of ancient and contemporary elements underscored shared cultural roots between Chinese and Russian peoples. Indeed, her craftsmanship consistently captivates viewers, sparking a newfound interest in the history of ethnic minority folk cultures and prompting scholarly inquiries into cultural origins. In the process of inheriting and creating birch bark skills for more than 20 years, Tao Dandan has gradually explored his own inheritance concept, that is, "intangible cultural heritage skills are not only an effective way for ethnic minorities to seek cultural identity, but also an effective way to enhance the cultural self-confidence of ethnic minorities, create cultural and tourism integration, and help rural revitalization" [3]. Following Tao Dandan's recognition by Heihe University as a distinguished talent, he promptly initiated intangible cultural heritage training in advanced birch bark techniques. Leveraging academic platforms, he refined traditional skills through field research, incorporating Russian and Taiwanese

influences. This fusion, aligned with contemporary aesthetics, revitalized northern Chinese ethnic minority birch bark craftsmanship. Through workshops across Beijing, Inner Mongolia, and Harbin, the social impact and recognition of these traditions were amplified, nurturing cultural confidence.

3. *The "technique and type" of Tao Dandan birch bark handicrafts in the dimension of inheritance.*

3.1. *National "set art" of Tao Dandan birch bark handicrafts.*

Generally speaking, the study of the aesthetic value of traditional handicrafts should first be based on the production techniques and types of handicrafts. Tao Dandan's birch bark handicrafts widely absorb the unique nutrients of ethnic minorities including the Oroqen people, Evenki people, Hezhe people, Russian Evenki people, Nanai people, etc., and explore the aesthetic value and current significance of birch bark art from their folk handicraft art. Tao Dandan's birch bark handicrafts are mainly divided into three categories: production and living utensils, home accessories, and bark paintings. Among them, from the perspective of inheritance, her three types of works all inherit the shapes, patterns, and production skills of the traditional plastic arts of ethnic minorities from different perspectives. For example, the birch bark products produced by Tao Dandan, which embodies the characteristics of the Oroqen people, mainly use the traditional birch bark production techniques of steaming, boiling, drying, pressing, and biting for material and molding, and use traditional sewing, carving, and inlay to decorate the vessels with patterns and animal skins. In the production of birch bark handicrafts of the Hezhe nationality, the traditional auspicious patterns of the Hezhe nationality are mainly absorbed, reflecting the decorative characteristics of national art. In the investigation and practice of the Russian Evenki and Nanai people, he mainly studied the indentation, weaving and modeling performance of Russian ethnic minorities. In the cultural elements of the Manchu people, it is more widely used in birch bark handicrafts to carve and superimpose the skills of production.

3.2. *Traditional creation "body type" of pottery Tao Dandan birch bark handicrafts.*

The plastic art of birch bark production and living utensils is an important part of birch bark art. With its rich material form, it truly reflects every perspective of birch bark art [4]. In the process of making birch bark handicrafts, Tao Dandan pays special attention to the inheritance of the traditional production and living utensils of ethnic minorities, especially the excavation and reproduction of the formal beauty of the practical art of ethnic minorities and the aesthetic consciousness of the ethnic minorities [5]. Therefore, through the production of birch bark boats, oblique kernel pillars (pruning Luozi), birch bark baskets, birch bark boxes, buckets, sewing boxes, bowls and other traditional ethnic minority birch bark handicrafts, the strong vitality and artistic imagination of the Oroqen, Evenki and other ethnic minorities are fully demonstrated. Relying on the cultural symbolism of traditional birch bark handicrafts, Tao Dandan has carried out artistic treatment on the basis of simple production techniques in the past, such as decorative stitching in parts, and making different types of birch bark traditional handicrafts into space decorative ornaments, in an attempt to reshape the unique beauty of ethnic minority art in the public aesthetics.

#### *4. The "Art and Quality" of Tao Dandan Birch Bark Handicrafts in the Innovation Dimension.*

As a young minority artist, the most prominent aesthetic value of Tao Dandan's birch bark handicrafts lies in borrowing the traditional skills and intangible cultural heritage techniques of many ethnic minorities to maximize the promotion and innovation of ancient and modern design methods, production tools and material media, and exploring the modern functions and values of traditional cultural resources, so as to complete the modern transformation of birch bark handicrafts from art (external form) to quality (internal quality).

##### *4.1. Integration and innovation of Tao Dandan birch bark handicrafts.*

Birch bark, cherished by northern ethnic minorities, embodies their ingenuity and cultural values. Tao Dandan innovatively refines traditional birch bark crafts, merging common patterns and techniques from Evenki, Hezhe, and Manchu cultures. By integrating animal and fish skin techniques, she creates universally recognized artifacts. Additionally, she combines classic ware types, such as back baskets and birch

bark boats, in novel oval designs. The cylindrical shape was borrowed and redesigned to create a new birch bark craft (fig. 1), and she combined Russian weaving techniques with Manchu weaving to create a perfect combination of Russian roughness and Manchu finesse. At the same time, Tao Dandan in order to ensure the core skills of birch bark, the iconic elements of the "do not exit" on the basis of accelerating the development and application of modern birch bark technology, through computer-aided design, modern production tools intervention, the use of mechanical abrasives, the use of new adhesives, and constantly improve the production methods, through the effective use of modern materials: such as rope, pigment, leather and other accessories, while trying to cooperate with glass, plates, metal, The combination of ceramics and other materials (fig. 2) has reintroduced the traditional artistic language of birch bark to the public's aesthetic vision, and the exquisite, innovative and national craftsmanship products have been widely praised by tourists.



Fig. 1. Birchbark craft ornaments



Fig. 2. Bark painting mixed material ornament

#### 4.2. *The artistic beauty of the natural texture painting of Tao Dan birch bark.*

Among Tao Dandan's many representative birch bark handicrafts, the production of bark paintings is of great significance to her, because as a representative inheritor of the birch bark skills of ethnic minorities, she is a well-deserved pioneer of birch bark natural texture painting. As the inheritor of birch bark skills, Tao Dandan has been committed to injecting modern art elements into the new creation of ancient birch bark skills, not only integrating multi-ethnic art and craftsmanship into the creation of birch bark paintings, but also being inspired by Chinese painting, using the mottled texture on the old birch bark to shape the mountain stones; absorbing the cutting techniques from the paper-cutting skills and applying them to the production of engraving; borrowing the composition, artistic conception and color techniques of Chinese painting» to make flowers, birds and fish, its color is as white as jade, and the style is elegant [6]. After long-term repeated experiments, Tao Dandan has successively developed and summarized the "birch bark transparent coloring method", "birch bark smooth surface treatment method", "birch bark painting natural color expression method", "stacking air suspension method", these new production methods not only solve the problem of birch bark material texture and flatness, but also fully reflect the unique three-dimensional nature of bark natural texture painting. The tranquility of winter and the inhabitation of



mountain beasts that often appear in Tao Dandan's series of works are the perfect presentation of the aesthetic ideals of artists of northern ethnic minorities (figure 3).



Fig. 3: Tao Dandan's natural texture painting "Snow Land"

### 5. Conclusion.

At present, comparative art studies are being widely used by academics in the in-depth study of Chinese and Western cultural history, art history and other fields, as the famous American scholar Li Dasan mentioned when talking about comparative literature, "it is to cultivate a way of thinking and the habit of comparative thinking" [7]. "To provide meaningful and operable methods for heterogeneous culture and art" [8]. Of course, this research method based on comparative thinking can also be applied to the comparison of the artistic expressions of different ethnic groups in similar regional cultural backgrounds. What is more valuable is that the young ethnic minority intangible cultural heritage inheritors represented by Tao Dandan are consciously using the research methods of comparative art to carry out artistic creation practice, and this kind of parallel vision and cross-ethnic comparison is providing more and more artists with a free, broad, dialectical and innovative creative space, which will also provide a higher level of theoretical basis for the research on intangible cultural heritage inheritance and innovation represented by birch bark handicrafts.

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