

The Study of Inheritance and Development of Heilongjiang Farmers' Paintings

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Abstract—Heilongjiang farmers' paintings are bold and brilliant in color with strong local flavor and artistic elements, showing characteristics of the local culture. From its emergence in 1970s and with forty years of development and innovation, Heilongjiang farmer's painting has found its cultural roots. At the same time that it inherited and learned from other folk art forms, it developed the unique Heilongjiang folk culture via absorption, fusion and recreation, becoming one of the best in the new national art category, enriching the national spirit. It is hailed by domestic media as the "China's second Huxian farmer painting country" and "The town of Chinese folk art". It is the intangible cultural heritage of unique characteristics.

Keywords—Heilongjiang farmer's paintings; developing process; inheritance; prospect; strategies for development

I. THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF HEILONGJIANG FARMERS' PAINTINGS

Dark soil nurtures the Suiling farmers' paintings from the Heilongjiang culture. Suiling farmer painting originated in the 1970s. It is rooted in the distinctive geographical environment of Great Northern Wilderness, where the unique landscape, folk customs and human environment nourishes the dark soil culture of the Northland and creates its regional characteristics. After decades of artistic growth, Suiling has produced numerous excellent farmers' paintings, many of which have been collected or shown in national exhibitions. Today, Suiling farmers' paintings have become a wonderful example of Heilongjiang folk art.

"Folk art is the art form involved in the specific folk life. The formation, development and dissemination of each kind of folk art is constrained by geographical factors, production and life factors as well as humanity factor of a particular region. It obtains raw material locally, takes advantage of the local resources based on the local conditions and forms a unique local style, thus it is known as local art and spreads throughout the region. Products of each region differ, which determines the diversification of the folk art." [1] Farmers' paintings contain the folk concept of traditional Chinese culture. They would lose their life and soul if they were deprived of the ideological connotation. The most touching features of Suiling farmers' paintings lie in that they tend to show the beauty of homeland, and nostalgia for Heilongjiang. They involve each aspect of diet, clothing, housing and the spiritual folk custom.

Their rich local characteristics fascinate people. In poor conditions, they draw simple and plain pictures to express people's inner feelings, beautify life, reveal optimism about life and a yearning for the wonderful life, showing people's pursuit of an ideal life. With the development of society, such primitive creation develops and innovates in form and content, most of which reflect the production and labor of farmers. The painters influence and move people through self-expression, entrusting of ambitions and vivid creation. [2]

Since the 1980s, there has been a growing number of farmers' painters in the Heilongjiang area. Based on real life, painters learn and absorb other folk art techniques and forms such as paper-cutting, embroidery, New Year paintings and frescoes. These form a unique artistic style differing from other peasant paintings. They involve strong geographical features and the rich local flavor of Heilongjiang. Suiling farmers' paintings reveal local flavor as well as the pure and simple vitality of the northeastern people. They absorb modern painting techniques in the expression of traditional folk art and become a type of modern folk painting.

By the 1990s, Heilongjiang farmers' paintings had continuously improved in artistic aesthetic effect and were close to professional painting in expression. Later, with the support and leadership of the local government and cultural department, they learnt from farmers painting in other domestic areas, absorbed nutrients of local folk art, formed an art group creating Heilongjiang farmers paintings, which refreshed the farmers' paintings. The creation of Heilongjiang farmers' paintings enlightened painters unconsciously in content and implication, improved farmers' ideological understanding, stimulated their observations and reflections of life, reduced superstitious beliefs and promoted the formation of good manners. In the painting process, people can find such qualities as industry, courage, wisdom, helpfulness and cooperation from their subject and content. People speak highly of good moral qualities and turn them into shared morality, in this way the noble moral standards such as being thrifty and law-abiding, are formed to guide people's behavior. After processing and refining, the content of the farmers' paintings are more vivid, involving more profound meaning, which would better improve people's understanding and

promote the formation of good morality. These are the educational effects of Heilongjiang farmers' paintings.

The northeastern rural life has strong local color. For example, farm women stitch innersoles while sitting on the Kang, or they feed poultry in the yard. Northeastern children like kicking shuttlecock and playing gachuha. Such life scenes have provided rich creative materials for the Suiling farmers' paintings. The image "Kicking shuttlecock" (see picture 1) depicts the scene where four children kick a shuttlecock. In the northeast, there are a variety of ways for kicking the shuttlecock, such as kicking with straight legs (ben'er), kicking with bent legs (guai) and raising legs backwards (kang). There are different postures. The picture is brilliant and contrasting strikingly in color. It shows a strong sense of movement, which makes the picture lively. "Playing Gachuha " (see picture 2) depicts a folk custom of the Manchu people. It is a native, commonly accepted and popular game among people. The gachuh are made of the patella of a sheep leg and usually painted red. Each gachuha has four sides which stand up. They are named respectively as keng'er which looks like the navel; the du'er which looks like the belly of a fat man; lun'er which is like the ear and zhen'er. People usually sit around on the Kang and play this game, using the gachuha carried in homemade cloth bags. This game can make the fingers more flexible. It's believed that Manchurian women are good at needlework because they played gachuha in childhood. The fine sewing works are greatly appreciated by the husband's family. Gachuha is popular throughout the Northeast area due to the interaction of Manchu and Han culture. This farmer's painting is vivid, natural and simple. "Making cotton-padded trousers" is simple in pattern, full in composition and strong in lyricism (see picture 3) and depicts farm life.



Picture.1. Kicking Shuttlecock

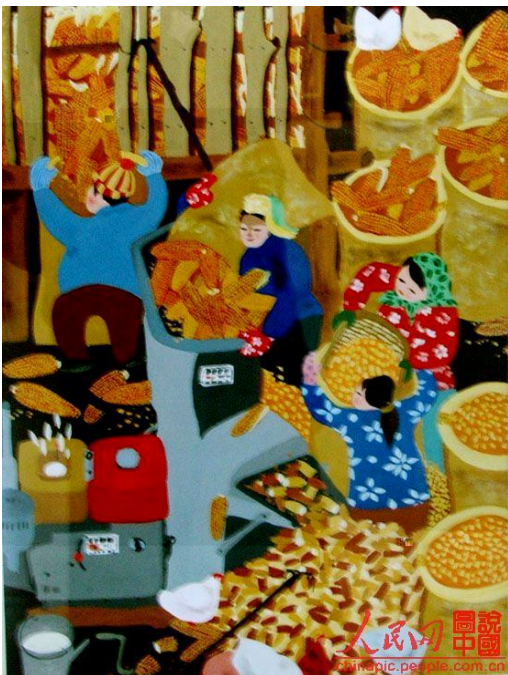


Picture.2. Playing Gachuha

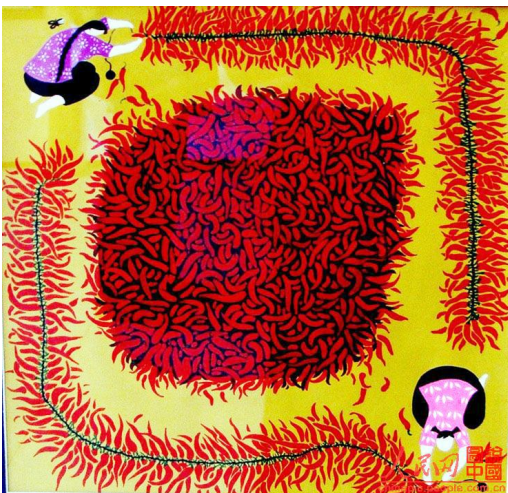


Picture.3. Making Cotton-padded Trousers

Farmers' paintings are paintings created in the process of productive labor. Farmers cannot live without labor or land. Farming and harvesting are the chief activities of the year. China is a big agricultural country with large population in rural areas. People desire to have ample food and clothing and look forward to favorable weather throughout the year and a good harvest. After the autumn harvest, clusters of red pepper, full flap garlic and golden corn are hung in the farmyard and around the house, symbolising a good harvest. The farmers use the harvest as goals and aspirations. Therefore, they choose labor and harvest as the theme of painting in leisure time. The colors of the picture are mainly red and yellow which symbolize golden autumn and harvest. See Suiling farmers' paintings "Harvesting corn" (picture 4), "Threading peppers" (picture 5), "Harvest" (picture 6). These paintings depict the lively scenes and joyful mood of the people. The painters used red and yellow as the main hues to express the inner joy and happy feelings. The full composition and plain patterns manifest the harmonious beauty in labor. The corn, peppers, grains and clothing reflect the regional characteristics and cultural connotation of Heilongjiang farmers' paintings vividly and distinctively.



Picture.4. Harvesting Corn



Picture.5. Threading peppers



Picture.6. Harvest

II. THE STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEILONGJIANG FARMERS' PAINTINGS

The development of Heilongjiang farmers' paintings represents the current state of Chinese social development and the history of mass culture development. In this new century, Heilongjiang farmers' paintings should provide a reflection upon the situation, and break a new path in order to gain lasting vigor and vitality.

A. Taking root in civil society and returning to the origin.

Heilongjiang farmers' paintings are the art form created and appreciated by Heilongjiang farmers. Their survival and development depend on the needs of farmers. They take root in civil society, develop hand in hand with the Heilongjiang folk custom and reflect the features and aesthetic taste of Heilongjiang folk art. Returning to the origin means drawing subjects from folk activities, which welcome happiness and blessings at festivals, expressing the ideas in the form of New Year paintings and frescoes. Only by diversifying the forms of painting, pursuing the folk style of the theme, the regionalism of style and the practicability of form can the true artistic qualities of Heilongjiang farmers' paintings be fully reflected.

B. Self-perfecting and pursuing aesthetic taste

As a visual art, Heilongjiang farmers' paintings have been experiencing an unprecedentedly prosperous creation and development process. Based on this, painters could search for the primitive root in the original category of Heilongjiang folk art, make continuous self-improvement and pursue visual expression at an aesthetic level to form a mutually improving and integrated visual context and provide a new perspective for understanding the relation of art and reality. [3]

C. Publicizing farmers' paintings based on the local area

The development of Heilongjiang farmers' paintings can neither be separated from history nor break away from reality. In order to achieve sustained and healthy development, farmers' paintings should be based on the local area of Heilongjiang and bring it into the cultural construction of people and the cultural perspectives of governments at all levels. Exhibitions, competitions and international cultural exchange should be organized to publicize and promote Heilongjiang farmers' paintings and gain domestic and international reputation. As a form of cultural resource, Heilongjiang farmers' paintings are the highlight of current distinctive cultural construction in the Heilongjiang area. At the same time, the industrialization of Heilongjiang farmers' paintings should also be taken as an important issue to explore. We should develop farmers' paintings as a resource, promote the industrialization in order to give them have a broader prospect of development.

III. THE PROSPECT FOR HEILONGJIANG FARMERS' PAINTINGS

The development of Heilongjiang farmers' paintings has gained great support from the Ministry of Culture, who took a series of measures to nurture farmer painting talents. Additionally the Ministry offered training, and with the

formation of the creation team, enabled the Heilongjiang farmers' paintings group to develop and Suiling has now won the reputation of "The town of Chinese folk art".

The arts circle has not yet adopted a clear definition of "farmers' paintings", but, in general, farmers' paintings focus on depicting the scenes of rural production and daily life. It features bright color and full composition, and reflects countryside life, making it different from other Chinese art creation, which takes urban life as the subject. In the process of China's modernization and urbanization, farmers' paintings of simple folk customs have received love and concern from many urban collectors, overseas collectors and art institutions. Many farmers' paintings have been sold overseas and produced considerable economic value. With the support of the Heilongjiang county government and the Cultural Department, Heilongjiang farmers' paintings will be developed as a local culture brand with distinctive characteristics, gaining reputation overseas. In view of this, the industrialization of Heilongjiang farmers' paintings is an inevitable or destined trend of development.

Heilongjiang farmers' paintings have made remarkable achievements in the inheritance of national culture, been innovative in the aspect of expressive techniques, and created a unique brand for Heilongjiang local culture, which helped achieve continuous development and innovation. Heilongjiang farmers' paintings are the spirit of Chinese art and inherit the outstanding Chinese civilization and culture, which are of very high cultural value. The further strengthening of the publicity for the farmers' paintings has laid a solid foundation for the improvement of the reputation of farmers' paintings nationwide. The development of Heilongjiang farmers' paintings has become the common interest in the culture circle in Heilongjiang province and they are achieving greater influence at home and abroad. In view of this, the inheritance, development and promotion of Heilongjiang farmers' paintings cannot rely on folk artists alone. Instead, it requires the attention and support of the government and people of all social walks who are committed to the revitalization of the national culture. We believe that in the future, Heilongjiang farmers' paintings will develop both cultural and economic value. This wonderful work of art nurtured in the dark soil will shine in the near future more brilliantly!

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