

# The Study of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mount Tai from Aesthetic Anthropology Perspective

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**Abstract.** The folk culture usually presents in three parts of belief cognition, living behavior and emotional item, whose relation and interaction are the key role of understanding the anthropological significance of folk art, as well as the major theoretical framework of aesthetic anthropology to study existing significance of intangible cultural heritage of the folk art kind. As a major part of Chinese culture, the intangible cultural heritage of Mount Tai possesses rich aesthetic anthropologic characteristics. The exploitation of the intangible culture of Mount Tai's value will facilitate the study of the evolution of Mount Tai culture so that to further promote preservation of traditional intangible culture.

As an interdisciplinary subject of aesthetics, literature science and anthropology, aesthetic anthropology roots its academic approach in aesthetics and culture, and is crucial to the thorough study of relationship between aesthetics and real life as well as historical progress. Trending towards a new disciplinary subject, since 1970s aesthetic anthropology gradually formed and then developed with lots of achievements from Western researchers, which exerted a measure of influence over the development of domestic aesthetics and literature science. In the field of aesthetic anthropology, beauty isn't a kind of isolated, pure cultural phenomenon, but an existing of being constructed, a subtle way to depict relations in the realistic life. Examining and appreciating the intangible cultural heritage of Mount Tai in perspective of aesthetic anthropology is of considerable practical significance to the exploitation and preservation of intangible cultural heritage so that to further expand its denotation as well as vitality.

## The Aesthetic Connotation of Mount Tai in Perspective of Aesthetic Anthropology

In the introduction of *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton said that one of the basic tasks of aesthetic anthropology is to explore how people from different cultures see the world and "see" forms a visual metaphor of "what is beauty" and "how to appreciate beauty". So viewing on the perspective of aesthetic anthropology, the aesthetic connotation of Mount Tai begins to take shape.

Firstly, exploit and emphasize the aesthetic symbol. With a spiritual symbol as essence of its culture, Mount Tai is in a sense of "authority aesthetic" and "value aesthetic". As the first of the Five Sacred Mountains, Mount Tai has been regarded as symbol of empire stability, regime consolidation, national prosperity and national unity since ancient times. As an epitome of the brilliant Eastern culture, the land of "unity of heaven and man", Mount Tai has been admired to the utmost by both emperors and great masters. On the concept of "what is beauty", Mount Tai is of high religious, political and spiritual symbol. Its unique aesthetic and art characteristic of "loftiness, stability, profoundness, harmony" has naturally integrated into Chinese people's mind as an essential measure of beauty. It goes without saying that Chinese people piously worship the Mount Tai.

Secondly, form "dependence" on the follow of motive power of spirit. Aesthetic anthropology develops on the major approach of studying how beauty is regarded as an existing of being constructed, namely "in what way and manner the beauty is depicted and represented". Such figures as the God of Mount Tai, the Grandmother of Mount Tai (Bixiayuanjun), Mount Tai Shigandang are

whether majestic, lenient or auspicious. Both the clay statues of Emperor Lord of Mount Tai in Tiankuang Hall of Dai Temple and Bixiayuanjun in the Azure Clouds Temple on the top of Mount Tai are full of divine beauty, which bear people's expectations, incarnated in the "aesthetic distance" of God and man, representing people's invocation of life, wealth and peace, as well as the psychological dependence.

Thirdly, derive "pleasure" from appreciation of forms of cultures. Aesthetic pleasure is one of the numerous enjoyments of real life. It's the unity of sensory pleasure and spiritual pleasure where sensory pleasure becomes aesthetic pleasure. In traditional Chinese cultural spirit, aesthetic activities are experiences based on sensibility, but not confined to it. So such worldly enjoyments of sensory pleasure as auditory, gustatory and olfactory joviality should have spiritual or social value to become aesthetic pleasures. Such folk arts as Mount Tai shadow play, Bangzi, Mount Tai stilts and Duanguqiang have been endowed with social and cultural connotations during thousands of years passing on. It's through various plays and costumes that the working people manifest their aesthetic expectations to satisfy their respective inner mind.

Fourthly, promote "development" of cultural value application. Jacques Maquet, a Belgian literary theorist put forward that people who get "things with sense of beauty" are either rich, or have domination on collective resources, which leads to the three outcomes: creators of these things must be talented, and be trained for a long time; these things with sense of beauty must obtain recognition from the patrons, and manifest their tastes and preferences; as hallmark of elite class, these things should be bought by them. Take the Shandong Bangzi as an example. After the Ming Dynasty, Shanxi merchants came to Shandong to trade and settled; along with them they brought "Xibang", one of Chinese four ancient operas into such western Shandong cities as Jining and Heze. Being influenced by local culture, dialect and customs, as well as other local operas, it gradually developed into Shandong Bangzi of today with mature stage artistic design and style. With sound economic strength by engaging in pawn or running private banks, the Shanxi merchants enhanced aesthetic needs of the opera and made material input to the opera bodies, promoting the development of Shandong Bangzi.

### **The Significance of Aesthetic Anthropology's Application to Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mount Tai**

Passed on from generation to generation, the intangible cultural heritage of Mount Tai is an important part of Chinese traditional culture. Under the background of integration of world cultures, aesthetic anthropology can provide strong theoretical support to the exploitation and preservation of the intangible cultural heritage of Mount Tai with independence and vitality.

Firstly, aesthetic anthropology's view of cultural flow and change contributes to a correct understand of significance of intangible cultural heritage. As the most subtle activity of human culture, the aesthetic activity finds its position between the complementary approaches of anthropology and aesthetics with the former emphasizes on culture's existing form and operating mechanism, while the latter grasps relationship between things from the perspective of culture criticism. On the one hand, anthropology couldn't break through the camouflage of ideological fantasy, though it made ideology as objective for reflection and criticism. On the other hand, aesthetics can't find the material basis for its existence, though it can describe the aesthetic state of one thing in great detail. Only by combining the aesthetic study and anthropological study of the intangible cultural heritage of Mount Tai with historical background under the guidance of aesthetic anthropology can we thoroughly exploit the value, spiritual and inner motive force of Mount Tai. In terms of preservation of the intangible cultural heritage of Mount Tai, we attach emphasis on transmission and development, rather than only protection of relics.

Secondly, concepts of cultural relativism, culture subject and object make aesthetic anthropology respect the protected object itself, and attach more attention on self development and adaptation mechanism of culture. Aesthetic anthropology makes deep probe into cultural context and meaning system in which the aesthetics and art exist and play roles, replace social and cultural theories by careful observations and narration from daily life with view that analysis of context has priority

over classification of artistic style. It helps to rectify the limitation of metaphysics in traditional aesthetics and philosophy of art, provides realistic basis to such issues as origin of art, the richness and complexity of aesthetic activities, change and reason of aesthetic preference. During the process of study and preservation of the very intangible cultural heritage of Mount Tai, more attention should be paid to studies on rules of development and transmission rather than the presentation characteristics.

Thirdly, cultural holism of aesthetic anthropology helps to protect the integral culture system of the intangible cultural heritage of Mount Tai. Using such anthropological research approaches as cultural holism, cross cultural comparison, conversion of emic and etic, dynamic evolvement and cultural relativism for reference to depict the aesthetic culture activities of non-western populations, aesthetic anthropology has challenged the ideology of traditional Western aesthetics, which takes binary opposition as logical premise, emphasizes on abstract speculation, and aims to construct metaphysical grand narration. In other words, aesthetic anthropology emphasizes on relations between things rather than the beauty of individual, holds macroscopic grasp of things with focus breakthroughs. The intangible cultural heritage of Mount Tai is now preserved rather well. However, other parts of resources are still undiscovered, and the horizontal comparative research is insufficient. A self-contained system with existing cultural forms and carrier for the intangible cultural heritage of Mount Tai should be established, and then advances on the whole.

### **Human Aesthetic Characteristics in Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mount Tai**

Intangible cultural heritage is the actual and lifelike appearance of national individuality and national aesthetic habits. Due to the specific way of transmission, influences from changes in social system, aesthetic value and ideology, intangible cultural heritage is altered and changed frequently, becoming the most vulnerable part of “living” traditional culture. The catch of its inner beauty should also be made in the environment of human development.

Firstly, Mount Tai legends and Mount Tai Shigandang are the epitome of laboring people’s aesthetic concept of worship for thousands of years. Originating from “mountain worship” for Mount Tai and the nature, the legends and Shigandang are forms of culture narrated and transmitted by people’s mouth. Viewed from geological structure, Mount Tai rises from the south of the Red Gate Palace, namely the First Gate to Heaven to the height of more than 1300 meters with a horizontal stretch of mere 5000 meters, being revered for its towering height and might at ancient China before the Qin Dynasty when people didn’t set foot further on more huge mountains. Along with historical changes, religious and philosophical thinking and imperial ruling thoughts were also attached to Mount Tai. According to Gu Yanwu’s *the archaeological records*, since the end of the Zhou Dynasty, some fairy legends have been related to Mount Tai. In the subsequence period of the Spring and Autumn when Yin-yang and Five Elements theory appeared, locating at the east, subsumed to wood, Mount Tai is the place where yin and yang alternate as well as the origin of life, thus the God of Mount Tai is in charge of life and death. Since the flourishing of Taoism in Han Dynasty, “The exorcism of Mount Tai” appeared. Then came to Tang Dynasty and Song Dynasty, the Five Sacred Mountains were canonized as “king” and “emperor” by Emperor Xuanzong and Emperor Zhenzong successively, and Mount Tai was canonized as “god” by Emperor Ming Taizu. Emperors in ancient China have offered sacrifices to Mount Tai for twelve times to pray for the nation’s peace and prosperity. Along with changes in political demands, religion and culture as well as people’s demand for social economy, Mount Tai has become an aesthetic standard of lofty character, holy, majesty, guarding and blessings for common people.

Secondly, such art forms as Mount Tai shadow play, Shandong Bangzi, and Mount Tai stilts mainly represent folk aesthetic intention. They are popular among people. Compared with Beijing Opera, Pingju, they possess more local characteristics. Based on internalization and solidification of central Chinese civilization, they obtain vitality from local customs around Taian city, reflecting the pursuit of beauty and art forms of local working people. The opera content, characters, singing arias and music melody which have come down to us, are mostly popular, such as shadow play Shigandang Against Evil Wolf, Duanzhiguan Liu Wenlong for the Exam, Shandong Bangzi Mu

Guiying to Eastward, etc. Combining such elements as philosophy, psychology, literature, art, music and dance, being intuitive and concrete, these comprehensive stage arts reflect people's worship of divine power, praying for peace, eulogizing heroes and longing for love, etc. These local folk arts are beacon of folk aesthetic tendency as well as concentrated reflection of what the public need.

Thirdly, the Mount Tai temple fairs epitomize aesthetic value of working people since ancient times. According to the ancient custom, people made "Chai Wang" to worship god on Mount Tai, that is to set fire on the mountain to talk to the Heaven, Later it gradually developed into imperial sacrificial offering to affirm the rule and pursue higher power and value. Then it became the folk custom of temple fair, taking shape in Tang Dynasty, established in Song dynasty, thriving in Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty, and declined in the Republic of China (1912-1949) while regenerates nowadays. As one of the sources of Chinese temple fair culture, temple fair was celebrated not only in Taian, but also in Zhangpu Town of Kunshan City and Taihua Town of Yixing City in Jiangsu Province, etc. The temple fair celebrates the God of Mount Tai and Bixiayuanjun's lunar birthday, which not only constitutes the unique religious culture landscape, but also becomes the leading local folklore. As written in Shi Naian's novel *Water Margin* of Ming Dynasty, temple fire is held "on annual lunar March 28, the Emperor of Heaven's birthday" when lots of natives of Shaanxi and Shanxi together with pilgrims come to the fair. Besides, there are varieties of goodies and gadgets on sale, contributing to the boom of business. Furthermore, so many activities as contests in boxing or martial arts, opera performance are held to attract crowds of spectators. The Mount Tai temple fair itself is a collectivity of economy, culture and sports of ancient society, representing people's aesthetic orientation with unique aesthetic characteristics during its wax and wane.

### **Effective Approaches to Protect Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mount Tai**

It's not only the need of development of our country and nationality, but also inevitable requirement of world civilization dialogue to inherit and protect intangible cultural heritage.

Firstly, make full use of technology means to promote the transmission and preservation. Establish information system and improve existing information system to provide service for later protection work. For instance, classify and code the intangible cultural heritage by category, archive pictures of objects by such information as age, conservation status and inheritor. Meanwhile, make use of modern information technology to make videos and CD of intangible cultural heritage for sale, build specialized website with detailed information search system and video resources for watch and download.

Secondly, give full play to publicity of nonprofit cultural institutions. Make full use of cultural centers, libraries and museums as well as technology advantages to protect and transmit intangible cultural heritage. Build database and website of intangible cultural heritage, and promote transmission by television, broadcast and tourism. Coordinate cultural administration sectors to organize such activities as temple fair, opera to the countryside so as to absorb the vibrant essence of traditional culture and realize integration of traditional culture and modern culture.

Thirdly, further explore spread channels for the intangible cultural heritage of Mount Tai. Besides of exploration, management and publicity, nurturing inheritor of cultural heritage will be an effective way. For example, Taian Normal Affiliated College has already opened a series of subjects of traditional folk cultures, among which includes the subject "Mount Tai Shadow Play". Fan Weiguo, the sixth generation descendant of Mount Tai shadow play, teaches the class by himself.

To sum up, aesthetic anthropology provides us with a perspective to get clear understand of the value and importance of the intangible cultural heritage of Mount Tai.

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