

A Study on the Pathways of Red Gene Transmission Through Fine Art Works

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Abstract. President Xi Jinping emphasized the need for systematic protection of intangible cultural heritage to better meet the growing spiritual and cultural needs of the people and promote cultural confidence and self-reliance. Red fine art works, as historical relics preserved and formed by the Communist Party of China over time, play a pivotal role in guiding young students to develop a correct understanding of history, oppose historical nihilism, foster patriotism, and establish socialist core values. Therefore, exploring the pathways of transmitting red genes through fine art works is of paramount importance. Taking the Xiuzhou farmer paintings as an example, this study explores the origins and inheritors of these paintings, delves into the depiction of societal changes reflected within them, and examines their role in the transmission of red genes. The research highlights the importance of farmers in China's development and the necessity of preserving intangible cultural heritage. To address issues such as the challenges of craftsmanship inheritance, difficulties in training and mentoring, potential declines in quality, and sales bottlenecks faced by farmer paintings, several strategies are proposed: Strengthening governmental guidance and regulation to promote the market-oriented development of the red-themed farmer painting industry. Actively organizing "Xiuzhou Farmer Paintings + Red Party History" promotional and exhibition events to foster cultural and tourism integration, develop a unique red farmer painting brand, and expand their reach through e-commerce platforms. Launching "Red Farmer Paintings in Schools" initiatives to subtly integrate them into primary and secondary school labor education through hands-on experiences. Hosting competitions and activities centered on farmer paintings to appreciate the charm and essence of red genes. Providing robust support for inheritors to pursue dynamic heritage practices and empowering red farmer paintings with technological advancements for intelligent development. Focusing on the international exchange of farmer paintings, using platforms like universities and Confucius Institutes to share the century-old history of the Party depicted in farmer paintings with international students and friends, thereby achieving global dissemination.

Keywords: Artistic Works, Red Genes, Xiuzhou Farmer Paintings, Inheritance, Dissemination

1. Background

Artistic works have always played a significant role in historical development, serving as carriers of human thoughts and emotions while reflecting societal changes to some extent. This study, using Xiuzhou farmer paintings as an example, investigates the red culture embedded within these works and explores the pathways for the dissemination of red genes.

Over the course of more than 40 years [1], Xiuzhou farmer paintings have secured an important place in the field of modern Chinese folk art. The community of farmer painting creators has grown steadily, producing over 5,000 works, with 370 selected for national and provincial farmer painting exhibitions and more than 130 winning awards. Hundreds of pieces have been collected by institutions such as the National Art Museum of China, the Central Academy of Fine Arts, and the Zhejiang Provincial Cultural Center, as well as by international friends. Furthermore, Xiuzhou farmer paintings have gained international recognition, with exhibitions held in nine countries, including France and the United States. Carrying red imprints, Xiuzhou farmer paintings are welcoming guests from across the globe, creating a globally acclaimed cultural brand and earning the reputation of being the "marvel of the water towns."

2. The Relationship Between Artistic Works and the Inheritance of Red Genes

2.1. Artistic Works as Carriers of Red Gene Inheritance

The great realist sculptor Rodin once said, “Great artistic works transcend their time, embodying their own spiritual essence; everything expresses ideas, and everything is symbolic.” Artistic works are not only cultural forms but also manifestations of thought and spirit. Red-themed artistic works vividly portray the glorious struggle of Communists and countless revolutionary pioneers who fought for the prosperity of the nation, national independence, and the well-being of the people. They encapsulate the unyielding spirit of the Chinese people and serve as ideal carriers for the inheritance of red genes.

2.2. Red Genes as the Eternal Spiritual Core of Artistic Works

Artistic works follow their own unique principles, and the artistic, professional, and red-oriented reflections and expressions endow them with greater depth, warmth, and breadth. Red genes, as an integral part of the spiritual foundation of Chinese traditional culture, provide the driving force for cultural inheritance, serving as the source of cultural transmission and the soil for cultural development. Artistic exploration centered on red genes represents a profound red cultural spirit that endures over time and is continuously passed down in contemporary contexts.

2.3. Mutual Enhancement Between Artistic Works and Red Gene Inheritance

Artistic works are not merely a medium for expressing red genes but also actively promote their inheritance and development. A series of artistic works, exemplified by Xiuzhou farmer paintings, reflect the evolution and characteristics of Chinese society over many years. Amid the collision between tradition and modernity, these works inject new vitality and inspiration into the development of red genes. Only through an in-depth exploration of both can we better understand the essence and value of artistic works and the inheritance of red genes.

3. The Red Connotations and Value of Xiuzhou Farmer Paintings

Xiuzhou farmer paintings originate from Xiuzhou and represent the region’s unique traditional cultural heritage. Xiuzhou is situated in the northwestern part of Jiaxing City, at the geometric center of the Yangtze River Delta, within the fertile Hangjiahu Plain. With its abundant natural resources and rich cultural legacy, Xiuzhou provides a solid foundation for the development of farmer paintings. The region has actively promoted this art form, earning prestigious national honors such as “Hometown of Modern Chinese Folk Painting” and “Hometown of Chinese Folk Culture and Art.”

Farmer paintings are a distinctive form of art developed among China’s working people. Without formal art education, farmer artists draw inspiration from their lives and the times, incorporating folk art elements and expressing themselves with childlike imagination and unpolished techniques. These works convey a natural, rustic charm and robust vitality, often using scenes from real life as their subject matter. By capturing what they see, hear, feel, and know, farmer paintings vividly reflect the history of China’s development over the past century. Moreover, these works embody the optimistic spirit of farmers, offering insights into the evolution of rural life, emotions, and aspirations amid societal changes. By integrating the protection and development of this “intangible cultural heritage” with rural revitalization and red heritage, farmer paintings inject new vitality into the countryside.

3.1. Bearing Red Imprints

On April 23, 2021, a special micro-party lecture held at the Linglong Bay Farmer Painting Gallery attracted many attendees. Farmer painter Zhang Jinquan served as the lecturer, presenting his work *A Hundred Years of Party History Through Paintings*, a masterpiece he created over seven months, devoting seven to eight hours daily to its completion. As the scroll gradually unfolded, it depicted the stormy journey of the Party’s centennial history: from the germination of Marxist ideas in China to the May Fourth Movement, from the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China in Nanhu to the founding of the People’s Republic of China, from the Nanchang Uprising to the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea. The painting is divided into three chapters—New Democratic Revolution, Socialist Construction, and Reform and Opening Up—showcasing 40 significant historical milestones. From a distance, the scroll exudes grandeur; up close, its ink brushwork is intricate and expressive. Zhang Jinquan employs traditional ink painting techniques to depict the Party’s century-long epic journey. The audience marveled at the painting’s majestic momentum and the rapid development of China under Party leadership. The success of this “micro-party lecture” provided new ideas for Party history education and red cultural dissemination. Beyond specific themes, farmer paintings often take the lives of working people as their subject, offering a people-centered perspective on China’s century of development. For instance, farmer paintings from Houzhai in Yiwu illustrate the positive changes in people’s lives and the surge of enthusiasm under the “prosper through commerce” development strategy since the Reform and Opening Up. Similarly, farmer paintings from Sandu in Zhuji revolve around national development goals, depicting historical periods such as “grain production” and “steel-making

campaigns.” These works not only present vivid historical narratives but also highlight the century-long struggle of the people under Party leadership.

3.2. Reflecting the Spirit of the Times

“Rooted in life, keeping pace with the times” is the hallmark of farmer paintings. These works embody the genuine emotions of their creators, seamlessly integrating with the contemporary social environment, evolving with the times, and reflecting the spirit of the era. With social progress, the primary creators of farmer paintings have expanded from farmers to include workers from other grassroots sectors such as employees, urban residents, and artisans, resulting in an increasingly diverse group of artists. Farmer paintings have evolved in both form and medium, transitioning from traditional poster paints and paper to acrylics, oil paints, canvases, and Xuan paper. The subject matter has also shifted. Early themes often focused on political propaganda, depicting agricultural “Great Leap Forward” campaigns, the “Cultural Revolution,” agricultural technology promotion, and patriotic health movements. Today, farmer paintings highlight rural customs, new countryside construction, and scenes from everyday life, expressing deep affection for local culture and traditions. Some exhibitions revolve around contemporary themes such as anti-corruption campaigns or population censuses, showcasing the achievements of rural revitalization. Other works combine modern life with traditional folk art forms, portraying the image of laborers in the new era. For example, Zhang Xinying, a farmer painter from Jinshan, Shanghai, draws inspiration from folk embroidery to create vibrant paintings such as *Hatching the Sun*, *Welcoming New Guests*, *The North Window*, and *Mud Toy Carrier*. These works transform ordinary daily scenes into touching and warm artistic representations, blending memories of early rural life with the charm of modern living.

Farmer paintings capture the optimism and vitality of grassroots laborers, reflecting their enthusiasm for contributing to the era’s progress and presenting a fresh image of rural people. As an intangible cultural heritage, farmer paintings hold unique contemporary value. With their distinct national and regional characteristics, farmer paintings have evolved from humble beginnings to earn recognition as a respected art form, beloved by people at home and abroad.

3.3. Inspiring Innovative Development

As awareness of the value of farmer paintings grows, cultural institutions and scholars have systematized their management, leading to a flourishing of this art form. This prosperity has provided new ideas for rural revitalization. In some areas, such as Bijie and Liupanshui in Guizhou, farmer painters have applied their artistic expertise to create murals for new rural construction projects. These murals enhance the income of farmer painters, beautify the rural environment, and prevent the homogeneity often seen in such projects. Farmer paintings have also integrated with tourism and the entertainment industry, expanding into markets such as souvenirs, home décor, and art collections, thereby promoting cultural consumption. Through derivative products and digital transformation, farmer paintings can continue and rejuvenate the traditional cultural values, beliefs, elements, and symbols they embody, enriching contemporary living spaces and promoting Chinese national values. In the new era, farmer paintings play a vital role in propaganda and education, aligning cultural genes such as national spirit and rural ethos with the spiritual and cultural development of modern society. This alignment supports “people-centered” urbanization. Current practices in organizing and utilizing farmer paintings systematically have paved innovative paths for the development of intangible cultural heritage, providing new approaches for integrating cultural heritage and red traditions with economic growth.

4. Challenges in the Dissemination of Red Imprints in Xiuzhou Farmers’ Paintings

Currently, Xiuzhou employs exhibitions, art galleries, painting collections, talent training, and cultural exchanges [8] as effective means to showcase and promote revolutionary culture, thereby reflecting and perpetuating its red heritage. These approaches have become essential methods for preserving the red memory within Xiuzhou farmers’ paintings. However, numerous challenges persist in the dissemination of these red imprints.

4.1. Challenges in Inheritance: The Difficulty of Skill Transmission

As a “living” intangible cultural heritage, the inheritance of farmers’ paintings depends on skilled artists with professional expertise and cultural depth. Questionnaire surveys reveal that most Xiuzhou residents lack sufficient knowledge about farmers’ paintings, with even less understanding of the red heritage they embody. This has resulted in a “disconnect” during generational transitions within the artist community. Older generations of farmers’ painters, burdened by age and health issues, are retiring from the field, ceasing their creative activities, and leaving behind limited systematic documentation of their techniques. Meanwhile, a new generation of painters is emerging. Although these younger artists possess more formal artistic knowledge, they lack the profound rural life experiences of their predecessors and have had limited exposure to traditional art forms. While their innovative perspectives may bring creativity and vitality to farmers’ paintings, they often fail to maintain the essential essence of the art or uphold its red heritage, placing unique techniques and classic art forms at risk of being lost forever.

4.2. Challenges in Quality: Declining Expression of Red Heritage in Creations

Farmers' paintings vividly portray the lives of affluent modern farmers in Jiangnan's water towns, capturing the reality of economic development and reflecting distinct regional and temporal characteristics. Deeply intertwined with China's revolutionary and reform history, these paintings are imbued with valuable red heritage and memory. However, some painters lack a profound understanding and awareness of this red legacy, rendering them incapable of effectively inheriting and expressing the red essence in their works—a regrettable shortcoming.

4.3. Challenges in Sales: Stagnation of High-Quality Farmers' Paintings

The sales difficulties of farmers' paintings primarily lie in two areas: limited market access and disorganized competition [2].

Limited Market Access: Farmers' paintings suffer from low recognition, particularly in economically underdeveloped and remote inland regions. Constrained by inadequate promotion and poor transportation, even the works of excellent painters struggle to sell, significantly dampening the enthusiasm of local artists. Furthermore, disparities in sales performance are evident across regions. Areas with robust economies, higher recognition, and thriving tourism often experience better sales, creating a market imbalance. Consequently, some painters, unable to sustain themselves financially, are compelled to change careers, resulting in a severe loss of talent.

Disorganized Competition: Under the influence of market economics, a profit-driven mindset prevails among painters, leading to impatience and a surge in low-quality works characterized by imitation and plagiarism. Many artists deliberately cater to market preferences, while sellers engage in price wars and homogeneous competition, causing significant damage to the quality and reputation of farmers' paintings.

In summary, the current state of farmers' paintings in terms of inheritance, artistic quality, and market dynamics is concerning. Addressing these challenges with effective policies is essential to ensure the healthy transmission of red imprints and the continued development of red culture.

5. Exploring Effective Pathways for the Dissemination of Red Gene in Xiuzhou Farmers' Paintings

5.1. Strengthening Government Guidance and Regulation

Since its inception over three decades ago, Xiuzhou farmers' paintings have begun to take shape as an industry [4]. However, compared to other traditional cultures, it remains underdeveloped and faces various challenges. Government regulation plays a foundational role in the development of farmers' paintings. By formulating and refining policies that align with objective realities, local industries can effectively guide the development of farmers' paintings and promote their market-oriented industrialization. Increasing government financial support and leveraging fiscal funds as a catalyst can attract investments from financial institutions and banks, thereby broadening corporate financing channels. The government can also establish a financing and investment platform for the farmers' painting industry.

5.2. Actively Promoting Xiuzhou Farmers' Paintings and Red Party History through Publicity Activities

Fostering the Integration of Culture and Red Tourism. Encourage collaboration between the government and local tourism companies [3] to organize exhibitions of Xiuzhou farmers' paintings in the region. These events can help more people appreciate the charm of these paintings, the embedded red spirit, and the significance of learning the Party's history.

Conducting Promotional Activities During Festivals [5]. During the annual "Cultural and Natural Heritage Day," detailed activity plans should be developed to host vibrant and diverse promotional events showcasing Xiuzhou farmers' paintings. These promotional series [6] allow citizens to better understand traditional culture, directly experience the craft of farmers' paintings, and enhance public awareness of intangible cultural heritage protection.

Creating a Dedicated "Xiuzhou Farmers' Paintings + Red Party History" Brand. Proactively liaise with relevant departments across various regions to establish online sales platforms for traditional Xiuzhou farmers' paintings on major e-commerce platforms. Representative inheritors of Xiuzhou farmers' paintings should be encouraged to participate in events, helping them expand sales channels and market their products. Additionally, by incorporating paintings into educational settings, the Party's history can be made engaging and accessible, allowing participants to draw wisdom and strength from history while inheriting the red gene and fostering motivation. Beyond traditional artworks, innovative cultural products like badges, postcards, and bookmarks featuring Xiuzhou farmers' paintings can help these creations gain wider recognition.

Introducing Farmers' Paintings into Schools. Zhejiang Normal University, as a cradle for future educators, plays a vital role in developing traditional culture. The university can spearhead the promotion and exhibition of farmers' paintings, enabling students to deeply appreciate Xiuzhou farmers' paintings. These students can then pass on Xiuzhou culture to their students during teaching, internships, and professional work. By integrating "red farmers' paintings" into the "Five Educations" approach in

primary and secondary schools, labor education can incorporate the preservation, research, and learning of farmers' paintings. This integration fosters a ripple effect in cultural transmission, enhancing the development of Xiuzhou's traditional culture.

Launching the "Discover the Beauty of Xiuzhou" Farmers' Painting Experience Tour. Organize research teams to explore Xiuzhou [7], where participants can visit the Xiuzhou Museum and archives and learn about Xiuzhou farmers' paintings from inheritors. On-site experiences will provide insights into the creative philosophy of Xiuzhou farmers' paintings. Participants will be able to create their own farmers' paintings, gaining a deeper understanding of their charm and essence through hands-on practice.

5.3. Strongly Supporting the Active Inheritance of Cultural Heritage

Encouraging Inheritors to Actively Engage in Transmission, Training, and Teaching Activities. Government agencies and cultural organizations should, based on practical needs, encourage inheritors to depict more elements of red Party history in farmers' paintings. Inheritors can organize a series of transmission activities, such as introducing "red farmers' paintings" into schools, classrooms, and communities, to showcase intangible cultural heritage to students, special groups, and citizens while revisiting the Party's centennial history.

Empowering Farmers' Paintings with Digital Technology. Utilize modern technological methods to enhance the smart development of farmers' paintings. A digital farmers' painting museum can be established, incorporating VR technology to provide immersive experiences that allow audiences to explore the historical and cultural significance behind the art.

Highlighting National Gift Culture to Link Farmers' Painting Heritage with National Image Enhancement. Leverage the unique characteristics of traditional culture by guiding Xiuzhou farmers' painting inheritors to utilize the influence of renowned artists' studios. Efforts should be made to refine the inheritor system for farmers' paintings by organizing mentorship programs and apprenticeships, offering long-term free training and classes to set an example and drive wider participation.

5.4. Emphasizing International Exchanges to Promote Global Awareness of Party History

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasizes the importance of deepening cultural exchanges and promoting Chinese culture globally. Xiuzhou farmers' paintings, as a unique art form, have consistently drawn international attention.

Incorporating Farmers' Paintings into Chinese Language Promotion. Conduct cultural exchange programs centered on farmers' paintings for international students, integrating farmers' painting experience courses into Chinese language education. Experiential teaching practices based on farmers' paintings can foster cultural identity among international students. Platforms such as Confucius Institutes should be utilized to build cross-cultural communication systems, advancing the global outreach of farmers' painting culture and providing people worldwide with an excellent cultural experience of Chinese farmers' paintings.

Actively Seeking International Markets and Competitiveness. Organize farmers' painting cultural festivals to share China's stories through the lens of farmers' paintings, shifting from merely "going out" to truly "integrating in." Transform "Chinese Festivals" into "World Festivals" by exploring mutually integrative approaches. Seek marketing strategies aligned with international norms and market dynamics to develop cultural products that combine the red-themed Xiuzhou farmers' paintings with global competitiveness.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have thoroughly explored the significant pathways through which art, particularly Xiuzhou farmers' paintings, contributes to the inheritance of red revolutionary genes. By analyzing the historical background, red-themed connotations, and value of Xiuzhou farmers' paintings, as well as the current challenges in transmission, quality, and sales, we have proposed a series of effective dissemination strategies. These include strengthening government guidance and regulation, actively organizing "Xiuzhou Farmers' Paintings + Red Party History" promotional and display activities, strongly supporting inheritors in dynamic heritage preservation, and emphasizing international exchanges to globalize the promotion of Party history.

Xiuzhou farmers' paintings are not only a treasure of China's intangible cultural heritage [9] but also an essential vehicle for passing down red revolutionary genes and promoting socialist core values. With their unique artistic expression and profound cultural foundation, they reflect the changes in Chinese farmers' lives and the spirit of the times, serving as a bridge that connects the past with the future. In the face of challenges related to heritage and development, we are responsible for adopting effective measures to protect and promote this invaluable cultural heritage. This ensures that it continues to shine in the new era, inspiring patriotism and cultural confidence in more people.

Looking ahead, we firmly believe that through the concerted efforts of society as a whole, Xiuzhou farmers' paintings will go further on the path of inheriting red revolutionary genes. They will make a unique cultural contribution to realizing the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Let us join hands to witness the glorious chapter of Xiuzhou farmers' paintings in the new era.

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