

# Ethnic Art Creation View from the Perspective of Ethnology

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**ABSTRACT.** *The creation of Chinese ethnic art in the 20th century is inextricably linked with the establishment of modern Chinese ethnology and the research carried out by it. It can also be said that the establishment and research of ethnology provides an academic basis and method reference for ethnic art creation, and the research objects and research methods of ethnology help to expand and deepen the theme of ethnic art creation. The creation of ethnic art is a reflection of pluralism. The issue of the modernity of the theme of Chinese ethnic art creation is not only the internal law of art development, but also the development of the nation and its social culture. In the context of contemporary visual culture, the theme of ethnic art creation needs to continue and still face the possibility of reconstruction.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Ethnology; Ethnic subject; Art creation*

## 1. The fusion of ethnological research and ethnic art creation

The art creation of Chinese ethnic subjects is a unique art form formed in the development of Chinese art in the 20th century. The subject of ethnic is an important cultural resource for artistic creation in the context of local culture, its subject, form, connotation and expression form have given great influence to China's art creation since the 20th century. On the one hand, it is formed by the internal dynamics of art development itself, such as Professor Song Xiaoxia of China Central Academy of Fine Art said: "The art tradition of this practice originated from the internal historical evolution of Chinese art and from its encounter with the West; It is closely related to the historical movement of China in the 20th century and the power to create contemporary culture." On the other hand, the creation of Chinese ethnic art in the 20th century is inextricably linked with the establishment of modern Chinese ethnology and the research carried out by it. It can also be said that the establishment and research of ethnology provides an academic basis and method reference for the creation of ethnic art.

Taking minorities and their culture as research objects is the main task of ethnological research. Since the establishment of ethnology discipline of China in the late 1920s, Chinese ethnologists have begun to work on the construction of academic norm and field practice. The official ethnological research and the artists' creation of the ethnic subjects are almost synchronous. The difference is that the

artists' creation is more attracted by the ethnic customs and the trend that painters who returned from the West tried to “nationalize oil painting through ethnic subjects”. The ethnic identification work that began in the 1950s clarified the context of artists' subsequent creation of ethnic subjects.

The creation of ethnic art began in the 1930s and 1940s. Affected by the Anti-Japan War, a large number of intellectuals and artists came to the southwestern and northwestern frontier provinces from the mainland, and they had great interest in ethnic minorities. The archaeological discoveries of Dunhuang and northwestern provinces have inspired artists' ethnic enthusiasm, which has created a new era of ethnic art. Those areas have unique natural scenery, unique ethnic culture and simple folk customs, which are quite different from the living environment of the Han people. Artists have sketched and inspected ethnic areas much more often than ever, and some of them have lived in these places for a long time, like Wu Zuoren, Zhang Daqian, Guan Shanyue, Dong Xiwen, Chang Shuhong, etc., their sketches and creations exude a strong expression of ethnic customs and lifestyles, which become the main subject of their art creation.

The ethnic-themed works created by the first generation of artists in New China have clearly applied the research results of ethnology, and those works clearly mark the ethnic origin. For example, through Dong Xiwen's oil painting “Miao Women in the Field”(1942) and oil painting “Kazakh Shepherdess”(1948), it can be seen that the author's creation is based on life experience of himself, as well as his in-depth research of ethnic cultural life. These works vividly show the social, economic and cultural changes and developments in ethnic areas. The artistic expression shows the customs and of ethnic areas and the spiritual and cultural characteristics of people. This kind of expression reflects the transformation of Chinese art creation and the transformation of ideas in the historical and cultural context. It is this transformation that has made China's ethnic art have completely different research ideas and expansions. As a creative subject, ethnic culture has entered the artists' field of vision more widely.

From the 1950s to the 1960s, it was the second peak period of the 20th century Chinese ethnic art creation. It came along with the first big discussion of the “nationalization” of Chinese and Western paintings. During this period, the China evolved from a “self liberated nation” to a “self realized nation.” “The Chinese nation, as a self realized national entity, has emerged in the confrontation between China and the Western powers in the past 100 years, but it has been formed as a self liberated national entity for thousands of years.” “The Great Unity of the Chinese Nation” by Ye Qianyu depicts the people of all ethnic groups in China gathering together and celebrating with the leaders of the Republic. National integration and sovereign independence constitute the theme of this work, and also establish the important motif of the new Chinese literature and art - “national unity.” This painting has thus become the symbol of the era of the Chinese nation changing from a self liberated national entity to a self realized national political entity. The concept of “Chinese nation” in this sense was born together with the concept of “people's sovereignty”, The concept of “Chinese nation” in this sense was born together with the concept of “people's sovereignty”, which also gave China's ethnic art in this

period the characteristic that people should be the main body of the society.

The 1980s was the new era of the exploration and transformation of the creation of Chinese ethnic art works. It was the outbreak after the repression of Culture Revolution and artists returned to the social reality from the “Red, Light, Bright” style. Yuan Yunsheng painted a large mural at an airport, “Splashing Water Festival”, taking Yi People's life as subject, Quan Shanshi painted “Tajik Girl”, “Old Crafter”, “Poet” and other portraits, Ji Shangyi painted “Tajik Bride” in 1983, Chen Danqing created “Tibet Series” and so on. During this period, the important feature of ethnic art creation was the attraction and spiritual liberation of artists by diverse ethnic cultures. The artist combines the spiritual needs of freedom with the vitality of nations, and displays the religion, culture and lifestyle as comprehensively and realistically as possible. For example, Zhan Jianjun's work “Chai Mucuo” and Zhu Naizheng's “First Visit to Patient” conveys a sense of humanity. Sun Jingbo's “Qinghai Lake” implies a typical plateau native feeling, which shows the construction of Tibetan culture in ethnology in a visual form, and reconstructs the traditional Chinese cultural spirit from the virtual form.

At the end of the 20th century, the ethnic subjects provided not only a kind of painting resources, but also cultural values and social attitudes. The ethnic subjects represented the creativity of Chinese art with its own cultural tasks, and created a sense of identity of the pluralistic Chinese nation. Moreover, the “Chinese style” was transformed into the interior of Chinese art for 60 years, and the root of the link with the art of the times was found from the root.

## **2. The pluralistic pattern of ethnic art creation**

From the perspective of ethnology, no ethnic culture is completely developing in a isolated gesture. In referring to the pattern of the pluralistic integration of the Chinese nation, Fei Xiaotong believes that the Chinese nation is a self realized national entity and pluralism is not only a national pattern but also a cultural pattern. In fact, the understanding and practice between nationality and nation in the creation of ethnic art is consistent with the relationship in pluralism. In the creation of modern and contemporary art, many painters integrate the locality of the ethnic with the concepts of society, economy, culture, humanities and customs to create paintings of minorities. From figure and form to aesthetics, they gradually enhance the lyric factors and reduce the narrative factor, and shift realistic depiction to the excavation of the deep spiritual essence of the ethnic culture, thus promoting the cultural character conservation of ethnic paintings in the local cultural and artistic language environment. The creation of ethnic subjects has always focused on the human spirit and the characteristics of the times. It expresses the interpretation of human values, social changes, and national culture. This has become an artistic embodiment of the development of the nation and an important manifestation of the multi-ethnic integration.

The uniqueness of ethnic culture is to motivate a large number of artists to be obsessed with the creation of ethnic subjects. But for artists, in the face of a ethnic

culture, the free creative context may not promote the time-dependent development of art creation, because the construction of a cultural system is based on a traditional stable framework, and this kind of stable framework makes individual development insignificant. For artistic creation, a single cultural system should try to communicate and integrate with various cultural systems, thus reflecting the practical value of ethnic culture.

The emergence of the “Tibet subject” for decades, from theme to subject, shows the independence of Tibetan culture itself. The creation of Tibetan subject has transcended the cultural perspective inherent in the subject matter, and is devoted to a cross-cultural creative experience. Its own course not only realizes the diversity of culture and artistic creation, but also experiences and It recognizes the value of different regions and different cultural spirits.

Today, ethnic art creation is also facing a change in the cultural pattern of ethnic minorities. For ethnic culture, the process of urbanization has affected the unique ethnic style. Affected by the mainstream Han culture, the mystery of ethnic has been destroyed. The establishment of a sense of national identity also brought about the almost simultaneous anxiety between the ethnic and the mainstream. Therefore, we must re-examine the cognition of a single national culture, whether it is an ancient traditional nation or a national period that is now gradually mainstreamed. However, the subject of “ethnic” in art creation has not disappeared, but rather appeared a more intrinsic “national culture”. The ethnic creation has broken through the narrow nationalist sentiments and redefines the direction of creation of ethnic subject. Today's artists engaged in the creation of ethnic art are more about exploring the cultural connotations of ethnic minorities, facing creation with a more open attitude, and using their subjective thinking to express their feelings about ethnic minorities. That is to say, in the future, the creation of ethnic subject art will be more personalized and subjective.

### **3. Visuality of ethnic culture and ethnic subject**

The subject of ethnic minorities is rich in artistic resources, and this kind of resources enriches the visual cultural spirit that the Han nationality does not have. For artists, ethnic culture needs to be extended and reconstructed in the contemporary visual culture environment.

Re-examining the visual cognition of the ethnic from the perspective of history and culture constitutes an important dimension in the creation of ethnic art in the 21st century. Since the 21st century, the worship of ethnic culture has expanded from a small number of people to national trend. The creation of artists has made the influence of ethnic visual culture on art creation increasingly strong. With the advent of the information age, people's cognition of ethnic minorities has been able to obtain visual aesthetic cognition of ethnic culture through various image methods.

The study of visual culture must lead to the study of visibility. The purpose of the artist to think a lot about the ethnic image is not the image itself, but how these images spread the ethnic culture, and what kind of image the ethnic culture uses.

For the study of ethnic art creation, from a cultural perspective, ethnic culture can be regarded as a language. ethnic culture and ethnic spirit constitute a connotation circle, or constitute the inner and outer ends of the study of ethnic art creation. The reason is that their research objects are directed at the meaning conveyance itself and are targeted. In the theory of ethnology, especially after the 19th century, the ethnic subject and ethnic culture became the main object of ethnological analysis. In fact, its relationship with visual culture has been doomed since the emergence of the nation, and the development process of contemporary art works: The whole process of conception, material, composition, perfection and decoration to the exhibition is to reflect a spirit of nation.

#### 4. Conclusion

The research methods and ideas of ethnology provide a methodological reference for the creation of ethnic themes. Ethnic culture is a culture of continuous development. The creation of national art cannot stop at the depiction of the simple life or costumes of the nation. More creation should focus on the changes in the living conditions of today's ethnic minorities. Whether as a subject matter or a culture, the positive meaning and value embodied in the creation of ethnic subject cannot be ignored, which has become a part of the development of Chinese art.

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