

# The Evolution of Traditional Craftsmanship and the Construction of Craftsman Culture from the Perspective of New Media

Jinghan Zhao

Communication University of China, Faculty of Arts, Beijing, 100024, China

**Keywords:** New Media; traditional arts; cultural context

**Abstract:** In the digital era, information technology and new media update themselves in a lightning speed. They gradually manifest the trend of combining with tradition in real life. At this time, Marshall McLuhan's concept of medium is the message is widely used. Given this context, the evolution of the craftsmanship of folk artifacts is more culturally significant. The shape of the artifact itself, as well as the decoration and pattern on it are the load-bearing and display of different cultures. This article mainly focuses on the evolution of the traditional arts of folk objects, and will discuss the current development of the inheritance of the traditional arts of objects in the cultural context of new media.

## 1. Introduction

In the traditional local civic society, civic artisans or craftsmen wandered about the streets, or run shops for managing a variety of businesses which were from gold and silver jewelry to pots and pans, and from playing tricks to peddling coolies. If it were possible for us to travel back to the traditional Chinese people's daily life, we would see them everywhere. However, as the times develop, the skills and artistry of traditional society have been changing under the circumstances of continuous upgraded media.

## 2. Techniques and Skills in the Penetration of New Media

Among the traditional folk artifacts, techniques and skills are their main functions and characteristics. Technique determines whether folk-custom can achieve practical objects and can be used in people's life with its unique technology. On the basis of technology, the concept of skill means to reflect the particularity of how do some folk artifacts different from others. The author will take the folk artifact as an example. Its working utensils involved various folk techniques and skills. This handicraft technique has thus become a model of traditional craftsmanship. The changes of the times make the surviving utensils become both the memory of the local society and the spirit of cultural heritage. The main characteristic of the folk artifact is different from other traditional one, because it is the combination of both techniques and skills. Every utensil is aiming to achieve practicability. Under this circumstance, skills are necessarily required for some kind of utensils to evolve into a certain utensil category, while techniques become the standard of this category for all the business uses. In the traditional working environment, only after reaching a certain skill standard, can a category survive and develop in the changing society.

The change of new media breaks down the barrier between traditional techniques and skills, and makes the new mode of communication more used in the function of preserving or copying traditional technology. In the meantime, due to the change of media, the inheritance of traditional techniques and skills shift from the two-way intuitive teaching mode of person-to-person to the one-way learning mode of person-to-object, which does not subject to time, place and other objective reasons. The new method shortens the learning time, but it loses the possibility for learners to dive in. After all, it is difficult to grasp the essence of certain skills with one-way self-study.

### **3. Changes in Identity and Production in the Context of New Media**

During the process of production, the identity of producer has a great influence on the whole process. Not only does production environment, but also the producer, plays a great role in it. In this process, the identity of the craftsman will greatly affect the inheritance and development of certain business. For example, in some ethnic areas, the craftsman learns through family inheritance. This situation especially happens in villages or areas with closed economy. As a result of closed environment, craftsman there formed a certain fixed mode of inheritance. With the development of society, when the non-native region of the foreign population moving into the nation, along with inter-regional population dynamics, the development will diversify gradually and promote the regional spread of technique. Also, this spread will gradually expand the sustainable development of the industry to some certain extent

In the production process, changes in identity will exert a two-way influence. The same line of work will produce different contents, different lines of work will vary greatly from place to place. On the one hand, this difference is caused by the imbalance of our country's development in geographical environment and economic. On the other hand, this different is formed because of various needs in different regions. It requires both the differences and changes in the geographical environment for a business to survive. That is because geographical differences determine the production mode and living standards of a region, and whether a business can be developed and inherited in this region for a long time.

Craftsman belongs to the lowest class in old times. This put a limitation on people to engage in related businesses. But this identity is changing quietly in the new media environment. With the penetration of new media and the improvement of society, economic growth and the continuous development of technology, early machines have replaced traditional handicraft production methods. In this case, the identity of the artisan or folk entertainer in these businesses has changed as well. The use of various new technologies has gradually replaced the original manual processing with machine technology. Under such circumstances, the techniques which are hand-manipulated by traditional craftsmen have become more precious and rare. In modern times, the identity of the craftsmen who were not valued in old times has been improved in all aspects, so do their status.

### **4. The History of the Craftsman and the Future of the Craftsman under New Media**

As a diachronic process, all the industries are developing from scratch, and the same is true of craftsmen. In old times, the life of the craftsman is consistent with the environment they live. The craftsmenn learned techniques from personal experiences. With time goes by, the technical practice finally becomes the skill. The living environment makes the craftsmen who they are. It is precisely the environment that creates the unique craftsman culture. Each type of craftsman has his own rules, taboos, and various norms. In the old times, the whole industry has standardized the words and deeds of the craftsmen, which have certain influence on pushing for the development of the whole industry.

The previous school year of folk teachers and apprentices has a certain gap with the current school system. The term of apprenticeship with the master is three years, after which the apprentice can work with the master for one year. After these four years, the apprentice will be officially allowed to leave their master and work freely. During the fourth year, all the money earned by the apprentice is given to the master, as a return to the teachings. There are also strict prerequisites to be a master's apprentice. To fulfill the process, there are five indispensable people: a teacher for introducing, a teacher for vouching, a teacher for notarizing, a master and the master's wife. These people are so-called Si Shi Yi Mu (four teachers and one teacher's wife). In addition, a feast must be prepared, and witnessed by a fellow craftsman of renown, or a man of renown among the family, or a man of renown in any other business. In the entire ceremony, the apprentice-to-be has to perform the rite of worshiping three times and kowtowing nine times. After the master accepts apprentice's gift, the ceremony is officially completed. In Qing Dynasty, this tradition of apprenticeship continued. It needed not only the Si Shi Yi Mu mentioned above, but also their own parents'

witnessing. During the period of the Republic of China, formal rituals and signing ceremonies were used to form the ritualization.

Traditional society's tedious apprentice ceremony has been transformed into today's not complicated process of learning techniques, so that people can quickly master and engage in this industry in a short, frequent, fast time. Many skills do not need to be led or taught by a master, self-learning can complete the process. It is not difficult to find that the progressing science and the updating technology have gradually replaced the traditional handicraft-based working mode. Craftsmen learn to use machines to accomplish their tasks, and the meticulous work of craftsmanship gradually became an even rarer skill. The identity of the craftsman has been highlighted with the changes of the new era. In the time of mechanization, people start to value the traditional production process. Under the impact of the mighty industrial civilization, this splendid handcraft art, which was born on the basis of the agricultural civilization in the past, is at the risk of vanishing. Although man has made many codes in the materialized world by science and technology, the meaning of these codes cannot be explained by technology itself. The spirit of "Ge Wu"(the spirit of investigating the nature of things in order to acquire knowledge) in Chinese traditional culture provides people with spiritual sustenance of their own. Between the object, the mind and the truth, the highest level of "Ge Wu" is not concealed in the object, nor in someone's ego. From the philosophical point of view, the mechanism is often hidden in the reality of things, people are often hidden in the heart of the self, the real craftsman can not only follow the natural principles of things themselves, but also can integrate the subject consciousness into them. In order to spread the spirit of creation and craftsman culture, the skills cannot be substituted by machines. People are starting to re-recognize the craftsmanship. The development of the craft is also bound to be confronted with a new challenge.

## 5. Conclusion

The craft that can truly be passed on to the future generation requires the handwork and special skills of the craftsman. The true art does not dwell in a cold mass production of the machine. The inheritance of the craftsman in the new context is also reflected in himself. Technology can be continually updated to help craftsman's techniques evolve. The constant updating of media communication can only copy the skill, but cannot imitate emotional elements. The future of the craftsman is a combination of technology and craftsmanship. In the new media context, the types of future craftsmen will be more diversified, the division of labor will be more detailed, the role will be more comprehensive, and the techniques will be more sophisticated. But no matter how it changes, the craftsmen's pursuit of excellence and their familiarity of traditional skills will never disappear as the renewal of the media.

## References

- [1] [US] Michael Owen Jones, Handicrafts, History, Culture, Behavior: How We Should Study Folk Art and Technique,[J] The Folk Culture Forum, 2005(5):78-89.
- [2] Wang Mingyue, Identity and Handicraft Production: Research on the Production Mechanism of Traditional Handicrafts--Based on the Discussion of the Buyi Batik Techniques,[J] National Art, 2017(7):157-164.
- [3] Feng Lijuan, Yan Xiaojuan: "The Craftsman's Documentary Writer's Identity Writing", [J]in Contemporary TV, 2017(4):49-50.