

## Research on Folk Culture in Dough Sculpture

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**Abstract:** Caozhou dough with long history and rich culture is a representative of the local folk culture. Essentially, Art is a symbol, is the authentic local art, is a reflection of the local folk daily life and spiritual beliefs. Under the guidance of Malinowski's theory of cultural function, combined with field investigation, this paper interprets and discusses the folk cultural meaning of dough sculpture art in Muli Village of Caozhou, in order to have a certain impact on the inheritance and development of local folk culture.

### 1. Introduction

Art is not only a symbol, but also a representative of culture. Folk art inherits the elegance of art and embodies people's life, thus showing its vitality. Cao Zhou dough sculpture, as a folk art form closely related to the lives of ordinary people, is bound to have rich folk cultural meanings that can fully reflect people's lives and spirits. From the perspective of folklore, based on Malinowski's functional theory, and by combing the history and culture of dough sculpture in Cao Zhou, this paper attempts to analyze and study the meaning of folk culture contained in dough sculpture in Mulizhuang, Caozhou and its role in people's life.

### 2. History and Culture of Dough Sculpture in Cao Zhou

Folk dough sculpture craft originated from the native land, which is closely connected with people's life, and shows people a colorful life world of common people. The same is true of dough sculpture art in Mulizhuang, Caozhou, which originated from the historical society, rooted in the soil of folk life, absorbed the nutrients and essence of local life, and finally developed into a folk culture and art style that is now famous all over the country and even the world. dough sculpture in Cao Zhou has a long history of art. According to legend, as early as Yao and Shun times, because of the geographical reasons of Cao Zhou, which is located in the Yellow River Basin, floods often occurred, which led to people's increasingly poor and difficult life. According to this, the local people try their best to take some way to pray for good weather and good harvest every year. At last, people thought of offering sacrifices in order to realize their ideal. However, due to the restriction of economic conditions at that time, there was not enough extra funds to buy meat and sacrifice to the gods and spirits of heaven and earth, so I thought of using flour to knead pigs and sheep and other shapes instead, as a sacrifice to pray for heaven. These are what we now call "Flower Sacrifice" and the earliest works of art in dough sculpture in Cao Zhou. After several vicissitudes, it developed to the Qing Dynasty, and dough sculpture art has developed and formed. According to the inscription that can be seen now, that is, the inscription of Mu En records: "Opera art is close to banter, but can master the production method. Every time a dough figurine is fabricated, the body is completely similar, and it looks like life, as if it will live. There is no such technique in Cao Zhou. From Xianfeng two years ago, the two of them visited our Cao Zhou together, lived in Ximuli, a local market, and earned more than their daily living expenses. After a few years, they began to buy land and settled down. Soon, Yang Yulin and other three people learned from Mr. Wang; Duan Wengan and others learn from Mr. Guo; Inherit and accept disciples, and soon teach each other for 70 years! It has been passed down for five generations and spread to Cao and nearby Zhili and Henan provinces, so there are no fewer than 1,000 people with this skill; Doing business in Asia, Africa,

Europe and America, and starting to sell one by one, some families are prosperous, and some people are safe in food and clothing, all because they have this skill". It can be seen that in the second year of Xianfeng in Qing Dynasty, in 1852, rice sculpture artists Wang Qingyuan and Guo Xiangjun from Yiyang, Jiangxi Province came to Muli Village for unknown reasons, and cooperated with local "Flower Safety" artists Hao Sheng and Yang Baisi to integrate Jiangxi's rice sculpture with Cao Zhou's "Flower Supply" dough sculpture skills, thus forming the current "dough sculpture in Mulizhuang, Caozhou" It can be described as a combination of North and South styles, which has a profound influence in the development history of dough sculpture art. dough sculpture artists in Mulizhuang not only carve dough sculpture in their hometown, but also constantly travel south and north, spreading their skills to other places, combining with local culture to realize its development and broaden its cultural living space in the future; On the other hand, it also influenced the formation of dough sculpture art in the places where they went, and integrated the dough sculpture skills with their own cultural customs and living habits to form a unique dough sculpture school with its own cultural symbols. There are three famous dough sculpture schools in China: Li School in Heze, Shandong, Tang School in Beijing and Zhao School in Shanghai. Among them, Li School in Heze, Shandong Province has always been in the first place, which can be said to be the leader with high artistic level, research value, economic value and stronger spiritual and cultural value.

### **3. Folk Culture Connotation of Dough Sculpture in Mulizhuang, Caozhou**

The emergence of any cultural form will have its corresponding value and function. As Malinowski thought, "the form of culture has no simple or single function. As a response to different needs, various cultural settings are integrated", and "culture eventually becomes a huge and complex behavior network that responds to various needs". The diversity of cultural forms is to meet people's different needs, and dough sculpture, as a traditional folk cultural and artistic form widely circulated in northern China, came into being under the premise that it is closely related to the spiritual needs of local people. dough sculpture, also known as "dough kneader", originated from folk sacrificial activities, and replaced the custom of real cattle and sheep with dough sculpture products. Folk dough sculpture is an art form which integrates group, region and folk customs, and sustains people's emotions. It embodies the philosophy, belief and national spirit of many folk groups. Through the in-depth study of dough sculpture art, we can have a clearer understanding of the rich cultural connotations hidden behind them. dough sculpture in Mulizhuang, Caozhou, as a magnificent and wonderful work among the hundred folk arts, has a long history and rich connotations, which fully embodies the spiritual sustenance, belief status of local people and all changes in modern society. dough sculpture in Mulizhuang, Caozhou is rich in variety and different in subject matter. Different themes reveal different cultural connotations. For example, as the Spring Festival approaches, local people will make dough sculpture art in the styles of chicken, duck, fish, grapes, eggplant, pomegranate, bergamot, etc., to symbolize that people hope that the whole family will have all the best, live a long life and have a lot of children and grandchildren in the new year. For example, when celebrating the birthday of the elderly at home or in the neighborhood, the family or neighbors will make some dough sculpture related to "longevity", such as "longevity" and longevity peach, which means that the elderly at home can live a long life. All these can reflect the rich connotation of dough sculpture in Mulizhuang, Caozhou and the people's demands and hopes. Generally speaking, however, the folk culture meaning of dough sculpture in Mulizhuang, Caozhou can be preliminarily discussed and discussed from the following aspects.

#### **(1) Totem worship**

From the initial fear and attachment to nature and the personification and mythological imagination of natural objects and natural forces, human ancestors formed the concept of "all things have spirit". In their view, floods, rainstorms, droughts and other natural phenomena are caused by the dissatisfaction of natural gods, so they began to worship them with some flour food and pray for their forgiveness and blessing. dough sculpture in Mulizhuang, Caozhou originally embodied the idea of seeking protection from gods and praying for happiness. In its original dough sculpture

works, some animal and plant images often appear as substitutes for worshipping heaven and praying for the earth. The image of dough sculpture of poultry and livestock is not only the physical supply for human survival, but also the life partner of human beings between heaven and earth. Without their existence, people's life will be lifeless and lifeless. All these have strengthened the ancestors' worship of animals and plants, and this idea has been continuously continued in the later social development process and integrated into people's ideas. It is these images, such as frogs, fish, birds, melons and fruits, which often appear, that create conditions for the expression and inheritance of the culture of continuous life and totem worship. Among them, "frog" shape is not uncommon in ancient Chinese ornamentation. According to the scholars concerned, the image of frog is the legacy and continuation of totem culture, and later gradually closely related to the myth and legend of Nuwa. Nuwa has always been regarded as the ancestor of human reproduction. People connect "frog" with "Wa" homophonically, which makes the connotation of life reproduction of "frog" more prominent. Among them, "Liu Hai plays Golden Toad" and "Zaoshan frog (baby)". It can be seen that, through the exquisite kneading art, the local government "has formed a set of rather well-rounded creation mode of" symbolizing meaning and meaning conformation "and the corresponding" language "material system", which more fully reflects the expectations of the broad masses of working people for a bumper harvest of grain and rice and early birth of a noble son. In addition, there are many works with birds as the theme in Cao Zhou's dough sculpture, such as "Phoenix Opera Peony", and dough sculpture's works with plants as the theme, such as brocade melons, peaches, grapes, pomegranates and gourds, all of which actually reflect the people's spiritual concept of being blessed, having more children and living longer to varying degrees.

Therefore, totem worship and life worship are one of the main contents of Cao Zhou's dough sculpture art. It is closely related to people's life customs, beliefs, concepts, etc. It is not art for art's sake, but always points to the inner spiritual world of the common people. Because it is closely connected with all aspects of people's life, this artistic style has been inherited more widely and spread more permanently in the soil of folk life.

## (2) Ancestor worship

It is a traditional virtue of our country since ancient times to worship ancestors. Looking at dough sculpture's works in Mulizhuang, Caozhou, the number is vast, the forms are complex and varied, and the colors are colorful, giving people a simple, bold and profound feeling. The production of dough sculpture must abide by the conventions and taboos stipulated by social customs and moral standards. On the one hand, the beauty and non-beauty of dough sculpture depend on its color and technique; on the other hand, it is more important to determine whether it is consistent with the social ethics at that time. The art of dough sculpture and the display of these contents are usually accomplished through some festival ceremonies. Since ancient times, there has been a political tradition of filial piety in China, which makes the people of the whole country regard the ideology of worshipping ancestors and respecting the old people of their fathers as a standard for judging traditional morality. According to "Book of Rites: Ji Yi", "By offering sacrifices, we can not be close to each other and never forget our own source of life. Have reached their own respect, express their feelings, try their best to do things, in order to repay their loved ones, dare not do their best." This is enough to show that people should have the heart to repay their kindness, not forget the teachings of their parents, and do their best to honor them when they have achieved something, so that they can enjoy their old age. For example, when celebrating the birthday of the elderly now, the younger generation should show something. In Muli Village, Cao County, people show the dough sculpture art related to birthday activities. To show blessing and hope. In the local area, this is a concrete manifestation of filial piety and reward for future generations, and it is also a way for relatives and friends to bless each other. Of course, with the improvement of living conditions, this way has also changed. In the dough sculpture of Mu Li Zhushou in Caozhou, there are children holding peaches and giving them to the birthday girl, expecting him to live longer. There are also images such as The bat (Fu) has both longevity and longevity, Pines and cranes can prolong life, and Eight Immigrants celebrate their birthday, all of

which indicate the connotation of good luck. For example, when offering sacrifices to ancestors at the cold food festival, the descendants pinch the dough sculpture snake dish, while when offering sacrifices to ancestors, the younger generation eats the snake head to show "Show poison and avoid disaster", that is, they want to get their blessing to their families by paying homage to their ancestors. Another example is that folk dough sculpture artists use Confucius, the sage of Wu, Guan Gong and other figures as the theme of dough sculpture, pinning the people's infinite worship and respect for the sages and sages, and hoping that their thoughts and justice will always influence the later people and society.

According to the above, we can further realize that dough sculpture in Mulizhuang, Caozhou is not only a few exquisite works of art, but more importantly, it is a rich carrier of the local people's concept of worshipping ancestors and ancestors.

### (3) Concept of good and evil

Dough sculpture in Mulizhuang developed from simple works to different historical figures. This change reflects the masses' record and evaluation of historical figures and events, and reveals their social history and views of figures. For example, the large-scale dough sculpture works made by dough sculpture artists in Mulizhuang, Caozhou, with historical works as the theme, Such as the Goddess Chang's fly to the moon, The Heavenly Maids Scatter Blossoms, Sun Wukong's Great Hall of Heaven, Baoyu Daiyu's Reading Picture, Various Characters in Outlaws of the marsh, The four masters and apprentices in the Journey to the West, as well as numerous civil and military officials, romantic maids, military commanders and chivalrous men, all show people's longing for a better life and a happy marriage from different aspects, and also show the masses' adherence to justice, criticism of evil forces and praise of heroes. All these are true records of ordinary people's life feelings. The modern bottom society is still in chaos, and with the wanton invasion of western culture, the minds of modern people are confused. It can be said that the minimum bottom line of being a man is almost lost. In the modern society, which is full of profits, many young people do some evil things by hook or by crook for a little benefit. Therefore, it is crucial to save people's values and eliminate people's desires. In this respect, some dough sculpture works with historical themes will have certain effects, which will arouse people's review of history and then reflect on the present, thus affecting social peace and harmony.

### (4) Modern concept

The wheel of history will always keep sliding forward. With the development of society, Cao Zhou's dough sculpture has been going on for thousands of years. In the process of history and the development of society, the theme of his dough sculpture works has also changed to some extent. Themes that didn't exist before have appeared now, and artistic phenomena that didn't exist before have also appeared now. For example, there are audio dough sculpture and dynamic dough sculpture, which are mostly children's toys, and are the new types of dough sculpture. All these reflect the change of people's ideas from different aspects and levels. The long-term existence of any kind of thing must continue to absorb new factors on the basis of the original tradition, and then innovate. Only by perfectly integrating traditional and modern factors can we have new life power and stronger development power. The integration of traditional and modern elements in dough sculpture's works must be based on the change of people's ideas. Only when the local people accept this new cultural concept can the perfect combination of multiple cultures be promoted. Therefore, the development and inheritance of dough sculpture in Mulizhuang, Caozhou must be integrated into the rhythm of modern life. The organic combination of modern concepts and traditional cultural factors is the truly modern dough sculpture form, and it is also a work of art with strong vitality.

## **4. Future Development of Dough Sculpture in Mulizhuang, Caozhou**

During the development of dough sculpture art, Cao Zhou's dough sculpture has widely and deeply influenced the dough sculpture art in Shanghai and Beijing. Cao Zhou's dough sculpture artists travel around and even around the world to show the world its artistic and cultural charm. Mu Lizhuang's dough sculpture artists and later disciples have visited Shanghai, Guangzhou and other

metropolises for many times, as well as Laos, Australia and many other countries to show dough sculpture art. In these places, they have won unanimous praise and love from all people, and won honors for China's artistic development, which can be described as “famous both at home and abroad”. This fact proves that dough sculpture in Muli Village, Caozhou did not stick to the tradition, but boldly absorbed many new elements, and skillfully integrated them into one, which made a better development now. However, dough sculpture in Mulizhuang will face a crisis in its future inheritance and development. Nowadays, the old group of dough sculpture artists are skilled and experienced, and deeply understand the cultural value and social status of dough sculpture art. However, nowadays, young people born after 1980s and 1990s rarely do this job. According to an old artist who studied dough sculpture at the age of 12, “nowadays, the age of specializing in dough sculpture is between 30 and 50 years old, and almost young people are unwilling to regard this as a lifelong career, because most young people can't accept the way of selling dough sculpture by walking around the streets”. It can be seen that the inheritance prospect of dough sculpture in Cao Zhou is not optimistic, and it is urgent to protect and attach importance to it. Once Cao Zhou dough sculpture disappears, it will never be regenerated. Therefore, it is extremely urgent to solve the problem of modern inheritance of dough sculpture in Cao Zhou. However, first of all, we must give Cao Zhou dough sculpture a brand-new meaning, and we should not rest on our laurels. We should keep up with the pace of the times and show its innovative value. Secondly, it is necessary to guide and educate the younger generation, so that they can sincerely devote themselves to the cause of spreading and inheriting the local dough sculpture art, and let them feel the cultural value of this folk art on the premise of solving the economic pressure. Only in this way can it ensure its successors. From the perspective of inheritance, under the premise of ensuring its traditional factors, dough sculpture art in Mulizhuang, Caozhou should adapt to the changes of the times, which can be described as “changing is living”, otherwise it will soon be lost without trace.

Dough sculpture, a folk handicraft, is a way of life for local people to support their families. Now, with the attention of the country and society to traditional culture and folk culture, coupled with the rise and development of urban tourism, dough sculpture in Mulizhuang, Caozhou will also go to the market and face the world. Its exquisite workmanship and vivid images not only attract people from different fields in China to buy them and regard them as treasures of spiritual enjoyment, but also attract a large number of foreigners, including senior leaders of western countries and other people from different strata to love and praise them. In the past, over time, with the continuous improvement of dough sculpture's reputation in Mulizhuang, on the one hand, it will inevitably bring a huge income to the local people and provide a solid guarantee for the improvement of the local people's economic level and quality of life; On the other hand, the development of economy will also become an opportunity for the further development of dough sculpture art, thus profoundly affecting the mental outlook and values of local people, and making them more deeply aware of the preciousness of their own culture, so as to cherish, rationally develop and vigorously protect it. Facing the modern market, dough sculpture in Mulizhuang, Caozhou will definitely go out of the country, enter the market, step on the big stage of international trade, and become a shining label of Chinese folk culture.

## **5. Conclusion**

The dough sculpture art of Mulizhuang in Caozhou has distinct regional characteristics, national characteristics and even the characteristics of the times. It reflects the national social life in a certain area, conforms to people's aesthetic feelings and customs, and is also a partial reflection of traditional culture, which contains the cultural spirit of praying for happiness, respecting ancestors and gods, and harmony and tranquility. The formation of this kind of cultural spirit is actually the product of the exchange and integration of ancient Chinese economic life, political ideas, cultural ethics and modern cultural factors. The research on folk dough sculpture art is more conducive for scholars to understand and explore our traditional culture from multiple angles and integrate the relationship between tradition and modernity, so as to create conditions and lay a foundation for the future development of dough sculpture art with modern cultural concepts and aesthetics. In the face

of modernity and tradition, many scholars subconsciously think that everything in tradition is excellent, while the concept of modernization is rubbish, but it is not. In the ancient Chinese culture embodied by dough sculpture, there are still some negative factors such as conservatism and closedness. However, in order to develop dough sculpture art to a greater extent, it is necessary to absorb the essence of modern culture, remove the dross contained in its tradition, and learn from the past and consider the present. Therefore, the development and inheritance of dough sculpture art is based on the perfect combination of national tradition and modern elements, and dough sculpture culture and art with national, regional and contemporary characteristics is created.

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