

A Study on the Dynamic Dissemination of Yangliuqing New Year Paintings from the Perspective of New Media

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Abstract: Yangliuqing New Year's Paintings are a quintessential example of Northern Chinese folk art, embodying deep-rooted folk cultural traditions and a unique regional aesthetic sensibility. With the widespread adoption of new media technologies and the mobile internet, the agents, channels, and forms of information dissemination have undergone profound transformations. Relying solely on static preservation is no longer sufficient to sustain the transmission and development of this intangible cultural heritage; it must now rely on new mediums to achieve a living transformation. Building upon an examination of the historical evolution, production techniques, and cultural value of Yangliuqing New Year's Paintings, this paper analyzes the current state of their development as cultural and creative products. It identifies existing shortcomings in areas such as thematic innovation, creative design, sensory experience, and digital products. Consequently, the paper proposes new pathways for innovation at two levels—the reconstruction of visual language and the empowerment of digital media—to help Yangliuqing New Year's Paintings chart a new course for development in the new media environment.

Keywords: New media; Yangliuqing New Year paintings; Cultural and creative products; Living heritage transmission; Intangible cultural heritage transmission

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1. The history and cultural value of Yangliuqing New Year paintings

1.1. The historical development and evolution of techniques in Yangliuqing New Year paintings

Yangliuqing New Year's paintings originate from Yangliuqing Town in Xiqing District, Tianjin, and their rise and fall have been shaped by the canal transportation system. According to physical artifacts and records passed down by print shops, the woodblock printing industry for New Year's paintings already existed in the area during the Wanli reign of the Ming Dynasty. The Dai Lianzeng print shop originated in the late

Ming Dynasty. With the completion of the Grand Canal during the Kangxi and Qianlong reigns, materials and painting techniques from the Jiangnan region were introduced, ushering in the industry's golden age. Together with Taohuawu New Year's paintings, they were collectively known as "Taohuawu in the South, Yangliuqing in the North." The works blend woodcut and imperial painting styles, combining printing and hand-painting techniques to create a unique aesthetic. Yangliuqing New Year's paintings undergo multiple production stages; their core characteristic is the combination of woodblock multi-color printing and hand-painting. The woodblocks are primarily carved from local pear wood, and the process is completed through the division of labor among artisans. With the rise of machine printing in the late Qing Dynasty, traditional New Year's paintings began to decline; Thanks to national protection, they were included in the first batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage listings in 2006. Since the 1990s, New Year's prints have transcended their traditional festive role and expanded into collectibles and tourist souvenirs, laying the foundation for cultural and creative development ^[1].

1.2. The multidimensional intrinsic value of Yangliuqing New Year paintings in folk culture

Yangliuqing New Year paintings possess significant aesthetic and folkloric educational value. Aesthetically, their forms are concise and vivid, capturing the essential characteristics of their subjects while employing moderate exaggeration; their color palette draws on the folk concept of the "five colors," featuring sharp contrasts without appearing garish. Artists use the properties of color to structure the layers of the composition; this traditional approach to color coordination aligns with modern visual theory and can serve as a reference for contemporary cultural and creative industries and graphic design. On the level of folk culture, New Year's prints are an integral part of traditional Lunar New Year customs. They convey auspicious meanings through homophones and symbolic imagery, with themes often drawn from opera allusions and everyday life scenes, thereby serving an educational purpose as well. At the same time, they embody the lifestyle aspirations and aesthetic preferences of northern Chinese people against the backdrop of the Grand Canal. Their unique folk cultural characteristics make them a valuable cultural resource that easily resonates with the public in the context of "Chinese-style" creative works and new media dissemination ^[2].

2. The current status of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year painting cultural and creative products

2.1. Contemporary cultural and creative industry development practices and achievements to date

In recent years, Tianjin has advanced the development of Yangliuqing New Year paintings in accordance with guidelines for the protection of intangible cultural heritage. The Yangliuqing New Year Painting Society has developed a variety of cultural and creative products inspired by these paintings, some of which have won national-level craftsmanship awards. In 2011, the Yangliuqing Woodblock New Year Painting Museum opened its doors to the public free of charge, providing a physical venue for exhibition and research. Relevant departments and universities have organized design competitions, giving rise to outstanding works such as the egg carving "Abundance Year After Year"; Nike has also launched a collaborative shoe line featuring this theme, successfully blending traditional symbols with fashion products. Many cultural venues have utilized apps and VR to offer digital interactive content such as coloring activities and virtual exhibitions.

Overall, Yangliuqing New Year's Paintings have already explored three areas—physical cultural and creative products, brand collaborations, and digital experiences—but there remains significant room for improvement in the depth and breadth of their development ^[3].

2.2. Real-world contradictions revealed in the practice of cultural and creative industry commercialization

Despite existing initiatives, the development of Yangliuqing New Year paintings as cultural and creative products still faces numerous challenges. First, the themes are outdated, new works are scarce, and market offerings struggle to align with the preferences of younger audiences; second, there is a lack of creativity and weak brand influence, with most products consisting merely of simple printed designs, resulting in severe homogenization; third, the sensory experience is one-dimensional, often limited to the visual level, lacking interactivity and thus failing to evoke an emotional connection with users; fourth, digital products are scarce, and a comprehensive digital content ecosystem has yet to be established, creating a communication gap with younger audiences. At the same time, the inheritance of these techniques faces a crisis: there is a shortage of *du li* wood, the number of woodblock carving artisans is steadily declining, and low-cost modern printing methods are widely used. The challenges surrounding the survival of traditional woodblock printing techniques also affect the expression of value and pricing of these cultural and creative handicrafts ^[4].

3. Innovation in the development of Yangliuqing New Year paintings as cultural and creative products

3.1. Reconstructing visual language: Cross-industry integration and innovation in physical cultural and creative products

The first step in cultural and creative development is to break down New Year's paintings from “complete images” into design resources that can be used flexibly. Simply put, creators can select figures from the New Year's paintings—such as children, court ladies, and opera characters—as well as decorative motifs like lotus flowers, lotus pods, pomegranates, koi, and cloud patterns. They begin by sketching line art to isolate the outer contours, then simplify, transform, and rearrange these lines. They can also employ compositional techniques such as two-way and four-way repeats to create new pattern series, giving traditional motifs a modern visual appeal. The key to this process lies in “reconstructing form and meaning” rather than simply copying the original images. Designs must preserve the cultural essence of auspicious symbolism while aligning with contemporary aesthetics in terms of form and color. In terms of color treatment, designers can draw upon the traditional concept of the “Five Colors” and the overall color palettes of classic works, while adjusting brightness and saturation to account for the characteristics of both physical products and digital screens. This approach yields color schemes that evoke the festive spirit of the Lunar New Year while maintaining a fashionable sensibility, ensuring that the traditional color language remains relevant on new media ^[5].

Cross-industry integration provides a broader platform for visual reinvention. In addition to conventional items such as bookmarks and tableware, “Chinese-style” fashion, footwear, luggage, home goods, and even food packaging can all serve as spaces for expressing New Year's painting elements. The success of the collaboration between Zhu Xian Town New Year Paintings and the Palace Museum's cultural and creative brand—which launched a chibi-style “The Emperor Bestows Blessings, the Empress Presents a Ruyi”

product line—demonstrates that innovation in New Year paintings should transcend the boundaries of the original artwork, transforming traditional cultural symbols into a contemporary product language with market appeal. Similarly, Nike’s collaborative shoe line, which reinterprets elements from the painting “Abundance Year After Year” through embroidery techniques, illustrates that traditional themes can be revitalized through a shift in medium. In terms of system development, people can draw on the three levels of transformation in the innovative design of intangible cultural heritage: The first level consists of haute couture pieces centered on complete handmade craftsmanship, intended for exhibitions and collections to preserve the authenticity of the craft; the second level comprises cultural and creative products that combine handmade techniques with industrial production, balancing quality and price to generate a sustainable source of orders; the third level consists of mass-market cultural and creative products based on visual symbols, which are affordably priced and serve an educational function for the general public. These three levels correspond to the progressive psychological journey of consumers—from awareness to identification to passion—and can provide differentiated products for different groups, thereby forming a complete cultural consumption chain ^[6].

3.2. Empowered by digital media: Innovation in digitalization and communication models

The new media environment has opened up a broader space for Yangliuqing New Year paintings than physical products alone could provide. First, there is the development of digital content products. Mobile animated emojis, e-cards, short online videos, interactive mini-games, and AR/VR applications can all draw inspiration from New Year paintings. The previous popularity of the “Little Marquis Sends New Year Greetings” mobile emoji pack and the “Spot the Differences in New Year Paintings” mini-game has already proven that this ancient art form can fully integrate into digital social scenarios in an entertaining way. For Yangliuqing New Year paintings, creators can develop a series of distinctive IP characters and transform them into animated emojis, digital illustrations, and micro-animations, allowing users to naturally engage with New Year painting culture through chat, entertainment, and social sharing. Additionally, AI-assisted design tools can be used to generate pattern variations and explore design options, significantly boosting creative efficiency while ensuring the cultural essence remains intact ^[7].

Second, multisensory and interactive experience design. Drawing inspiration from successful examples such as smart toys and cultural and creative ice cream, people can develop New Year’s painting dolls that speak and tell stories about the paintings, or integrate New Year’s painting elements into the design and packaging of local, time-honored food brands, adding auditory and gustatory experiences beyond the visual. By using AR technology to scan physical products, users can trigger animated stories and craft demonstrations; VR devices can recreate New Year’s painting scenes and simulate the processes of sketching, outlining, and printing, transforming users from observers into participants. This interactive and dynamic design approach aligns closely with the characteristics of new media visual communication—namely, mass appeal, visuality, and interactivity—and can significantly enhance the sense of participation and memorability of the message ^[8].

Third, innovation in communication models and collaboration among stakeholders. The widespread adoption and interactivity of new media mean that communication is no longer limited to official institutions; ordinary users can also participate in the creation and reinterpretation of New Year’s print content. By leveraging short-video platforms and social media networks, content showcasing New Year’s painting

techniques and folk tales can be produced, and trending topics can be created to guide users in secondary creation, thereby generating viral dissemination. Through user profiling and algorithmic recommendations, New Year's painting content can be precisely targeted to reach younger audiences. Additionally, building digital resource libraries and virtual exhibition halls will help overcome temporal and spatial constraints to expand the cultural reach. On a broader level, collaboration should be fostered among cultural inheritors, designers, universities, brand companies, and the media: cultural inheritors provide the cultural DNA; designers bridge the gap between tradition and modernity; universities conduct research, training, and project incubation; brand companies open up commercial channels; the media builds communication bridges; and the general public serves as the foundation for cultural consumption. Only through the concerted efforts of these diverse stakeholders can people provide sustained momentum for the living transmission of Yangliuqing New Year paintings ^[9].

4. Conclusion

In the age of new media, the preservation of Yangliuqing New Year paintings can no longer be limited to static conservation; instead, it should embrace a dynamic path where dissemination fosters preservation and innovation drives development. This article examines the historical value and technical characteristics of Yangliuqing New Year paintings, analyzes the shortcomings in cultural and creative development regarding themes, creativity, user experience, and digitization, and proposes innovative approaches in two areas: the reconstruction of visual language and the empowerment of digital media. In the future, while upholding its cultural essence, Yangliuqing New Year's Paintings must continue to explore ways to connect traditional symbols with contemporary life and digital technology. By leveraging cross-disciplinary design, digital products, and omnichannel dissemination to expand its audience base, this ancient folk art can truly integrate into the daily lives of modern people, achieve sustainable, dynamic preservation, and serve as a model for the contemporary transformation of other forms of folk art ^[10].

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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