

## Interventional Aesthetic Experience: The Aesthetic value of “Chan-Hua”

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**Abstract:** The article aims at the inheritance and creative development of “Chan-Hua” Art. Based on the aesthetic empirical theory of folk art in western modern aesthetics, it uses a deductive method to analyze the aesthetic experience of “Chan-Hua” art, expounds the way and context of its aesthetic activities. Through the study of the modeling and craft characteristics and aesthetic concepts of “Chan-Hua” art, we can understand the aesthetic value of “Chan-Hua”. The research shows that the aesthetic activity of “Chan-Hua” art embodies the interventional aesthetic experience, that is, the process of the aesthetic activity in which the subject is fully engaged in the aesthetic object. Similar to folk art, the aesthetic experience of “Chan-Hua” art is daily and lifelike, and its aesthetic activities are an immersive experience. At the same time, “Chan-Hua” art embodies the people's attitude and values, and shows the essence of the traditional Chinese auspicious cultures. The aesthetic value of “Chan-Hua” art is reflected in the close blending with the aesthetic subject. In the process of inheritance and innovation, it cannot be separated from the aesthetic subject and used blindly to understand the general principles of modern aesthetics. Instead, the aesthetic activity should be regarded as an immersive and integrated overall can be inherited and protected while retaining its essence.

### Introduction

“There is not only one way to gain aesthetic experience. Kant’s analysis of aesthetic experience is “a typical separated aesthetic, emphasizing the external consciousness of the aesthetic subject towards the aesthetic object”. This type of aesthetic experience has limitations and cannot covering all areas of aesthetic experience. There is also an interventional aesthetic experience, which is an aesthetic experience that 'emphasizes the active participation of aesthetic subjects in aesthetic objects.’<sup>[1]</sup>Folk art is embodying this kind of interventional aesthetic experience. “Chan-Hua” originated from the ancient Chinese custom of Zan-Hua, which first appeared in the Ming Dynasty and flourished in the Qing Dynasty. As a component of folk art, the aesthetic process of “Chan-Hua” also reflects interventional aesthetic experience, that is, the process of aesthetic subject's integration into aesthetic object and aesthetic creation. Through the study of its aesthetic experience, this article can re-recognize the aesthetic value of “Chan-Hua” as folk art, and then provide a theoretical basis for the protection of “intangible cultural heritage” Now, “Chan-Hua” art is in an endangered state. The traditional “Chan-Hua” custom that has flourished in the folks is still only held in Taiwan, Xiamen, and Yingshan. But even in these places, the art of “Chan-Hua” is facing the crisis of loss, and it is in urgent need of inheritance and protection.

### Aesthetic Characteristics of “Chan-Hua”

As a folk handcraft, “Chan-Hua” has a variety of art characteristics, and it has extracted the essence from various art forms such as painting, paper cutting, embroidery and sculpture. It has its own unique aesthetic characteristics. Each piece of “Chan-Hua” craft works are hand-made throughout the whole process, and the colored silk threads are neatly wrapped around the cardboard and wire frame. “Chan-Hua” works can reproduce silk-like texture and gloss with threads. Every

craft works contains the beautiful intentions and blessings of the author. It reflects the ideological core of folk art and the values and life attitudes of people.

**Craft and modeling characteristics of “Chan-Hua”.** “The craft and modeling characteristics of “Chan-Hua” can be summed up in four words ‘small, clever, fine, flexible’ ”<sup>[2]</sup> “Small” refers to the volume of “Chan-Hua” craft works. Folk “Chan-Hua” works are generally used as decorative objects. So their volume is generally not large. “clever” refers to the meaning of “Chan-Hua” works. The works are mostly used for weddings and funerals or folk festivals, etc. They are used to express beautiful wishes and emotions. “Fine” refers to the technique of making “Chan-Hua” works. Its can fully reflect the luster and gorgeous feeling of silk threads. “Flexible” refers to the lively form of the art of “Chan-Hua”. There is no restriction on the production theme, as long as it is a theme that conveys good wishes, it can be accepted.

“Chan-Hua” is unrestrained and free. And it can be combined with various types of art forms to enrich its visual effects. Mainly reflected in the theme, production methods, expressions, areas of use and other content can be changed within a certain range. Its shape reflects the combination of three-dimensional and flat, the harmony of abstraction and reality.

The shape of the “Chan-Hua” works is stereoscopic, with a strong sense of space and realism. There are many works of flower modeling in “Chan-Hua” art. The layering and stacking of petals is based on observing real flower to reproduce the modeling and structure of the flowers. The smoothness of silk threads and the satin light sense fully reflect the delicate texture of petals, to create a stereoscopic shape and Spatial hierarchy of real objects.(Figure 1)

“Chan-Hua” works have the characteristics of abstraction and exaggeration. Its not blind copies. The “Chan-Hua” artworks are generally composed of multiple parts, rather than a complete whole. The structural design of each component often requires the designers have a strong abstract thinking. In the artworks of “Chan-Hua” art, images of birds such as cranes, Chinese dragons and phoenixes, and magpies often appear. Those images often have complicated details, such as the stacking of feathers and the shape of wings.(Figure 2)Therefore, these details are abstracted or exaggerated in the “Chan-Hua” craft to make it more artistic than simply copying the real thing.

The essence of “Chan-Hua” lies in ‘winding of threads’. Its special visual effects can be formed by the winding method and technique. “The processing of the manual entangling skills and the hanging angle of silk thread determines the beauty of the work. “Chan-Hua” works require silk threads to be smooth and neat, not drop silk, not slip and not reveal white cardboard background. Therefore, during the winding process, it is necessary to constantly adjust the angle and control the strength.”<sup>[3]</sup>And its manufacturing process requires good quality of the raw materials, that is, the silk thread must be the same thickness, to ensure that the finished product has a perfect satin finish.

“Chan-Hua” artworks have high added value. Although the materials used for “Chan-Hua” are just a few common items in every family such as silk threads, cardboard, iron wires, etc. But these works are usually made by housewives for children, loved ones. So these “Chan-Hua” artworks not only include decorative value, but also the life attitude and emotional expression of the working people contained in them.



**Figure 1.** Made by Shi Yujie, TaiWan



**Figure 2.** Made by Guo Li

(Quote from the fieldwork's Picture data of Guo Li Studio, Wuhan Textile University)

**Humanistic spirit implied by “Chan-Hua”.** “Chan-Hua” art is derived from the wisdom of

laborer, and at the same time embodies China's deep-rooted traditional ideology. Most of the “Chan-Hua” products are designed and produced by traditional auspicious patterns as the source, which means that the “Chan-Hua” art contains a spiritual characteristics of traditional Chinese auspicious culture. “Auspicious culture is the epitome of a agricultural civilization based on the concept of ‘the union of heaven and human’. People respect and worship the unknown mysterious force, and pin their hopes and aspirations on the future, hoping for blessing.”<sup>[4]</sup>There are many objects with the theme of ‘fortune, emolument, longevity, happiness, property, pray for wealth, and luck’ in the “Chan-Hua” artworks. For example, the pen, ruler, abacus and other silk thread wrapped artworks made to bless children's healthy growth are used as a special gift at children's birthday parties. Or, some decorations such as “magpie surrounds plum blossoms and phoenix hovering over peony flower” decorated on the wedding bed at the wedding. Many “Chan-Hua” works are integrated with the traditional Chinese Confucian thoughts, incorporates confucianism “moral, rites, filial piety, benevolence,” Taoism thought and Buddhist theory. And convey the ordinary people's hopes and aspirations for life and the future. “Chan-Hua” artworks can be said to be a kind of mascot, which can give people an omen of good luck, can also help people avoid evil and bring psychological comfort. “As early as in ancient times, people connected their own destiny with nature and external things, so they produced the most primitive totem worship and natural worship, and then formed the “fetish worship”, and in the process of secularization, they gradually produced mascots.”<sup>[5]</sup>And “mascots can be divided into two categories, one is a positive mascot, and the other is a negative mascot. The so-called positive mascot mainly reflects the Chinese people's advocacy of auspiciousness and good things. The negative mascot is a reflection of avoiding evil psychology. It can also be called an amulet. When folk superstitious ideas prevail, it can bring people soothing and tranquility.”<sup>[6]</sup>In folk , people use the “Chan-Hua” artworks in important events such as birthday, marriage, funeral, and festivals. People often apply some myths, legends, fables and their images to the design and production of “Chan-Hua” workspeople will also make a series of objects that symbolize auspiciousness or avoid disasters, such as silver ingots, “Ruyi”,the Eight Diagrams, coins, etc. to express their inner wishes.(Table 1)As mentioned, the “Chan-Hua” art, as folk art, has the characteristics of folk culture and expressing the common people's longing for auspiciousness. It contains the essence of Chinese traditional "Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism" and reflects the spiritual core of Chinese auspicious culture. It expresses the labourer’s mentality of avoiding evil, praying for blessings and avoiding calamities, and the longing for a better life.

**Table 1.** The “Chan-Hua” artworks

The “Chan-Hua” artworks for luck	The “Chan-Hua” artworks for avoid evil
 <p data-bbox="185 1809 820 1901">(Made by the Lu Family in Taiwan, Quote from the fieldwork's Picture data of Guo Li Studio, Wuhan Textile University)</p>	 <p data-bbox="849 1809 1409 1901">(Made by Lin Peiyong, Taiwan, Quote from the fieldwork's Picture data of Guo Li Studio, Wuhan Textile University)</p>
<p data-bbox="185 1912 820 2047">The auspicious “Chan-Hua” works that pray for auspiciousness generally use animals, such as dragons, phoenixes, turtles, cranes, etc.to indicate auspicious meaning, to express people's expectations for a better future.</p>	<p data-bbox="849 1912 1409 2024">In order to avoid disasters, people will make “Chan-Hua” and enshrine them to temples, praying to gods for blessings, to save people from disasters and evil.</p>

## The aesthetic experience of the art of “Chan-Hua”

People's psychological state, behavior, and emotional experience when performing folk art activities can be explained and understood from the artistic aesthetic experience. Folk art is rooted in the lives of the people, so it is difficult to understand by the separated aesthetic experience of elite art. The art of “Chan-Hua” embodies the interventional aesthetic experience of folk art. It is a daily aesthetic experience, which is closely related to our daily life. Aesthetic activities may occur at any time in daily life, and everyone may become an aesthetic subject and participate in aesthetic activities.

**The aesthetic subject of “Chan-Hua”.** From the beginning, the art of “Chan-Hua” has appeared among folk women and has been used in various festivals and celebrations as a traditional folklore female craft. Its aesthetic subject is the laborer. The creative process and aesthetic creation are based on the laborer's aesthetic concepts and value orientation.

The art of “Chan-Hua” comes from folk and has the characteristics of folk art, while folk art is not an object created by artists for aesthetic activities and viewing. It is the art of working people and producers. It appeared for satisfy the needs of laborers' production and life and their aesthetic concepts. “American anthropologist Robert Redfield creatively put forward the concepts of great tradition and little tradition in the book *“Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization”*. The little tradition refers to the religion, morals, legends, folk arts and so on believed by the common people.”<sup>[7]</sup>Folk art relies on the small tradition mentioned here, which is a system of ideas based on the values and aesthetics of ordinary people. “Folk art is a symbol of collective life and collective consciousness. Its folkness is the brand of little cultural tradition. It does not pursue differentiation and independence, and it is mixed with the daily life of the people.”<sup>[8]</sup>“Chan-Hua” as a folk art relies on little tradition, and it is used in a series of activities such as folk festivals, wedding celebrations, funeral ceremonies and birthday wishes. The people it affects are all aesthetic subjects in the folk aesthetic context and understanding its aesthetic value.

As traditional folk art that relies on little tradition, it is difficult to compare with elite art if it is separated from the folk aesthetic subject and environment. Elite arts are created for aesthetic activities. Aesthetic subjects in elite arts maintain a certain distance from aesthetic objects for aesthetic activities, which will bring mysterious and unpredictable sensory effects and psychological hints to aesthetic subjects. The earliest Chan-Hua artworks were designed by laborers. So It reflects the workers' aesthetic ideas and attitudes towards life. If you only look at it with a modern aesthetic concept, you may find it naive and clumsy. But if you integrate into the environment in which it works, understand its rules and internal logic. The aesthetic subject is in an immersive aesthetic space. And this kind of interventional aesthetic experience can make the behavior, emotion and thinking of the aesthetic subject influenced by the environment. Let people quickly enter the state of aesthetic psychology, so as to feel the greatest value of aesthetic objects.

**Aesthetic context of “Chan-Hua”.** “Chan-Hua” has specific aesthetic context, that is, the daily life environment. In this particular context, people can understand and enjoy the pleasant aesthetic experience brought by “Chan-Hua”. This aesthetic experience that blends with the aesthetic environment is an interventional aesthetic experience. “interventional aesthetic experience makes the aesthetics of folk art have the characteristics of daily spatialization. Folk art is not isolated in a specialized art place, but “scattered” in the daily life space and gradually integrated into daily life, and developed with labor and ceremony”<sup>[9]</sup>This means that the aesthetic activities of folk art have no place limitations, and can be carried out in the ordinary days. It can even be said that the beauty of “Chan-Hua” must be felt in daily life. If the folk art works are isolated from daily life, will not feel its charm as a folk art.

Most of the artworks of "Chan-Hua" are very simple and mundane themes that are closely related to daily life, such as praying for a good harvest, expecting the healthy growth of children, husband and wife harmony, family happiness, etc. “The theme of folk art is often directly related to daily life ... It shares the same aesthetic ideal and value concept with the public, and this aesthetic ideal and value concept is always closely related to daily life.”<sup>[10]</sup>And its manufacturing process and materials are also common household items, because its first purpose is practical, in order to enrich

the needs of daily life. The theme of it are all intuitive and auspicious. It shows that “Chan-Hua” as a folk art is an art form of “get close to the masses”. Its theme and image make viewers happy and relaxed. The aesthetic subject does not need to make every effort to clarify the connotation, because the aesthetic subject is beside the aesthetic object and be surrounded. “Chan-Hua” works can be relatively easy to obtain and use it in life, and peoples can participate in its production. In short, people can feel the aesthetic pleasure directly. Aesthetic subject is a part of aesthetic activity, and aesthetic experience exists everywhere in life. Therefore, when inheriting the “Chan-Hua” art, we must understand the context of it and understand that it is an interventional aesthetic experience. We cannot separate the art work from the daily environment to protect and inherit the “Chan-Hua” art that as “intangible cultural heritage”. Otherwise, we cannot feel its true aesthetic value.

### **Folk Art Aesthetic View of “Chan-Hua” Art**

**The “Extreme” of “Chan-Hua” art.** Folk art makes extensive use of warm, vibrant colors. “Chan-Hua” works are no exception. Most of it works use colors with high purity and high contrast. The works are bright and colorful, it use contrasting colors to reflect the strong emotions expressed in the artworks with extreme colors. “Chan-Hua” artworks make heavy use of green and red. Green represents growth and reproduction. Red is the favorite color of Chinese society. Red symbolizes auspiciousness and vigorous life. Red also represents blood and life. It is believed that red can ward off evil and bring good luck to people. “The color choice of folk art also reflects a “sheng sheng” aesthetic concept, that is, the meaning of creating life, endless life and strengthening physical fitness.”<sup>[11]</sup>

“Chan-Hua” artworks often use realistic techniques to enrich the layers of the work, and use overlay and layering to restore the real image. It sets the extremely complicated decoration as the standard of beauty. In the “Chan-Hua” works of art, the petals of flowers, feathers of birds or poultry animals, and intricately decorated handicrafts all reflect the beauty of “Chan-Hua” as a folk art with “Extreme” complicated decoration and superb techniques. This dazzling technique embodies the spiritual power of folk art, and contains the love, enthusiasm and praise of laborer for life. At the same time, it reflects the living wisdom of the laborer and the beautiful aspirations for the future. People pinned the most simple and precious emotions on objects and express their inner emotions with “Extreme” complicated patterns and decorations.

The laborer's pure and rustic life experience gives them an idea that "more is better, and complete is beauty". The perfect pattern and decorative feeling give people a sense of psychological security, making people feel that life will become better and happier. Laborers express all their dreams, wishes, and expectations through this "Extreme" beauty. And the aesthetic concept of "Extreme" in folk art is conveyed through this complicated decoration and craftsmanship.

**The “real” of “Chan-Hua” art.** “Chan-Hua” works of art are generally realistic depictions of objects, in pursuit of “similarity” with the objects and the authenticity of the work. China’s original artistic aesthetic was to pursue “similarity” with actual objects. This is related to traditional Chinese beliefs. The first aesthetics in China originated from the Chinese belief in gods and respect for witchcraft. Chinese man-made statues of Buddha for worship and pray. In addition to practical purposes, produced the aesthetics unique to China that is the beauty of “real”. In the same way, Chinese Taoist thought is based on nature and respects the beauty of nature, so many works of art depicting natural reality are produced. This is also one of the reasons for the formation of China’s “real” aesthetic concept.

The “Chan-Hua” artworks entrusts the true feelings of the producer. “Chan-Hua” is often used in major celebrations and special festivals, and it is more common in daily life. For example, the “Chan-Hua” tiger-head hat made by grandmother who wishes the grandchildren to grow up healthy or the “Chan-Hua” artworks made for the child's birthday that express the parents’ expectations of the child, etc. Express aesthetic ideals with true feelings and goodness of human nature. “Folk art's pursuit of goodness was born of people's thirst for life production and yearning for a peaceful world. Folk art is people-oriented. Civil society communicates all expectations and blessings through folk art.”

From the “Chan-Hua” art, we can appreciate the “real” of respecting nature in folk art, also feel the “real” that expresses true emotions and expresses the inner goodness. We must deeply study and understand the important features such as the aesthetic characteristics, aesthetic process and spiritual concept of “Chan-Hua”, which is the crystallization of folk art. And use this as a theoretical support to inherit and carry forward the traditional cultural spirit and aesthetic concepts.

## Conclusion

“Chan-Hua” art, as one of the forms of folk art, has unique aesthetic characteristics, aesthetic experience and aesthetic concepts. If we want to inherit and protect “Chan-Hua”, we must understand and explain the aesthetic value of “Chan-Hua” deeply. First of all, as a folk art, “Chan-Hua” art has peculiar aesthetic context. It also has a different aesthetic experience from elite art. Its aesthetic activities are scattered in daily life. Therefore, in “Chan-Hua” art, the aesthetic subject is part of the aesthetic activity, can deeply feel the beauty and aesthetic concepts conveyed by it. This leads to an interactive, immersive aesthetic experience that is interventional aesthetic experience. “Chan-Hua” as a folk art, its aesthetic value lies in that it originates from people's daily life, and is a spiritual sustenance of Laborer and a medium to express true feelings. This means that it cannot leave its inherent communication context and original expression, or it will lose its vitality. However, understanding the aesthetic value of “Chan-Hua” is the premise and basis of visual expression. Take the aesthetic characteristics, aesthetic experience, and aesthetic concepts of “Chan-Hua” as the cornerstone and starting point for research. Only by fully understanding the true meaning of “Chan-Hua” art will we not forget its artistic value and protected and inherited in a better method.

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