

Geo-humanistic Cultivation of Artistic Creation in Northern Grassland

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Abstract: The northern border area of China is covered by grassland. The regional environment nourishes the nomads growing here, and makes them form a strong, tough and open-minded ethnic character. The artistic creation with "grassland" as its motif revolves around this geo-humanity. From the perspective of natural and cultural ecology, this creation explores the internal and external factors of its artistic appearance, creation thoughts and aesthetic concepts, and seeks for the root of culture, so as to promote the inheritance and development of ethnic art.

Introduction

To study the grassland artistic forms in the new era, we must look for the soil that forms the contemporary appearance and the possibility and necessity of its creation from the traditional nomadic culture. Culture "grows out of the soil"^[1]. The deep-rooted regional culture breeds today's grassland ecological landscape. This ethnic group, which lives on the grassland and depends on the dynamic lifestyle, has a unique cultural accumulation and aesthetic character. Thus, its natural and cultural ecological environment is the fertile soil for the growth of grassland art.

At present, the research on regional artistic creation mainly focuses on the language features, artistic expression and artists' creative concepts of the works. There is still room to explore the root cause of its appearance, especially the connotation of regional culture hidden in the ethnic foundation. Thus, starting from the unique regional ecological beauty and the cultural accumulation behind, it opens a more diversified perspective for the study of regional ethnic art.

Cultivation of Geography

To some degree, the emergence and development of ethnic art are restricted and influenced by the regional environment of ethnic life. The Greeks go boating to cross the sea so that they have a talent for navigation, and an atmosphere of freedom, optimism and romance fills the Aegean coast. Grassland, the ocean on the land, has nurtured generations of herdsman and hunters with her vast breast. Its artistic form is either unrestrained and full of tension, or lyrical and poetic. The unique features of a local environment always give special characteristics to its inhabitants, which also makes one place of art.

Physical Geographical Features. The northern grassland is located at a higher latitude and far away from the ocean. The humid air flow is difficult to penetrate, and the border is blocked by mountains. Thus, the climate is dominated by the temperate continental monsoon climate, which belongs to the semi-arid and arid climate of the temperate plateau. The annual precipitation is small and uneven, and the daily temperature difference is large, which has the characteristics of strong wind in spring and autumn, severe changes in winter and summer. Thus, this place has four distinct seasons, and the withered and flourish is periodic. The richness of the four seasons allows us to experience a different style rather than the desert solitary smoke, which nourishes the unique regional art.

According to the traditional concept, grassland is a pure land with abundant water and grass, herds of cattle and sheep, and herders live a leisurely nomadic life. However, in fact, grassland

ecology is a test for human long-term living and survival. The grassland is known as "the ocean on land". If people go there alone, there will be no place to hide in the vast oasis when wild animals and bad natural weather invade. Besides, the particularity of soil can not plant crops, and forced cultivation will make it degenerate into desert in a short period of time. As a result, people can only rely on the nomadic way to live with water and grass, and fight and coexist with nature for a long time. In this process, the northern nomads have formed a strong and tenacious ethnic character.

Spatial and Regional Features. The northern grassland is vast, with a small population density and relatively concentrated distribution. The vast grassland blocks the contemporary settled animal husbandry and forms a centralized regional economic living area. Thus, exchanges between regions, districts and provinces are not frequent. Many geographical factors lead to relatively closed platforms for cultural exchanges. Compared with the prosperous regions or economic corridors in China, the northern grassland is influenced by the diversified artistic trends outside quite late, and the attitude of artists accepting the foreign artistic trends is relatively conservative.

Moreover, the geographical location of the border area also has a certain protective effect on the local culture. The border area is the terminal point of the entire domestic traffic. Compared with hub cities in the mainland, this region has less population mobility, less access to external resources, and is more likely to form a small cultural ecosystem with a small population, which can preserve the original cultural artistic forms for a long time. This geographical feature also ensures the self-development of the ecosystem to a certain degree, and provides a primitive cultural atmosphere for artistic creation.

Regional Lifestyle. The farming nationality depends on the land and needs to take root and stick to good fields, while nomads depend on the water and grass on the ground, so they can only migrate based on water and grass. For a long time, the northern nomads, mainly depending on animal husbandry, have formed a lifestyle that is harmonious with the grassland ecology from dress to daily diet. The herdsmen must not only resist the severe wind and cold weather in the northern part of the Great Wall for a long time, but also prevent the invasion of big beasts. Thus, they have formed a unique way of life in the long-term herding and hunting activities. They wear long robes, high riding boots, eat meat, drink wine, and live in movable tents. No matter men, women, old or young, they travel by riding horses.

The harsh natural conditions have trained a strong adaptability of nomads to struggle with nature and live in harmony with nature. Herdsmen "try to depend on the coarse grass that they can't eat to survive, and turn the grass into the dairy and meat of domesticated animals."^[2] They have a living "material storehouse", which creates a beautiful grassland ecological landscape.

The Connotation of Humanity

The development of ethnic art is accompanied by the generation of early traditional culture. It's like "Greek mythology is not only the arsenal of Greek art, but also its soil, which becomes the basis of Greek fantasy."^[3] The inner spiritual belief and ancient traditional cultural form of the northern nomads have become the elements for the absorption and reference of the ethnic art. The ethnic spirit behind the traditional culture is the inherent motive force to penetrate into the "marrow" of works. Artists explore the worship of the Lord in the hearts of grassland people under the guidance of Tengri, find the ethnic spirit of the wolf and the white deer in the steel and cement, illustrate the strong and tenacious livelihood of the nomads in the abstract thinking of Shaman priest, and depict the heroic humanistic view under Genghis Khan and epic Jianger. Every bit of exploration is an important cultural and spiritual support for the development of ethnic art.

Natural Worship. Heaven, earth, water and fire not only gives the living things to human beings, but also has the terrible power to bring great disasters. Herdsmen are more affected by nature than farming people. A serious natural disaster can lead to the division and destruction of ethnic groups, which is difficult to rebuild in a short period of time. Since ancient times, the nomads have lived on the grassland relying on the power of nature. They believe in heaven and earth, water and fire, worship the sun, moon and stars. "According to cultural classification, grassland culture can be regarded as an ecological culture with nature as its fundamental characteristic in a certain

sense. From lifestyle to production style, from ideas to practice, this kind of culture is closely related to the natural ecology of heaven and earth and integrates into one. It regards the harmony between man and nature as an important code of conduct and value scale, so that it can be sublimated in the unity of knowledge and action, and even treat and protect nature with awe and treasure. This is also one of the main signs that the grassland culture is different from the ethical culture in central plains. "[4]

"Tengri (Changshengtian)" is the most revered God of the northern nomads. Their earliest belief in "heaven" refers to the nature of heaven, is the worship of nature, and then evolved into the concept of gods. In their eyes, yurt is not only an understanding of the nature of heaven and earth, but also an attitude towards life. They regard themselves as a part of nature. Tengri is known as the god of heaven and has supreme power. Although the Mongolian shaman believes that all things have spirits, all the gods are subject to the highest divine power of "Tengri", and heaven is the king of all things.

Fire is the only energy for herdsmen to keep warm, light and cook. The fire on the grassland is also amazingly destructive and difficult to control and for herdsmen, grassland fire is no different from a devastating disaster. Since ancient times, the nomads have revered and worshiped fire. They believe that fire has mysterious power, which can drive away diseases and all evil things.

The view of nature worship has created the original ecological aesthetics of grassland nomads. They respect nature, appreciate nature, and live in the most primitive way of being. They do not intend to transform nature, but rather conform to the laws of nature to a great degree and regard people as a part of nature, not as masters. They always maintain respect for natural life and live in harmony with all things. From the way of life to the formation of cultural thinking, they are all following this kind of natural originality, which is also the unique aesthetic view of grassland ethnic art.

Heroism. Hunting civilization is the prelude of nomadic and agricultural civilization, but it has existed for a long time among the people of northern grassland. On the one hand, it can bring people some small animal food supplement and provide clothing. On the other hand, bear bile and antler of large animals can also be used as medicine. Thus, this kind of auxiliary hunting behavior also brings pleasure for herdsmen. This kind of riding and shooting behavior, as well as the hunting and detouring of prey, has also become a military rehearsal. The free ethnic character keeps them free from the constraints of the outside world. Meanwhile, the long-term disputes between tribes also reflect the heroic and belligerent character of the hunting nationality. The fighting nationality has the supreme reverence for the hero, they advocate courage and despise timidity.

The worship of heroes makes the grassland people write and depict the legendary epics of heroes in literature and art. They have wrote heroic humanistic views in the epics "Jianger" and "Geser" ("Gesar"); They have demonstrated the bravery of the nationality with the armed struggle of Gadamelin that shocked the Horqin Grassland; They have praised the bravery of the "little sisters of the grassland heroes" in the age of peace. Among the various forms of grassland art, warriors and heroes are integrated into the life of grassland nationality. The people sing in poetry, show bravery and fearlessness in dance, commemorate historical monuments with sculptures, and show the elegant demeanor of ethnic heroes with paintings.

The Meaning of Religion

Gao Changjiang have mentioned in his "Anthropology of Art" that "The reason why religion makes people believe and pursue is not only that it's a mysterious and sacred world, but also that it is a beautiful ideal world, a crystal artistic world." [5] The Shamanism and Lamaism that the northern nomads believe in have condensed the ecological view of sustainable development in the ecological operation of grassland, and influences the construction of regional culture and aesthetics in the religious world of spiritual belief.

Shamanistic Culture. Shamanism is a religion commonly believed in the northern grassland. "Shaman" is a Turkic language, an "intermediary" between God and man, and serves as a mediator between man and God. The Mongolian calls this kind of Shaman that can communicate with God as

"bei er" or "bo". Birth, senility, illness and death of the ancient steppe people all depend on Shaman to inquire about their domination, that is, Changshengtian. "Shaman, as the guardian God of the clan's security, the clan's economic production, social life, resistance to natural disasters, sharing hardships, resistance to foreign invasion, etc., are all implemented by Shaman's assistance in planning, divination and joint efforts with clan leaders...Shaman has a kind of extraordinary ability, which has a strong appeal, inspiration and attention to the clan. It uses the traditional religious experience and the spiritual and psychological guidance with singing and dancing in the emotion and name of God to mobilize the clan's earning power. "[6]

Shaman culture believes that all things have spirit, and this polytheism is reflected in many aspects. For example, there are 99 gods in Shamanism. In the Shamanism of the Daurs, God is called "Bariken." In their conception, there are many kinds of Bariken, 'Banacha' (Mountain God) is one of them. They remove the peel of the birch tree and paint the "Banacha" image (usually the image of a white-haired old man with a beard fluttering) on it. When someone comes across the idol, they dismount to worship. The figurative patterns and totems are a manifestation of the transformation of religious culture from abstract thinking to concrete thinking. This kind of religious painting is rough, generalized, and integrated into nature, with the charm of primitive beauty.

Nowadays, the costumes, sacrificial ceremonies and totem patterns in Shaman culture have become the reference elements in the grassland stage art, performance art and modeling and painting art. Its belief in the view of soul, heaven and spirit, and totem worship of animals, plants, astronomy, etc., make up the rough line, free and flexible aesthetic concept of grassland nationality, which emphasizes the beauty of artistic conception and mystery.

Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism is also called "Lamaism". "Lama" is a transliteration of Tibetan, which means "guru" and "saint", and originally refers to the eminent monk in the temple, and later becomes the honorary name of all monks. The Tibetans belong to the nomadic type of plateau grassland, and the northern area belongs to the nomadic type of Gobi grassland, but they all have the characteristics of mobility and dispersivity. Thus, Tibetan Buddhism is suitable for the wide spread in northern grassland.

In the late Ming Dynasty, the Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism was introduced into the northern grassland, and was widely spread here, which has become a religion almost believed by everyone. The wide spread of Buddhism also has political factors, and the basic teachings of Buddhism meet the needs of the national system of the northern grassland. In the early days, the cruel war among the northern tribes led to people into misery and suffering. The "causal metempsychosis" advocated by Buddhism is a consolation for the suffering people, and also an effective means for the rulers to anesthetize the public, which helps to maintain and realize a unified state power. Meanwhile, Shamanism has cruel behaviors such as being buried alive with the dead, while Buddhism does not kill livestock for sacrifice, and advocates being kind to living beings. Lamas also serve as doctors and diviners, so they are widely recognized and accepted by people. It is more suitable for the grassland area than the Confucianism in central plains. Moreover, in the process of integrating into the northern grassland, Tibetan Buddhism has absorbed part of Shaman culture, which makes it easy to spread in the local area and reduces cultural confrontation^[7]. Certainly, in a certain period of time, Buddhism also has brought some negative effects, and caused the once heroic and martial nationalities to indulge in incense recitation and lose their fighting spirit. However, the thoughts of Lamaism remain in the northern nomads and influence the formation of regional culture. Nowadays, in the northern grassland, Tibetan Buddhism is still one of the main beliefs of grassland people.

On the one hand, the Buddhist doctrine guarantees the sustainable development of ecological cultural heritage, and changes the inner wildness of primitive tribes to some degree, so that the cultivation of ethnic character retains some generosity and modesty. On the other hand, the belief in "living Buddha" has narrowed the distance between people and Buddha. All affairs are arranged by Lamas like marriage and funeral. This has promoted the popularization of Tibetan Buddhism and

temple art such as pagodas and statues all have influenced the formation of grassland ethnic aesthetic.

Conclusion

Modern people search for the origin and the initial form of artistic generation. It is necessary to dig and extract from the regional environment and humanistic background, which is the cultural basis for the artistic creation of grassland themes. The geo-humanistic environment determines the direction of artistic growth. Meanwhile, art also reflects the unique ethnic life, and enriches the regional culture. With unique way of life and strong and tenacious ethnic strength, the northern nomads integrate culture and art into the grassland and inhabit the northern land poetically. With the diversity of art, history and context show the long-term continuity and inheritance of language.

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