

# **The Aesthetic Meanings and Value Manifestation of Jade Carving Works Integrated with Overseas Chinese Hometown Culture**

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**Abstract:** Overseas Chinese hometown culture (qiao xiang culture) and Lingnan jade carving culture have a long history with abundant contents and forms. From the point of the connotation of qiao xiang culture, the paper discusses the relationships between qiao xiang culture and jade carving works in terms of social and artistic values. Also, the paper elaborates on the sublimation of jade carving works' connotation benefiting from qiao xiang culture and the inheritance of qiao xiang culture through jade carving works. At last, the paper puts forward the application of qiao xiang culture's regional characteristic in jade carving works.

## **Introduction**

Guangdong is the largest overseas Chinese hometown in China and it has a profound history and culture as overseas Chinese hometown. Lingnan jade carving culture also has a long-standing tradition. As early as Neolithic period, jade carving began to emerge in Guangdong and in the late period of Qing dynasty, Guangdong became a major trading port of jadeites and now it is one of the four distributing centers of high value jades. Most jadeites in China are processed in various workshops in Guangdong province. There appear unique craft skills for jade carving after a long period of development and jade carving art school in the south which is the main part of Lingnan culture is thereby formed.

Jade works are not merely art wares. Chinese jade and jade culture are closely related to faith, national spirit and people's consciousness and the historical and cultural essence and the excellent humanistic spirit locked in jade carving works should be understood and inherited by the later generations.

Jade carving is a kind of art and cultural heritage. With the dual attributes, the research topics should focus on how to further excavate, protect and inherit the values of jade carving as intangible cultural heritage; how to make the local feature of jade carving the innovation point to improve jade carving works, promote the transformation and upgrading of jade industry, create new cultural brand, enhance the value of jade and generate the local economic development; how to transmit the traditional regional culture through new ways so as to inherit Lingnan culture more effectively. Qiao xiang culture has a profound tradition, therefore it's of great significance to study the aesthetic connotation of qiao xiang culture expressed in jade carving works and conduct an in-depth research on the relationship between qiao xiang culture and jade carving from the aspect of social values.

## **Part One. The Current Situation of Guangdong's Jade Industry Development**

### **The Current Situation of Jadeite Carving Industry**

#### **The Themes of Jadeite Carving Are Too Old and Homogenization Problem Is Serious.**

Currently, jade carving industry develops in a good manner while the industry also faces many difficulties. For example, the rise of the price of Burma jadeite makes it more difficult to acquire raw materials. What's more, most jade carving works are only handicrafts whose themes center on traditional auspicious culture and the design patterns are old and traditional that are short of artistry and cannot meet the changing demands of the consumers.

**The Consumers Pursue the Business Values of Jade Carving Works Rather Than Acknowledge Their Cultural and Artistic Values.** Most consumers do not have a proper knowledge of jades. They recognize the opportunity for the appreciation of jades' value and consider them as the symbols of status, wealth and luck that can exorcise evil spirits. However, the cultural and artistic values of jades are not recognized by many people who simply think that safe jade could keep them safe and sound and wearing a jade is the expression of their love to jades. The jades made for this purpose show no spirit of art but vulgarity. It can be said that the consumers pursue more of the business values of jade carving works rather than acknowledge their cultural and artistic values.

**Jade Carving Artists Face Dilemma Choices.** There are many skilled and innovative jade carving artists, but in the jadeite market, there are still a lot of works with the same theme and design, the major reason being that the jade carving artists face contradictory choices which involve the contradiction between artist's pursuit of art and the financial pressure of enterprises and the contradiction between jade carving works and consumers' demands. The development of enterprises and of innovative jade art rely on money, and this is the reason for the formation of today's jadeite market.

**The Consumers' Changing Aesthetic Standard Requires New Demand for Jade Carving Works.** Consumers' aesthetic standard is changing and they ask for diverse, interesting, personalized, fashionable and artistic jadeite works. The machine-made jadeite works which can be seen everywhere in the market lack the unique design and cultural connotation of handicrafts and lack emotional resonance between the creator and consumer. Nowadays, our life is full of high technology, people's pressure is growing and their desire for freedom becomes stronger. The special handicraft works embody people's feeling of life and expression of emotion and represent modern people's spiritual and material demands as well as aesthetic demands. The value of this kind of jade carving works cannot be evaluated simply through their cost and it brings development opportunity and challenge for the jade carving artists to rejuvenate the traditional handicraft art.

### **The Development Status of Taishan Jade**

The jade industry in Guangdong province is famous for carved jadeites. In recent years the price of them have been rising thus there is restriction problem. The raw materials of jade carving should be diverse. After being well-designed and carved, some jades (non-mainstream jade) show higher value than jadeite works with lower quality. Guangdong is abundant with jades that is not so well-known. For instance, Taishan jade of Jiangmen is known as the First Jade of Guangdong Province and is collected only by folk jade amateurs.

Nationally speaking, Huanglong jade and Nanhong agate of Yunnan province just begin to

emerge in the jade market but the prices of them are roaring. The carving works of these jades are sought after by collectors, the reason being that these carving works combine Yunnan's national characteristics with jade culture. Geographically speaking, Taishan jade is a representative of Jiangmen and Guangdong jade culture. In order to further improve its popularity, the cultivation of jade culture is of significance and an important task is to further develop the carved design, cultural innovation and deepen its unique cultural foundation and regional characteristic.

## **Solutions**

Facing the problems of rising price of raw materials and the changing demands of the market, jade carving works still use the old designs and lack cultural connotations. On the one hand, people complaint about the dull and single themes, and on the other hand, it is a pity that the precious regional resources and cultural resources of qiao xiang are not fully applied and exploited. The development of modern jade carving should rely on traditional handicrafts and cultural inheritance, and the value of jade carving works should be promoted through applying modern design ideas, integrating regional characteristic culture and improving artistry.

## **Part Two. The aesthetic connotation of jade carving works integrated with qiao xiang culture**

A successful jade carving work should have good implication, beautiful shape and composition. According to the natural lines of the jade, the artist should creatively design the pattern and input the inspiration that he gets from the historical site, social custom, natural landscape and understanding of life into the work so as to bring formal beauty.

Kaiping watchtower is the representative of qiao xiang culture and it combines the features of Chinese and Western buildings. The outline of this symbolic building can be applied in jade carving works by integrating western realistic artistic expression method with Chinese traditional craft or using color gradient technique. Zhang Zulin's works *Wuyi Impression of Kaiping Watchtower* (Fig. 1) and *Wuyi Impression of Returned Overseas Chinese* (Fig. 2) are accomplished based on overseas Chinese hometown with history as the mainline and watchtower as the carrier. The size, color and highlight of the works are well designed and the artistry and culture of the works are perfectly expressed through skillful carving technique.

*The Heaven of Birds* written by Ba Jin describes the fantastic scene in the overseas Chinese hometown where clouds of birds bouncing around the giant beautiful banyan. There are jade carving works drawing inspiration from literature or real feelings and designing patterns of free sketch painting of flowers and birds. The works, if the patterns of which are a part of the whole picture, show artistic characters of natruality and simplicity and if the patterns of the works depict the whole picture, they seem majestic and vivid.

Various ideas are drawn from qiao xiang culture and plentiful design elements could be used. The jade carving works with qiao xiang scenery and qiao xiang culture and spirit have specific aesthetic characters and those works are more harmonious, symbolic, interesting and ingenious.



Fig.1

Fig.1 Wuyi Impression of Kaiping Watchtower



Fig.2

Fig.2 Wuyi Impression of Returned Overseas Chinese

### **Part Three. The Value Manifestation of Jade Carving Works with the Artistic Characters of Qiao Xiang Culture**

#### **Jade Carving Is a Kind of Art and Cultural Heritage**

Qiao xiang culture is the result of mixed multiculture and as times are changing, it should be endowed with new connotations and be transmitted in a more effective way.

China's jade carving art has dual attributes. It is not only material cultural heritage but also intangible cultural heritage and it manifests the ancient technique and records historical and modern culture. It is the symbol of ancient civilization, the reflection of the development of our times and the carrier of our society. Jade carving works, like classic literature and famous songs, are important medium to commemorate the past, learn about history, acquire ideas and inherit traditions.

To endow jade carving works with meaningful qiao xiang cultural connotations and to better express their beauty could bring people pride and strong emotions for traditional qiao xiang culture, satisfy people with modern design ideas, improve their aesthetic consciousness and make them feel the integration of traditional and modern inspirations. We can say that modern jade carving is a development of traditional jade culture and qiao xiang culture.

#### **Culture is the soul of jade carving works**

Jade carving works manifest the formal beauty and reflect the artistic conception and connotation of the works. Judging whether the content, intention and state of the work is good or bad, new or old depends on the creative construction and cultural connotation which are the essence and key of the work. Only when the work is integrated with rich humanistic resource and profound historic background can it has creative, cultural and meaningful connotation, produce resonance and be endowed with life and become the cultural product with humanistic value and aesthetics.

With the development of the society, people have a better understanding of jades and their taste for jade carving works have improved. They begin to ask for new creative ideas integrated with the crafts. To innovate the skill is not difficult, what's hard is conception and cultural innovation. Combining qiao xiang culture with jade carving design will fully express people's material and spiritual demand in the new era. This will not only innovate the designs but also boost the jade industry and the derivative industry of jade culture.

## **Part Four. The Thinking of Jade Carving Innovative Design**

### **The Application of Regional Cultural Symbols in Jade Carving Works' Innovative Design**

In the context of the new era, humanistic spirit, social concept, aesthetic standard and value evaluation norm are changing, but the excellent traditional culture and regional culture remain the same important as before. Now, we still live in the culture of Lingnan and qiao xiang. In order to transmit the jade carving works and derivatives of them such as the jade culture and jade culture industry and to uphold the regional culture, we should extract the philosophical thought, classic word, historical legend or site from the traditional culture through modern design approach and we should reshape the influencing traditional culture through modern design ideas.

Qiao xiang culture is a special regional culture and it's the fruit of the inheritance and development of Lingnan traditional culture. It manifests characteristic forms including social customs, traditional handicrafts, historical sites and natural sceneries. The heaven of birds, Kaiping watchtowers and villages, palm-leaf fans and Birdwood's Mucuna could represent qiao xiang culture and they provide plenty of source materials for the creative works. To use the typical regional symbols in the artistic works do not mean rigid simulation, but extract new design elements from the symbols. The rigid simulation would reduce the sense of design and beauty, but with skillful carving and modern design ideas, the works would have good visual effects and rich connotations.

### **The Value Connotations of Traditional Patterns in the New Times**

In different times, jade carving works have different styles and features. For example, there is pattern of "two yin lines with one yang line between" in Shang dynasty, the pattern of "one side slope" in Zhou dynasty and Liangzhu culture's "yin carved line" pattern. Before Song dynasty, ritual jade was the main theme while during Song dynasty folk's life was the major theme. Zhou dynasty's "one side slope" pattern is the innovation on the basis of "two yin lines with one yang line between" pattern, and Hanzhan period's "gossamer depiction" is the development of Liangzhu culture's "yin carved line". These patterns have distinct features of the ages and each new pattern is the innovation of craft, of cultural connotation and of element of the earlier age. The themes of modern jade carving works involve goddess of mercy, maitreya, and ruyi which are the representatives of historical culture. Those themes meet the material and spiritual demands of people from various status. Many modern works inherit and uphold the traditional patterns and culture. Although time changes, people's aspiration of traditional themes never change. What need to be changed is that the artist should add more touching elements to improve the works' artistry and provide more aesthetic pleasure for the jade amateurs.

China's traditional themes have special charms if people feel them with heart. The explanation of the traditional artistic resources from the perspective of culture gives people more acceptable aesthetic experience. The grass and trees in qiao xiang as well as insects, birds and poultry in the yard and garden are the traditional themes of jade carving works. It is in line with the demand of the times to integrate the vibrant life and harmonious relationship with the emotion for the hometown and the unforgettable memory.

## **The Application of Jade Culture in the Modern Inlay Jewelry Design**

The theme of the works should inherit the traditional culture on the one hand and advance with time on the other. The design should be more unique; the color should be used bolder and the cultural connotation should be more closely related to the modern life. We should introduce modern jewelry processing technology and fully make use of the natural color and lines of the jade. As for the materials for processing the jade, we could combine the metal materials with jade through inlay technology and modern design method. Through the comparison of brightness and matteness of the materials, the work would have the quality of precious metal material which is the feature of modern jewelry and express national style which is the character of jade.

## **Conclusions**

With the development and progress of the modern society, people request for new demand for the explanation of jade culture and jade carving design. Qiao xiang culture should be endowed with new connotations and be inherited through various ways. The jade carving works integrated with qiao xiang culture embody rich traditional culture and are in accordance with people's aesthetic demands in the new era. Jade carving works with qiao xiang culture are an innovative design, a new approach to rejuvenate traditional handicrafts and an effective way to pursue traditional culture inheritance.

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