

## Research on the Artistic Design Characteristics and Development Methods of Folk Cloth Tiger

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### Abstract

This study focuses on the current development status and future development trend of the Chinese cloth tiger, a traditional folk art beautifully shaped and simultaneously contains traditional cultural connotations and is loved by the people. However, from the current perspective, the development of cloth tiger culture and crafts is facing significant challenges, and the market recognition could be higher. This study focuses on the characteristics and stylistic features of cloth tigers from different regions of China and analyses the uniqueness of cloth tigers in each area. The three stages of this study, the first stage is to study the artistic connotations of the cloth tiger, the second stage is to check the innovative design features of the cloth tiger, and the third stage is to analyze the modern development trends of the cloth tiger, after field research and evaluation, to explore the intangible cultural heritage of the cloth tiger and its possibilities for future development. The article is a systematic study of the art design features of the folk cloth tiger, the exploration of its connotation, and the subsequent rationalization of its development.

**Keywords:** Chinese Cloth Tiger, Artistic Design, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Folklore Symbols, Development

### Introduction

The folk cloth tiger is a folk art that combines culture and artistry. It contains both the traditional cultural cognition of China and is an essential embodiment of the design skills of folk crafts. An in-depth analysis of the artistic design characteristics of folk cloth tigers and a discussion of the direction and development options are undoubtedly of great practical

significance. The tiger pattern is a usual folklore pattern in the treasure house of traditional Chinese folk culture and art and a treasure with a cultural heritage behind it.

In China, the tiger has been worshipped since ancient times and is the birthplace of the tiger totem culture, which is now also loved by the masses in folklore and used in various types of folk art, a common type of folk art that adds aesthetic interest to people's everyday decorations.

The emergence and development of the cloth tiger has a long history in China, from the Shang and Zhou dynasties to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, the tiger culture has always been a symbol of power for the emperor. From the Han Dynasty onwards, tigers were depicted fighting in tomb murals excavated from all over the country, which led to a shift in tiger culture towards folklore. After the Sui and Tang dynasties, many folk crafts in the shape of tigers began to appear, influencing each other in cultural transmission from one region to another, forming distinctive folk artworks. The tiger-related folk artworks have blossomed to this day, and it was during this period that the creation of cloth tiger art was born (Xueyuan, 2019). A cloth tiger is a softer toy made of cloth that is more suitable for people's daily lives. Cloth toys, which are soft sculptures shaped by folk artisans using cloth material as a shell, are mainly shaped with common animals such as tigers, chickens, cows, sheep, monkeys, rabbits, donkeys, dogs and fish, and frogs, and decorated with cloth appliqués, embroideries, picks or hand-painted flowers, and cloth tiger shapes are widely popular in folk art (Xiaogui, 2019).

In China, each region has different cloth tiger shapes, as cloth tigers come from ordinary artisans, so the living customs of other areas influence people's aesthetics, and the form and decorative patterns of the tigers vary. The artisans use different techniques and production processes to make different cloth tiger shapes according to their aesthetics and regional culture. But as a whole, cloth tigers from all over China share the same feature of highlighting the head of

On 7 June 2008, the State Council approved the cloth tiger to be included in the second batch of the national intangible cultural heritage list. As an essential part of China's traditional culture, the cloth tiger culture is also a symbol of intangible cultural heritage. It interacts with each other in cultural transmission in various regions, and thus folk artworks with regional representativeness are produced. Among them, the tiger pattern is an essential element in the treasury of traditional folk culture and art (Yu & Yi, 2020).

As China is a vast country, each province has its unique local culture, so cloth tigers also present different decorative characteristics. The cloth tiger is created from the daily life of the artisans, and the decorative motifs vary from region to region, with the artisans incorporating their own regional culture and aesthetics into the design of the cloth tiger, thus creating their own distinctive cloth tiger. The main reason for the differences is that each region's different living environments and cultural beliefs have led to different decoration styles. The main feature is that the tiger has a large head and a small body. The charge refers to the entire face of the tiger, including the eyes, eyebrows, mouth, whiskers, and nose, which are exaggerated and enlarged by anthropomorphic techniques, while the tail and limbs of the body are short and stout. (Yu, Jing Yi, 2020).

### **The Artistic Connotations of Folk Cloth Tigers**

The cloth tiger artwork contains a rich tiger totem culture from ancient times. In the early days of human development, when primitive humans lived by hunting, fierce animals

undoubtedly became powerful opponents. The tiger was considered a symbol of strength, and the tiger was so brave that young tigers were protected, and the value of "tigers do not eat their children" emerged. As a result, the tiger was seen as a protector of life and a deity of reproductive development, which led to the creation of many works of art, and it was this perception that led to the formation of the cloth tiger, with its vital tiger worship. At the same time, as the connotations of the cloth tiger continued to expand, different images of the cloth tiger were created, such as the double-headed tiger pillow, which incorporates the ancient Chinese concept of yin and yang and is thought to be very effective in setting up this style to dispel disasters and protect children. On the other hand, the single-headed tiger and the straight-lying tiger have a calming effect on the house. For this reason, the cloth tiger has been a vital folk handicraft for a long time, carrying a good meaning that has been passed down to this day.

The cloth tigers of China are mainly found in the four provinces of Shanxi, Shaanxi, Huaiyang, and Shandong. The cloth tiger from Shanxi Province has thick, fat limbs, stands with its head held high, and has long legs; the cloth tiger from Shaanxi Province has a more elaborate design, preferring to use the "five poisons" motif; the cloth tiger from Huaiyang District, Henan Province, has its five senses painted on top of a cloth, which is more anthropomorphic and symbolizes the cult of human reproduction; the cloth tiger from Shandong Province has a more detailed design for its head, with a wide mouth and teeth. The cloth tiger from Shandong Province has a more complex head structure, with a wide mouth, sharp white teeth, and two thick teeth leaking out to express the majesty of the tiger.

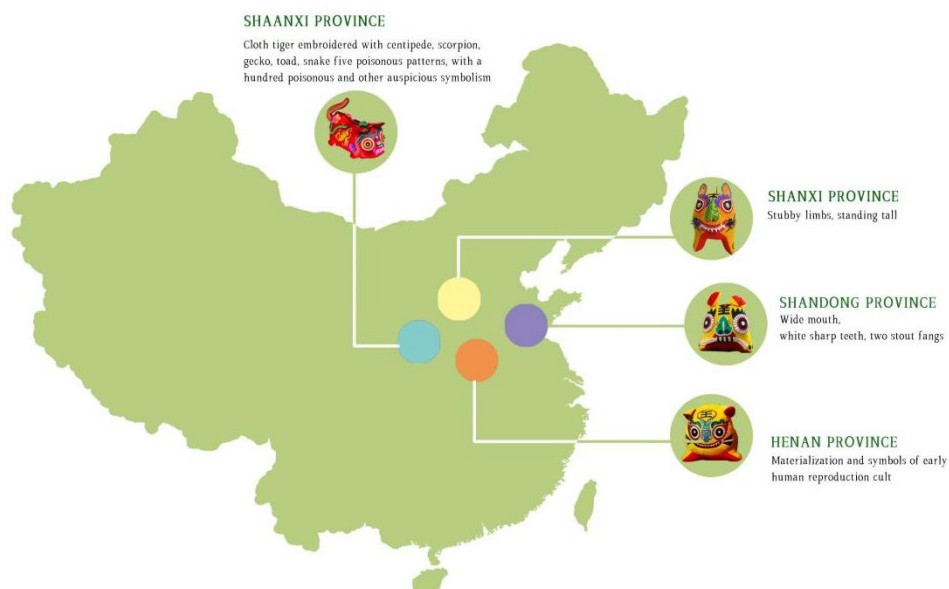


Figure 1: Distribution map of the cloth tiger in China

The traditional handicraft, the cloth tiger, is still sought after by many because of its beautiful symbolism. Especially for older people, their hopes and expectations are sewn into the cloth tiger, incorporating their inner thoughts into it, making it a carrier of reasonable expectations, signifying health, strength, courage, warding off evil spirits, peace and good fortune, and wealth protection. At the same time, the use of materials varies from person to person due to their different living conditions, values, and ideological perceptions, and the shape of the cloth tiger differs significantly, but this does not affect the recognition of the cloth tiger as a symbol of good fortune.

### **The Artistic Design Features of the folk Cloth Tiger**

During its long-term development, the innovative design features of the folk cloth tiger have evolved, but each region has basic design features. Specifically, they are mainly manifested in the following aspects.

The first is the meticulous and exquisite production process. The cloth tiger has a brief appearance, but the production process is complex and requires several steps. The artisans usually use hand weaving, stitching, and stuffing to control the cloth tiger handicraft and ensure the meticulousness of the production process. Each of these processes is carried out by hand, resulting in some variation in the shape of different cloth tigers, but the dozen or so processes ensure that the craftsmanship is exquisite and that every part of the cloth tiger is detailed.

Then, the cloth tiger has a funky form. The cloth tiger is designed with a three-dimensional form as the main feature and is based on the image of the tiger. The cloth tiger artworks are mainly cute images, and some of the documents are wildly exaggerated, with features such as a big head and mouth, a big belly, and a thick waist, while parts such as the head, torso, limbs, and tail are also treated cutely and equipped with actions such as jumping, opening the mouth and pouncing. In the creation process, many of the cloth tigers have large heads, big eyes, and short limbs, with a slightly upturned head, an upturned tail, and a solid, rounded body with corresponding movements, showing a playful and cute dynamic aesthetic. The large head enhances the tiger's simplicity and transforms the initially imposing image into an attractive form. The eyes of the cloth tiger are usually large and rounded, aiming to be shining and in the center of the features, and the teeth are mainly distinctive tiger teeth, showing both the tiger's powerful image and cute character.

In addition, the design of the cloth tiger is also decorated with a rounded stick pattern on the male tiger's spine and a concave groove pattern on the female tiger's spine, which profoundly demonstrates the yin and yang balance culture initially embedded in the cloth tiger and is also quite interesting.

Cloth tigers are made of elementary and elegant materials, usually made of soft and comfortable fabrics such as cotton or fleece, giving people a feeling of closeness and warmth. The tiger's body is filled with cotton, buckwheat bark, and grain bran, which gives life to the cloth tiger's character and has a symbolic meaning of a good harvest, abundant grain, and a good life for the people. Also, to enhance the beauty of the image, some parts of the cloth tiger are enhanced by incorporating items such as cotton. The ears of the cloth tiger, for example, are made of fabric on the surface and filled with cotton on the inside, which allows the proportions of the ears on the head to be further enlarged, making them visually look more lovely and festive. With these basic materials, the cloth tiger is closer to people's lives and is, therefore, more acceptable to the people.

The colors of cloth tigers are primarily yellow, red, black, and white, similar to those of real tigers, while some bright color blending may also be added to enhance the vibrancy and cute feel of the craft. Some colors are chosen with great care, such as red as the theme color, to show the symbolic meaning of redness and prosperity. Yellow was the imperial color in ancient times, with noble and pleasant symbolism. Yellow and green, for example, can give people a lively and vivid feeling. Blue is used less often and involves few parts, simply for embellishment. Black and white are used primarily for the eyes, forming a sharp contrast with yellow and red, highlighting the coffered character of the cloth tiger. In general, the colors of the cloth tiger are warm, with a few cool colors presented on the eyebrows, ears, and nose,

showing the structure of the five senses well. Black, white, red, and yellow are the primary colors used in a clear hierarchy and arranged in a measured manner, highlighting the basic features of the cloth tiger and enhancing its beauty. In addition, some of the cloth tigers are more colorful, using applied colors such as red, pink, blue, and green to form decoration strips.

Meanwhile, some cloth tigers are more unusual, such as the Five Poisons cloth tiger. The five poisons refer to scorpions, centipedes, geckos, toads, and snakes, thus demonstrating the folk understanding of "attacking poison with poison," while the colors corresponding to the five poisons are black, white, red, yellow, and blue, which also correspond to the cultural perception of the five elements of yin and yang in China. As can be seen, the colors of the cloth tiger are very carefully applied.

Folk cloth tigers usually also incorporate some decorative elements such as lace, embroidery, and ribbons to add to the beauty of the tiger. At the same time, cloth tigers are often decorated with tiger motifs or other motifs with Chinese characteristics, such as dragons, phoenixes, and fish, which can reflect the charm of traditional Chinese culture. In terms of details, the eyes and eyebrows of cloth tigers are essential to treat, and designers often design double fish eyebrows and sun eyes. The body design is frequently embellished with intricate patterns, such as five-leaf shapes and auspicious motifs. At the same time, the cloth tiger's eyebrows, eyes, nose, whiskers, mouth, and tail are individually hand-stitched and decorated using a variety of techniques such as embroidery, stapled beads, stapled sequins, inlay and cut-and-paste fabric pieces, and the tiger's neck is strung out with thread and tied to the tiger's tail with a cord at the back of the tiger to finish the shape. Through these elements, the image of the cloth tiger is made more diverse and not too monotonous.

The cloth tiger is a traditional folk handicraft art that has developed in many regions of the country, with different areas incorporating other local cultural characteristics based on the elements of the cloth tiger craft. In this situation, different styles of cloth tigers have emerged, preserving the original style features while incorporating local knowledge without losing the original cultural connotation and giving a new perception. For example, some of the folk cloth tigers in Sichuan province have included the style of Sichuan opera faces. The folk cloth tiger from Shandong province is cute and simple, with various decorative designs, and its mouth is mainly designed in an upturned form, showing a smiling state. In Shanxi Province, the Lihou tiger has thick, fat limbs and stands with its head held high in the style of the warrior Guan Gong, while in Shaanxi Province, the Guanzhong cloth tiger is particularly fond of using the 'five poisons' motif. As can be seen, the cloth tiger has different characteristics in different regions and is more integrated with the local culture.

In conclusion, the design features of folk cloth tigers are mainly reflected in traditional weaving techniques, three-dimensional forms, colors similar to those of real tigers, decorative elements, and regional characteristics.

### **The origin of the cloth tiger and tiger totem culture**

"The tiger culture has a long history in China; unlike the dragon totem, the tiger culture generally appears more in folklore, in the daily life of the people, in folklore culture, from ancient times to modern times, the cloth tiger is a symbol of folk prayers and good fortune, the pattern symbol can be seen as a living fossil of the original Chinese tiger totem culture. The earliest research into the culture of the tiger can be found in rock murals from around 10,000 years ago in areas such as Heilongjiang and Inner Mongolia. The worship of the tiger

is also a symbol of the aspiration for strength that people had in ancient times when the tiger was known as the king of the forest and a symbol of strength and excellent combat power. In the legend of the world's creation by Nuwa, when the universe began, the sky collapsed, the earth fell, and there were only two siblings in the world; they agreed to use a rolling stone as a matchmaker to get married. On the night of the wedding, Fuxi was ashamed to see his sister, so he transformed himself into a tiger, while Nuwa married with a straw hat so that humanity could continue. Therefore, the tiger culture was inherited and developed along with people's rituals and became a witness to the history of human development. The folk artwork made of tiger prints also carries the blessings and prayers of the people and perpetuates and passes on the worship of tiger culture.

### **Survey on the survival status of tigers and tigers**

The cloth tigers in Huaiyang are sold at temple fairs. During the February Fair in Huaiyang, a cloth tiger stall can sell 1,000 finished products a day, and Zhang Huaixia said in an interview that "every Chinese New Year, until the February Fair, the slightly more expensive cloth tigers can sell more than 100,000." (Huaiyang Rongming Media, 2023). Huaiyang cloth tigers have changed from being made with wood shavings in their bellies to cotton wool in their stomachs, making them softer to the touch, and the embroidered designs have made them more delicate.

Shandong cloth tigers, in the Chinese New Year of the Tiger in 2022, are also selling very well; Niu Chenglu said in an interview that "the monthly production is expected to be around 20,000, this year coinciding with the Year of the Tiger, our orders have exceeded expectations and now far exceed our expected quantity" (Qilu Evening News, 2022)

Chinese tourist cities have developed a cultural tourism model in recent years. The development of cultural tourism projects must be connected to the intangible cultural heritage of different regions by creating local cultural confidence and promoting the unique cultural characteristics of each part to attract tourists to come and visit. Cloth tigers, as intangible cultural heritage of different regions, also represent the cultural pride of people in each area, combining the protection of intangible heritage projects with shared prosperity so that intangible heritage projects, While being inherited and developed, create innovative and dynamic private enterprises of intangible cultural heritage projects, drives the economic growth of the people, and allows intangible culture to play an essential role in the economic development of the countryside.

### **The Current Development of Folk Art of the Cloth Tiger**

The art of the cloth tiger is a traditional Chinese folk art and craft with a long history and deep cultural heritage, which has developed and evolved over the years to form its own unique style and style. However, with society's continuous progress and development, cloth tiger art is also facing some problems and challenges. Firstly, the market demand for cloth tiger art is decreasing. As modern production techniques and technologies continue to improve, more and more people are choosing to buy machine-made toys and decorations, creating a certain degree of substitution for hand-made cloth tiger art. At the same time, the problem of homogenization in the market is becoming increasingly severe. Traditional handicrafts are easily overlooked if they are not systematically innovated and kept close to the demands of the times, coupled with the variety of products on the market and the many different forms of exposure to them, resulting in a decreasing market share for cloth tiger products. Secondly, cloth tiger art's heritage and cultural identity must be improved. The art of cloth tiger is a

traditional handicraft art that requires long-term learning and practice, but with the influence of modern lifestyle and education, young people are less and less interested in this, resulting in inheritance and talent training becoming a problem. The cultural connotation of the cloth tiger is too traditional and needs to fit in with the current thinking of many people, and this perception is embedded in many products, making cloth tiger products highly substitutable and challenging to develop efficiently. In addition, there needs to be more dynamism in the innovation and development of the art of the cloth tiger. Although cloth tiger art has a long history and cultural heritage, it seems outdated and lacking in novelty in modern society and needs more innovation and development to meet the needs of the market and the audience. In particular, everyday people seek personalized products and services, while the uniform style of the cloth tiger is challenging to resonate with, and many young consumers do not hold it in high esteem, thus causing great difficulty in developing cloth tiger art. In conclusion, the current situation and problems of the art of the cloth tiger need to be addressed, and a solid foundation for the modernization and internationalization of the art of the cloth tiger should be laid by strengthening marketing, promoting heritage and innovation, and cultivating talents.

### **Approaches to the development of Folk cloth Tiger art**

From the current situation, folk cloth tiger art development is a mixture of opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the state vigorously supports ethnic culture and attaches importance to the excavation and innovation of ethnic art, which provides room for the development of cloth tiger art. On the other hand, the rapid development of the market economy has also put the art of the cloth tiger under impact. The market for cloth tigers needs to be better developed. Based on such considerations, the development of folk cloth tiger art needs to be considered from the following points in the future development process.

#### **Innovative art forms to enhance audience recognition**

In the process of development, the art of the cloth tiger should be further developed based on maintaining its original style and connotation and further innovated to meet the preferences and needs of the audience to expand the market and enhance recognition. As the leading consumer of the market, the demands of young people need to be given greater attention, and the quality of product innovation can only be improved by dovetailing with the demands of this group of people. For example, the blind box format, which is highly respected in the market today, is liked by young people. Various forms of cloth tiger products can be set up to generate innovation for cloth tigers, such as Chinese New Year tigers, Olympic tigers, Chinese zodiac tigers, animation tigers, digital tigers, etc. Through the design of such cultural and creative products, the style characteristics of cloth tigers can be incorporated to enhance market recognition.

At the same time, when designing cloth tiger products, designers should also get rid of the inherent perceptions and actively expand other types of products, such as incense pouches, puzzles, pillows, woodblock prints, hats, gloves, mobile phone cases, handicrafts, etc., to retain the traditional folk craftsmanship and combine different tiger cultures and appearance features, adding more modern doll elements to truly enhance the products' Innovative.

#### **Focusing on cultural heritage and enhancing market understanding**

As an intangible cultural heritage, the development of the cloth tiger is recognized by the state. As such, there is a need for cooperation between the inheritors and the manufacturers to actively explore cultural heritage. For example, primary and secondary schools can study

the intangible cultural heritage curriculum so that the culture of the cloth tiger can be substituted into schools, and student's knowledge of the cultural connotations and production processes can be continuously increased. At the same time, makers can also actively set up workshops to pass on the cloth tiger handicraft skills, transforming them into a combination of family heritage and social heritage and leading more younger generations to participate in the excavation, inheritance, and preservation of this art. At the same time, cloth tiger art should strengthen cooperation and exchange with other art institutions, artists, and cultural organizations to expand its links with the outside world, enrich its business and enhance its artistic value. In addition, the cloth tiger craft can also actively cooperate with local museums and the like to set up corresponding exhibits and enrich experiential activities to continuously increase awareness.

### **Tapping into product value and enhancing product coverage**

In market development, producers also need to expand, such as artwork customization and cultural tourism, to continuously expand their product lines and achieve market development. In cultural inheritance and market development, the market understanding is constantly being enhanced to lay the foundation for subsequent development. At the same time, it is also essential to focus on improving the quality of the products. Quality artwork and services are the keys to maintaining customer satisfaction. Cloth Tiger Art should focus on improving product quality, perfecting after-sales service, improving customer experience, and increasing the company's reputation and brand value.

### **Optimise marketing mechanisms and increase market coverage**

To enhance market awareness, cloth tiger producers need to do an excellent job of marketing to continuously improve market coverage. In addition to traditional marketing schemes, they can cooperate with local tourist attractions to sell their products by incorporating cloth tiger elements and combining them with the culture of the interests. At the same time, marketing can also be carried out using online platforms, such as short video platforms, employing influential anchors to broadcast live, explaining and promoting the artistic connotations of the cloth tiger and the value of the product, to continuously raise market awareness and thus open up visibility.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

All in all, the art of the cloth tiger is one of the most important representatives of folk art in China, containing a solid national culture with its peculiar shape, excellent symbolic meaning, and strong representation. In the current development context, the cloth tiger craft should pay attention to the development mode of inheritance and innovation simultaneously, pushing out new ideas and realizing market development and cultural heritage at the same time. Only in this way can the long-term development of the cloth tiger craft be genuinely realized.

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