

The Folk Murals in Pingnan County of Guangxi: Protection and Inheritance for Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

The folk murals in Pingnan County, Guangxi, play an important role in local economic development and rural revitalization. Due to natural threats and insufficient protection, the murals are facing a crisis. This study proposes two goals: (1) To study the current situations and problems of folk murals in Pingnan County, Guangxi; (2) To study the protection and inheritance of folk murals in Pingnan County, Guangxi. The study sample consisted of 7 key informants, 15 practice informants and 20 general informants. This paper adopts a qualitative research method, through literature survey, field investigation, in-depth interviews, and combined with tools such as interview outlines to collect data, and finally proposes strategies for protection and inheritance through focus group discussions. The results of this study are as follows: (1) The number of murals has decreased sharply due to challenges such as natural environmental erosion, funding shortages, cultural changes, conflicts between innovation and tradition, infiltration of secular tastes, and urban demolition. (2) This study proposes a comprehensive strategy for protecting murals, including anti-aging treatment, repair of diseases, enhancing cultural identity, developing mural tourism and derivatives, using digital technology, and recording and evaluating cultural heritage. Compared with previous studies, the protection and inheritance strategies proposed in this study are more comprehensive and systematic, forming an all-round protection and inheritance system. The results of this study have certain reference value for the protection and inheritance of murals in Guangxi, Guangdong, Hainan and other regions, as well as for the formulation of policies by local governments.

Keywords: Pingnan County folk murals; multiple dilemmas of murals; protection and inheritance; strategic research

Introduction

This study focuses on the folk murals in Pingnan County, Guangxi, which is a cultural heritage with profound national cultural heritage and historical memory. Pingnan County is a county located in the southeast of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, under the jurisdiction of Guigang City, between 23° 2'19" and 23° 54'18" north latitude and 110° 3'54" and 110° 39'42" east longitude. As an important part of the traditional culture and cultural heritage of the Chinese nation, the folk murals in Pingnan County, Guangxi have unique artistic and historical value.

Lingnan Region From 2012 to 2024, a series of studies on traditional architectural murals in Lingnan region have emerged (the Lingnan region in this study refers to the three provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan in China). The emergence of these studies has greatly enriched the knowledge system in this field, and the main research is based on Guangdong region. Kang (2012) took the lead in conducting an in-depth study of the works and cultural influence of Yang Ruishi, a master of Lingnan murals in the Qing Dynasty, and provided important insights into the

Lingnan culture in the Qing Dynasty. Subsequently, Xie, Cheng and Wang (2014) took the murals of Xujiang Ancestral Temple in Foshan as an example to explore the uniqueness of the hall mural techniques in the Lingnan Cantonese region. Li (2014, 2016) focused on the current status of ancient buildings and murals in Foshan City, Guangdong Province, put forward protection suggestions, and explored the application of digital technology in the protection and inheritance of murals. In his doctoral thesis, Xie (2018) established a theoretical framework for the systematic study of Cantonese traditional architectural murals, and deeply analyzed the graphic characteristics of murals, the inheritance of skills and their relationship with spatial art. Mai (2020) systematically sorted out the application and types of decorative patterns of Cantonese traditional buildings and established a knowledge framework. Li and (Li 2021) conducted a comprehensive survey of traditional architectural murals in southeastern Guangxi. Deng (2021) focused on the murals of traditional ancient buildings in the Nanjiang River Basin in Guangdong, and explored protection measures and the inheritance and development of cultural heritage. Lv and Zhou (2022) analyzed the origin and historical background of traditional architectural murals in Guangfu and discussed the significance of protection. Finally, Nong (2023) conducted a comprehensive investigation of traditional architectural murals in southeastern Guangxi and proposed a protection and development strategy. These studies together constitute the knowledge system of traditional architectural murals in Lingnan. Although predecessors have studied Lingnan mural culture in many aspects, there is still a lack of targeted and comprehensive protection measures in unknown areas and regions.

In summary, this study aims to deeply explore the targeted protection measures for folk murals in Pingnan County, Guangxi, combine the results of previous studies, deeply analyze the problems faced by folk murals in Pingnan County, Guangxi, and propose comprehensive and effective protection measures. Through this study, new ideas and approaches are provided for the protection and inheritance of folk murals in Pingnan County, Guangxi, and new theoretical perspectives and practical references are provided for the inheritance and protection of cultural heritage.

Research Objectives

- (1) To study the current situations and problems of folk murals in Pingnan County, Guangxi
- (2) To study the protection and inheritance of folk murals in Pingnan County, Guangxi

Literature Review

There are abundant murals in China, but research on Cantonese traditional architectural murals in Lingnan region is relatively lacking. Lingnan region refers to Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan in China. The Cantonese dialect in Guangxi is similar to the customs and culture of Guangdong. The folk murals in Pingnan County, as an extension and development of Cantonese traditional architectural murals, can fill the gap in its research. Cantonese traditional architectural murals occupy an important position in the Chinese historical mural system, and are of great significance to deepening the understanding and promoting the excavation of Lingnan culture. However, there are currently few scholars in this field, and the research results are not comprehensive and systematic. In addition, murals are rarely mentioned in the study of ancient villages and ancient architectural culture. In 2012, Kang Wei's research focused on the works and cultural influence of Yang Ruishi, a master of Lingnan murals in the Qing Dynasty. The purpose

is to organize and study Yang Ruishi's artistic achievements through in-depth identification of his work "Chuanjing Tu", and thus provide important insights and interpretations for Lingnan culture in the Qing Dynasty.

Xie Yantao, Cheng Jianjun and Wang Ping took the murals of Xujiang Ancestral Temple in Foshan as an example to deeply explore the uniqueness of the hall mural techniques in the Lingnan Cantonese region, aiming to reveal its profound historical heritage, exquisite technical craftsmanship and rich cultural value. At the same time, through the detailed appreciation of each mural, they explored the unique artistic style and creative techniques of different painters (Xie, Cheng & Wang, 2014). In 2014, Li Mujun focused on the current status of ancient buildings and murals in Foshan, and put forward relevant protection suggestions, aiming to provide a solid foundation for subsequent in-depth research, and especially emphasized its important scientific, artistic and historical value Li, M. (2014). Two years later, Li Mujun further explored the possibility of using digital technology to protect and inherit the murals of traditional Cantonese buildings, aiming to provide new opportunities for cross-disciplinary cooperation and utilization of ancient architectural research through digital technology, and to promote the research of a new model for the protection and development of folk murals (Li, 2016). Xie Yantao's 2018 doctoral dissertation aims to establish a theoretical framework for the systematic study of Cantonese traditional architectural murals. By deeply analyzing the graphic characteristics of murals, the inheritance of skills, and their close relationship with spatial art, this study promotes a comprehensive understanding and effective protection of Cantonese traditional architectural murals. This study combines multidisciplinary research methods, establishes a solid theoretical framework through field surveys and case analysis, and deeply explores the subtle relationship between murals and spatial scale, architectural function, and cultural psychology, providing a new perspective and interpretation for a deeper understanding of Cantonese traditional architectural murals (Xie, 2018). Mai Jiawen's research focuses on the decorative patterns of traditional Cantonese architecture, aiming to systematically organize their applications and types and establish a complete knowledge framework. The study found that patterns were widely used in many parts of Cantonese architecture, showing a variety of types and forms. By summarizing common patterns and designs, a preliminary knowledge framework of Cantonese decorative patterns was established, and an in-depth comparative analysis of specific types of patterns was conducted (Mai, 2020). Li Yifan and Li Wei's research focused on traditional architectural murals in southeastern Guangxi, aiming to comprehensively investigate their number, distribution, theme and characteristics, and provide important reference and reference for folk mural research. The study found that traditional architectural murals in southeastern Guangxi are widely distributed and numerous, showing strong local characteristics and unique Lingnan style. These research results have greatly enriched the information and connotation of mural research (Li & Li, 2021). Deng Hui's research focuses on the traditional ancient architectural murals in the Nanjiang River Basin in Guangdong, aiming to explore and protect these precious mural heritages and promote the inheritance and development of regional cultural heritage. The study pointed out that traditional ancient architectural murals were an important decorative element of residential buildings and ancestral halls in the region during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Their current status, artistic techniques, subject types, styles and values will become the focus of the study. At the same time, exploring effective protection measures and incorporating them into the development of local cultural industries and school education activities is also one of the important goals of the study (Deng, 2021). Lü Tangjun and Zhou

Yixin studied the murals of traditional Cantonese buildings, analyzing their origins, historical background, themes, artistic schools, etc., and explored the significance of their protection (Lv & Zhou, 2022). Nong Xiubei conducted a comprehensive survey of traditional architectural murals in southeastern Guangxi, proposed strategies for protection and development, deeply described their characteristics and charm, and gave specific suggestions for protection and utilization. (Nong, 2023).

Although previous studies have covered many important aspects of Lingnan mural culture, such as case studies of artists, analysis of skills, current status assessment, digital protection, theoretical framework construction, decorative pattern compilation, regional surveys and the origin of mural craftsmen, most of the vast Lingnan region is still unaware of its existence, and there are still certain research gaps in cross-disciplinary cooperation, the integration of mural culture and modern society, and the implementation strategies of specific protection measures. Most of the above-mentioned previous studies are in Guangdong, and there are still a large number of such murals in Guangxi and Hainan. In particular, how to combine the protection of mural culture with practical fields such as local economic development, cultural tourism, comprehensiveness, and mural development, as well as how to formulate more targeted and operational protection plans, are still aspects that need to be strengthened in current research.

Research Methodology

1. Research methodology

This study is a qualitative research. The researcher will collect data from relevant documents and research papers. The field research will collect data and information by using documentary research, field survey, interview, content analysis. In addition, photos, videos and audio recordings will be taken. These data will be analyzed using concepts, theories, literature, related research, and classified according to the research objectives through the method of descriptive analysis.

2. Population and sample group

This study involved a total of 42 respondents, all from Pingnan County. The research sample included 7 key information providers, who were mainly local government officials, relevant mural industry experts, museum administrators, and cultural relics protection leaders; 15 informal information providers, who included the descendants of the building owners, art associations, and related artists; and 20 general information providers, who included tourists, villagers, students, and businessmen.

3. Research tools

This study used three research tools to assist in the investigation. The first was an interview guide, which was used for in-depth interviews. The second was a fieldwork record sheet, which was used to record data during observation. The third was a focus group discussion guide, which was used to guide the discussion and ensure that relevant topics were fully covered.

4. Data collection

The data for this study came from four sources. (1) Literature analysis, which extensively reviewed the historical background, artistic style, distribution area, and preservation status of the murals. (2) Field investigation, which directly observed and recorded on-site, and interacted with the person in charge of mural conservation. (3) In-depth interviews with department heads, experts, the president of the Art Association, the director of

the Pingnan County Museum, the administrator of the Pingnan County Museum, and industry leaders. (4) A focus group discussion led by the Pingnan County Art Association was held at the Pingnan County Cultural Center to explore the current status and existing problems of the murals. The data obtained was submitted to the government department Cultural Relics Bureau for focus group discussions.

5. Data analysis

This paper mainly adopts the methods of descriptive statistical analysis and content analysis. Specifically, the data collected in the field work are organized and analyzed to reveal the basic characteristics, distribution patterns and quantity, as well as the cultural connotation of the murals, and to describe the current situation and problems of folk murals in Pingnan County.

Research Conceptual Framework

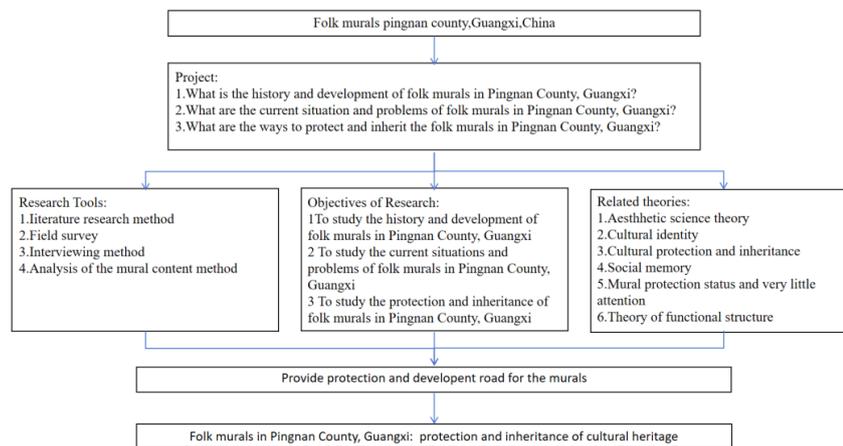


Figure 1: Research Conceptual Framework

Research Results

(1) To study the current situations and problems of folk murals in Pingnan County, Guangxi

1.1 Current status of murals

Murals are distributed in the vast rural areas of Pingnan County, and there are traces of murals in almost every village. These murals are mostly painted on the walls of village ancestral halls, temples, houses and other buildings. They are not only numerous but also widely distributed. Pingnan County is in a subtropical monsoon climate, which brings challenges to the preservation of murals. Environmental factors such as humidity, light, acid and alkali erosion accelerate the aging of murals. Now murals in various places are generally prone to fading of pigments, cracking of walls, shedding of white powder layers and spot shedding.

Problems with murals in various places in Pingnan County:

Table 1 Meteorological Parameters of Pingnan County

Name	Years	Material	Problems
Palace of Saints	1662	Mineral Pigments	Pigment fading, white powder layer falling off, spot falling off
Fan Family Courtyard	1755	Mineral Pigments	Pigment fading, white powder layer peeling, spot peeling, rainwater stains, mural scratches
Li Family Ancestral Hall	1803	Mineral Pigments	Pigment fading, white powder layer falling off, spot falling off
Simadi Residence	1828	Mineral Pigments	Pigment fading, wall cracking, white powder layer falling off, spot falling off
Xie's Residence in Zhongtuan Village	1862-1874	Mineral Pigments	Paint fades, rainwater stains

Data source:: Liao Haowen

1.2 Problems faced by murals

1.2.1 Impact of environmental factors on the preservation of murals

Pingnan County's subtropical monsoon climate provides favorable conditions for the long-term preservation of murals. The annual average temperature is stable at 21.5°C. This mild and constant temperature environment slows down the aging process of murals. However, humidity, sun and rain, and acid and alkali substances in the air still pose a serious threat to murals. Long-term moisture can easily cause the surface of murals to mold and fall off. The pigments will fade and peel off faster after absorbing moisture. At the same time, the humid environment is also prone to mold growth, further damaging the murals. Sun and rain will cause the mural pigments to fade, and rain erosion may cause the picture to be blurred. Acid and alkali substances in the air will also corrode the murals and accelerate their aging.

1.2.2 The impact of economic factors on mural protection

Economic factors also have an important impact on the protection of murals. Currently, murals are distributed in various towns and villages in Pingnan County. Due to the different development conditions of each township, there are also significant differences in the protection of murals. Although most of the large-scale and historic ancient buildings have been well restored, the protection of buildings and murals in some remote areas is still insufficient. Although economic development has provided more resources for cultural undertakings, when it comes to the protection, restoration and inheritance of folk murals, financial investment may still be insufficient, resulting in some precious murals not being properly maintained.

1.2.3 The influence of cultural and social factors on the development of murals

Cultural homogenization, faults in cultural inheritance, social and cultural changes in rural clans, and the impact of modern cultural trends have also brought challenges to the development and protection of folk murals in Pingnan County. In the process of modernization, the phenomenon of cultural convergence has become increasingly serious, resulting in the weakening of the uniqueness of murals and affecting the expression of their cultural value. At the same time, as the number of older generation artists decreases, the younger generation may not have enough understanding of and interest in folk murals, leading to gaps in cultural inheritance. The changes in the social culture of rural clans have also affected the embodiment and inheritance of related elements in murals. Although the influx of modern

cultural trends has injected new vitality into folk murals, it has also had an impact on the style of traditional murals, causing some young artists to ignore traditional elements and techniques in their creations. Human factors cannot be ignored either. The acceleration of urbanization and the lack of awareness of protection during the construction process also put some murals at risk of disappearing.

2. Protection strategy of murals

2.1 Enhance cultural recognition and publicity of murals

In response to the challenges of mural protection and inheritance in Pingnan County, multiple measures need to be taken. First, in response to the problem of low cultural recognition of murals in remote and economically underdeveloped areas, publicity should be strengthened through educational institutions and the media to enhance the public's awareness of the history, skills and cultural connotations of murals. At the same time, exhibitions and cultural exchange activities should be organized to attract the attention of young people. The inheritance of murals in Pingnan County is a long-term task that requires the joint efforts of the government, society and professional teams. In the inheritance, we should combine dynamic and static protection, hold exhibitions, lectures and other activities to show the charm of murals, improve public awareness, and encourage artists to learn and inherit skills. At the same time, strengthen the protection and restoration of murals on the original site to ensure safety and integrity. Focus on the transformation of research results, provide reference for academia and the public, and explore the application of murals in modern design and other fields. In addition, it is crucial to cultivate the interest of the younger generation. Through activities such as summer camps and creative competitions, we can stimulate young people's interest in traditional culture and incorporate mural culture into school education.

2.2 Implement technical protection measures to deal with environmental and disease problems

In view of the problems caused by Pingnan County's subtropical monsoon climate to the preservation of murals, as well as the fading of mural pigments, cracking of walls, shedding of white powder layers and spot shedding, a series of technical protection measures need to be taken. This includes anti-aging coating treatment on the surface of the murals, using special moisture-proof, mildew-proof and acid-proof paints to form a protective layer; at the same time, for the existing diseases, remedial measures such as reinforcement with polymer reinforcement agents, partial or overall coloring, crack repair, and re-scraping of the white powder layer are adopted to restore the original appearance of the murals and prevent the recurrence of the diseases.

2.3 Diversified ways to increase economic income and strengthen cultural heritage

In view of the economic shortage problem faced by the mural protection work in Pingnan County, as well as the threat of cultural homogenization and cultural inheritance fault, it is necessary to increase economic income through diversified channels and strengthen the protection and inheritance of mural culture. This includes developing mural tourism and creating mural tourism routes with local characteristics; developing mural derivatives and integrating mural elements into cultural and creative products; providing mural protection and restoration services, and providing one-stop services for mural protection projects at home and abroad; at the same time, using digital technology to collect and record murals with high precision, establish a mural digital resource library, and realize the online display and interactive experience of murals. In addition, it is necessary to launch a comprehensive survey

of folk murals, conduct detailed records and evaluations of murals in Pingnan County and its surrounding areas, and use modern scientific and technological means to establish a detailed digital archive to provide a solid foundation for subsequent protection, research and inheritance. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the awareness of mural protection among the public and builders, formulate scientific demolition and reconstruction plans, and ensure that important murals are effectively protected.

Discussion

In response to the challenges posed by Pingnan County's subtropical monsoon climate to the preservation of murals, as well as the low cultural identity of murals in remote and economically underprivileged areas, economic problems, cultural homogenization and cultural heritage gaps, this study proposed a series of practical solutions. This includes anti-aging coating treatment on the surface of murals, repairing pigment fading, wall cracking and other diseases; strengthening the publicity and education of mural art through educational institutions and media platforms, organizing exhibitions and cultural exchange activities, and encouraging innovation and development; making full use of mural resources to develop mural tourism, develop derivatives, provide protection and restoration services, and use digital technology to bring economic benefits; at the same time, launching a comprehensive survey of folk murals, recording and evaluating cultural heritage, and using modern scientific and technological means to establish a digital archive to provide a solid foundation for subsequent protection, research and inheritance.

Previous research results have laid a solid foundation for this in-depth understanding and protection of Lingnan mural culture and provided valuable references. Kang (2012) conducted an in-depth study of the works of Yang Ruishi, a master of Lingnan murals in the Qing Dynasty, revealing his artistic achievements and cultural influence, and providing new insights into the Lingnan culture of the Qing Dynasty. Then Xie and Chen and Wang (2014) explored the hall mural techniques in the Cantonese area of Lingnan, revealing its historical, technical and cultural value, and explored the artistic style of the painters, providing an important basis for understanding the artistic characteristics of Lingnan murals.

Li (2014) studied the current status of ancient buildings and murals in Foshan, put forward protection suggestions, provided a basis for subsequent in-depth research, and emphasized its multiple values. Two years later, Li (2016) further explored the possibility of using digital technology to protect and inherit Cantonese traditional architectural murals, and contributed to the research on new models of folk mural protection.

Xie (2018) aims to establish a theoretical framework for the study of Cantonese traditional architectural murals, promote comprehensive understanding and protection, and provide new perspectives and interpretations, providing systematic theoretical guidance for the study of Lingnan murals. (Mai, 2020) focuses on the decorative patterns of Cantonese traditional buildings, systematically organizes their applications and types, establishes a knowledge framework, and conducts comparative analysis, providing important materials for a more comprehensive understanding of the decorative art of Lingnan murals.

Li & Li (2021) and Deng (2021) studied traditional architectural murals in southeastern Guangxi and traditional ancient architectural murals in the Nanjiang River Basin of Guangdong, respectively, and comprehensively investigated their characteristics and the application of protection measures, providing important references for folk mural research and the inheritance and development of regional cultural heritage.

Lv and Zhou (2022) initially explored the origins of traditional architectural murals in the Cantonese region, which is of great significance for understanding the various aspects of this artistic heritage. Nong (2023) comprehensively investigated and analyzed the current status and characteristics of traditional architectural murals in southeastern Guangxi, provided protection and development strategies, and put forward specific suggestions and mechanisms.

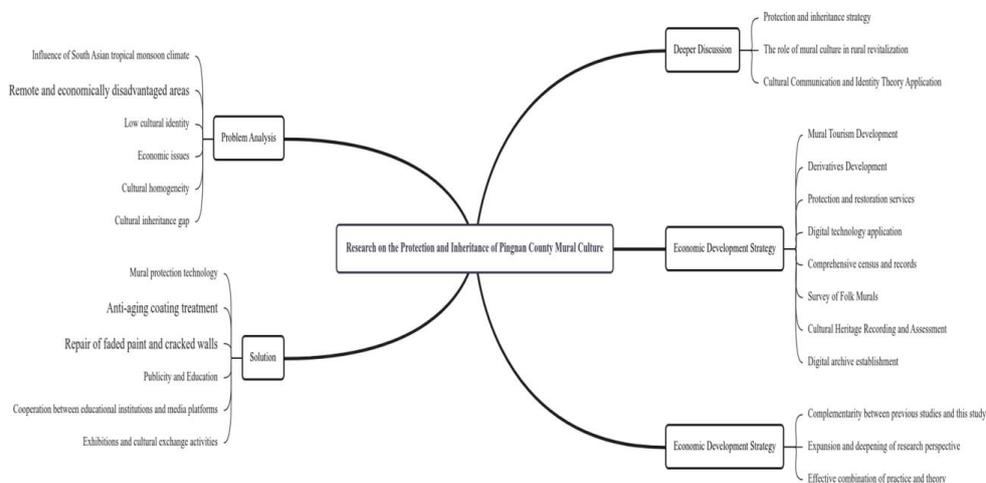
These research results together build a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Lingnan mural culture, and provide valuable theoretical basis and practical experience for subsequent protection and inheritance work.

On this basis, this study further explored the protection and inheritance of Pingnan County mural culture, and proposed a series of specific protection measures and development strategies. In the context of globalization and cultural diversity, especially under the impetus of rural revitalization, this study emphasizes the importance of mural culture as a key factor in promoting the transformation and upgrading of rural economy and promoting the integrated development of cultural tourism.

In addition, this study further emphasized the universality and diversity of mural cultural communication through the application of theories such as cultural communication and cultural identity, and provided a new perspective and interpretation for understanding the cultural background and communication methods of murals. The application of this theory not only enriches the understanding of mural culture, but also provides strong support and guidance for more effective protection and inheritance of mural culture in practice.

In summary, the research results of predecessors and the content of this study have formed an organic complement and extension in the protection and inheritance of Lingnan mural culture. The combination of the two not only provides a more comprehensive and in-depth perspective on the study of Lingnan mural culture, but also provides strong support and guidance for more effective protection and inheritance of this precious cultural heritage in practice. Through the implementation of these measures, the mural culture of Pingnan County can be effectively protected and inherited, allowing it to glow with new vitality in modern society.

Figure 2: Mural Protection and Inheritance Framework



Recommendations

1. Theoretical recommendations

The protection and inheritance of folk murals in Pingnan County requires the strengthening of multidisciplinary comprehensive research, and the in-depth exploration of the cultural connotation, inheritance mechanism, educational value and economic potential of murals from multiple perspectives such as cultural anthropology, sociology, education and economics, to provide a comprehensive scientific basis for protection and inheritance, and to explore ways to combine with tourism and cultural industries to provide economic support for inheritance. The concepts of fusion and collision can be used, mainly referring to the fusion and collision of different cultures and artistic styles as an important driving force for the development of murals as a medium for cultural exchange. This cross-cultural exchange has prompted mural art to present a more diverse and rich appearance.

2. Policy recommendations

In order to enhance the public's recognition of mural culture, it is recommended to increase the publicity and education of mural culture, popularize mural knowledge through media, educational institutions and other channels, so that more people can understand and respect this cultural heritage.

In view of the environmental and disease problems faced by murals, technical protection measures should be implemented, and funds should be invested in the research and development and application of new protection materials and technologies to protect murals scientifically and rationally.

In order to support the long-term development of the mural cultural industry, economic income should be increased through diversified channels, such as promoting mural tourism, derivative product development, etc., and establishing a mural digital resource library. At the same time, mural culture should be incorporated into school education to cultivate the interest and love of the younger generation.

3. Practical recommendations

For the restored murals, advanced scientific and technological means should be used to prevent aging, moisture, mildew and acid, and form an effective protective layer. For the existing diseases, professional measures should be taken in time to repair them to maximize the service life of the murals.

The inheritance of mural culture requires the combination of living inheritance and static protection. Through exhibitions, lectures, workshops and other activities, the charm of murals can be shown to the public to improve people's awareness of the value of murals. At the same time, artists and craftsmen are encouraged to learn and pass on the skills of mural making to ensure that this traditional art can continue.

Diversified development is also an important way to protect and inherit murals. It is possible to develop mural tourism and create special tourist routes; develop mural derivatives to integrate mural elements into modern life.

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