

Research on the Figurative Representation in Guangxi Ethnic Minority-Themed Sculpture

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Abstract: The cultural landscape of Guangxi's ethnic minorities is remarkably diverse, with sculpture serving as a vital cultural medium that plays a pivotal role in preserving, transmitting, and showcasing ethnic traditions. This study focuses on the figurative representation of ethnic minority subjects in Guangxi's sculptural works, analyzing their artistic characteristics, cultural connotations, and contemporary trajectories. Functioning as both historical documentation and cultural embodiment, these sculptures not only chronicle the quotidian lives and historical narratives of ethnic communities but also carry profound cultural symbolism. The sculptural tradition in Guangxi dates back to the Neolithic period, initially driven by religious rituals and agricultural practices. Over time, the thematic scope expanded to encompass daily life and historical events, while sculptural techniques have been continuously enriched and refined through ongoing inheritance and innovation. This legacy establishes a robust foundation for contemporary sculptural creation centered on Guangxi's ethnic themes, positioning it as an essential vehicle to articulate Guangxi's evolving narratives, reconfigure visual identities, and perpetuate ethnic ethos.

Keywords: Guangxi ethnic-minority themes; sculpture; figurative representation; cultural heritage preservation

1. Introduction

The Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, a multi-ethnic enclave, is distinguished by its profound cultural heritage and distinctive artistic expressions.[1] This paper investigates the modes of figurative representation in sculptures depicting Guangxi's ethnic minority subjects, interrogating their cultural significance and artistic merit. The unique historical contexts and cultural traditions of these minorities provide fertile source material for sculptural practices. These works function not merely as symbols of ethnic culture but also as vital articulations of collective identity.

2. Historical Context of Sculptural Creation on Guangxi Ethnic Minority Themes

Sculptural works centered on Guangxi's ethnic minorities not only exemplify artistic practice but also function as critical vehicles for cultural transmission. These creations vividly reconstruct the figurative identities, quotidian environments, and spiritual ethos of minority communities. For instance, engravings on the bronze drums of the Zhuang people depict ritual ceremonies and musical activities, while Miao dragon boat racing scenes carved into these artifacts dynamically encapsulate their unique folk customs and collective solidarity. The recurrent representation of the Miao King in Miao carvings, for example, commemorates historical heroes, simultaneously reconstructing physical forms and embodying indigenous ethos, thereby reinforcing ethnic identity and cultural dissemination.[2] Furthermore, religious beliefs profoundly influenced the evolution of minority sculptural arts, as evidenced by works depicting deities or spiritual figures that reflect cosmological views and ritual practices. Huang Jian's *Bubai Battles the Thunder God* (1984), selected for the 6th National Fine Arts Exhibition, narrates the legendary tale of the Zhuang hero Bubai, standing as a seminal work in Guangxi's early sculptural canon. Shi Xiangdong's *Buluotuo* marks another zenith in Guangxi's ethnic-themed sculpture. This piece portrays Buluotuo, the Zhuang ancestral deity, through robust, exaggerated forms that channel the primordial vigor of Zhuang ancestors. As the largest ethnic group in Guangxi, Zhuang sculptures frequently engage with folklore and mythology, as seen in works like "Statue of General Fubo", "Buluotuo", and "Liu Sanjie". These creations integrate historical narratives with folk elements, amplifying artistic expressiveness.

3. Artistic Characteristics of Figurative Representation in Guangxi Ethnic Minority-Themed Sculpture

In terms of figurative representation, Guangxi's ethnic-themed sculptures frequently synthesize realism and stylized exaggeration to foreground the psychological depth and affective states of subjects. The sculptural forms exhibit dynamic vitality, characterized by fluid contours, tensile energy, and visual immediacy. Thematic inspiration is often drawn from quotidian

practices—labor, festivals, and folklore—providing both ethnographic documentation and unique expressive frameworks. Miao sculptures frequently foreground festival dynamism, emphasizing corporeal movement to channel cultural exuberance. Huang Yuexin's *Song from the Clouds*, a seminal Miao-themed work, employs figurative modeling to merge female subjects with natural elements, their uplifted gazes and terraced compositional lines symbolizing ethnic-natural symbiosis. The piece advocates resilience amid ecological precarity while celebrating cultural-natural interdependency. The interplay of realism and lyrical abstraction defines Guangxi's figurative paradigm. Li Jianwei's *Zhuang Ethnic Homeland* figures with rugged geological textures, allegorizing the Black-Clad Zhuang's tenacity in harsh environments. The sculptures' elegant postures and dynamic forms, coupled with refined craftsmanship, epitomize Zhuang virtues of diligence, compassion, and collective solidarity. Through nuanced technique and kinetic vitality, these works crystallize the optimism and unity of Guangxi's minorities, affirming the distinctive artistic lexicon of regional sculpture.

4. Modern Development of Guangxi Ethnic Minority-Themed Sculpture

Within the contemporary artistic context, Guangxi ethnic minority-themed sculpture faces dual challenges of heritage preservation and innovation.

Modern sculptural artists, while inheriting traditional sculptural techniques and cultural connotations, actively explore new artistic forms and expressive methodologies to revitalize ethnic minority sculpture. [3] Young sculptors such as Qin Jigang, Wei Yangfeng, Li Jianwei, Wei Yangbowen, Yang Shanqing, and Zhan Bingqiang dedicate their creative processes to the fusion of tradition and modernity. They experiment with novel materials and techniques to expand the artistic expressiveness of sculpture. For example, Qin Jigang's works frequently employ wood as a medium, utilizing its warm texture and fluid abstract lines to convey the strength of ethnic figures. These works exhibit the tension and impact characteristic of modern aesthetics. Such innovative attempts not only broaden the artistic boundaries of Guangxi ethnic minority sculpture but also propel its development within contemporary art systems.

Modern sculptural artists such as Shi Xiangdong, Huang Yuexin, and He Zhenhai, while inheriting traditional craftsmanship, integrate modern artistic concepts to create a body of sculptural works imbued with contemporary relevance and innovative spirit. These works have garnered acclaim in domestic and international exhibitions, facilitating the dissemination of Guangxi's ethnic minority cultures and fostering cross-cultural dialogue. With societal development, the significance of Guangxi ethnic minority-themed sculpture has transcended the realm of pure artistic appreciation. It now plays a vital role in cultural exchange, tourism industry development, and the construction of ethnic identity. For instance, the display of ethnic-themed sculptures in public spaces not only beautifies urban environments but also enhances public awareness and recognition of minority cultures, promoting the coexistence and interaction of diverse cultures.

In summary, Guangxi ethnic minority-themed sculpture demonstrates robust vitality in modern society. Driven by multiple factors such as technological innovation, global cultural exchange, and industrial development, Guangxi ethnic minority sculpture continues to advance along internationalized and modernized paths, injecting new vitality into the inheritance and development of ethnic cultures. [4] In the future, while preserving the cultural roots of ethnic traditions, Guangxi ethnic minority sculpture will further expand its artistic expressions, persistently explore new creative methodologies, and employ increasingly sophisticated artistic lexicons to showcase the unique charm of ethnic cultures. It will thereby secure a more prominent position within the global art system.

5. Conclusion

The figurative representation of ethnic minority subjects in Guangxi's sculptural works exemplifies the region's rich cultural heritage and distinctive artistic allure. Through the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture, Guangxi's ethnic minority sculpture has achieved renewed development and vibrancy in the contemporary era. In the future, as cultural exchanges deepen, this sculptural tradition will embrace even broader horizons for growth. As a significant artistic form, Guangxi's ethnic minority-themed sculpture is rooted in profound historical lineages and imbued with multifaceted cultural significance. Through the shaping of figurative identities, these works not only render the physical and spiritual visages of ethnic minorities but also transmit their folk customs and affective dimensions. In modern society, such sculptures continue to play a vital role in advancing cultural preservation and evolution. As a critical vehicle for ethnic culture, the figurative representation in these sculptures embodies both artistic virtuosity and the weight of historical memory and spiritual values. Through rigorous investigations into stylistic configurations, materiality, and cultural symbolism, we may attain a nuanced comprehension of the cultural specificities inherent to Guangxi's ethnic minorities, thereby establishing a robust foundation for articulating Guangxi's contemporary narratives and propelling innovative trajectories in sculptural praxis through the recontextualization of emerging anthropocentric themes.

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