

Gaocheng Palace Lantern: Cultural Value and Commercialization of Chinese Folk Art in the 21st Century

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Abstract

The main object of this study is Gaocheng Palace Lantern, and the main objectives of the study include the following three points. Firstly, study the historical evolution of Gaocheng palace lanterns. Secondly, this study aims to analyze the impact of the commercialization process on the dual dimensions of "art" and "social process" of Gaocheng palace lanterns. By studying the process of commercialization of Gaocheng palace lanterns, this study aims to fill the gap in the development of commercialization of Gaocheng palace lanterns after the 21st century. Finally, analyzing the cultural value of Gaocheng Palace Lantern as a folk art in the process of commercialization and the pros and cons of commercialization, the final conclusion is that Gaocheng Palace Lantern as a folk art has both benefits and drawbacks in the process of commercialization. This article uses qualitative research methods to conduct in-depth research on the commercialization of palace lanterns in Gaocheng, Hebei Province, based on literature review, field research, and interviews. Commercialization is a popular concept in economic research, and the content of this study will expand the scope of this concept. At the same time, it will provide reference and inspiration for other researchers, enriching the theoretical system and research methods in related fields.

Folk art is the accumulation of traditional Chinese culture for thousands of years, and is a product of aesthetic significance created by our ancestors through practical life. It is a perfect

combination of technology and art. As a treasure of Chinese culture, the craftsmanship spirit of the palace lamp makers in Gaocheng is extremely precious in today's society. Gaocheng Palace Lanterns have strong local characteristics. During festivals, every household and street has red lights hanging high. At the same time, there are also activities such as sightseeing and guessing lantern riddles, which are very interesting.

Keywords: Gaocheng Palace Lantern, Chinese Folk Art, Commercialization

Introduction

Arjun Appadurai, an American research scholar, developed the concept of commodification that is applied in this study. The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective was where he first introduced this concept. In this study, commodification refers to the object's commodity form, which is considered a stage in its life cycle. This reveals the diverse and fascinating world of the object, including its existence as a gift, a commodity, a work of art, and other forms (Appadurai, 1986).

Folk art is a form of artistic expression that encompasses arts, crafts, and decorative ornamentation created by individuals without formal artistic training. It is characterized by the mastery of established traditional styles and techniques. Folk art is unique to each country or region, with its own distinct style and cultural significance (Mayer, 2008). Gaocheng Palace Lanterns are a form of Chinese folk art that has entered the commercial market in the 21st

century, becoming a commodity with both collection and decorative value. In 2002, the 16th Party Congress proposed the active development of cultural undertakings and industries, which paved the way for the prosperity of China's cultural industry in the 21st century. In 2005, the State Council issued the Opinions on Strengthening the Protection of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage. The document proposed the establishment of a multifaceted classification system for intangible cultural heritage and the formation of a protection system with Chinese characteristics .

Previous research suggests that Gaocheng Gongleng is a folk artwork that originated in ancient times. It is considered a testament to the wisdom of ancient Chinese people in terms of its form, creation process, and artistic style (Zhong, 2008). However, its commercial value has been largely overlooked. Since 2000, the Gaocheng Palace Lantern has developed and matured in response to China's changing social and economic landscape. A comparison of the pre- and post-2000 periods reveals changes in both the social process and the Gaocheng Gongleng artifacts.

Objectives

1. To study the expression and aesthetic value of Gaocheng lanterns as works of art.
2. Analyze the "social process" of Gaocheng lanterns and its influence.
3. Analyze the cultural value, social value and commercial

value of Gaocheng Palace lanterns as folk art in the process of commercialization.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative analysis method. Based on three research objectives, specify specific research methods and processes. This study used literature review, field investigation, data analysis, and interviews as the main data collection methods. Then, the collected data is analyzed, summarized, and applied to the paper. Finally, a descriptive analysis is used to write the paper.

The field survey location of this study is Tuntou Village, Gaocheng District, Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province. More than 90% of the villagers in this village are engaged in industries related to palace lamps, which has also driven employment for more than 70000 people in the surrounding area. In the field survey, researchers interviewed groups including inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, dealers of Gaocheng palace lanterns, and enthusiasts of Gaocheng palace lanterns. The interview content includes: the development trend of types of palace lanterns in Gaocheng after the 21st century, the impact of economic development on Gaocheng palace lanterns, the development of the social process of Gaocheng palace lanterns, and the artistic value of Gaocheng palace lanterns. This study mainly uses literature reading and interview methods to study the development history of Gaocheng palace lanterns and the evolution process of traditional art. It analyzes the value of Gaocheng palace

lanterns as folk art in the commercialization process and the advantages and disadvantages of commercialization. The interview method mainly adopts a combination of personal in-depth interviews and focus group interviews. A total of 6 individual interviews were conducted, with each interview lasting about 30 minutes; A total of 5 focus group interviews were conducted, with an average of 4 people per focus group. Each interview lasted about 20 minutes; A total of 26 samples and over 20000 words of interview data were collected in the study.

Results

1. Gaocheng Palace Lantern Commercialization in the 21st Century

1.1 Research on the expression and aesthetic value of the Gaocheng Palace Lantern as a work of art

The Ligao City Palace Lantern is known for its strong regional characteristics, with the 'Tuntou Palace Lantern' being the most representative. Tuntou is a specialized village in Gao Cheng District, Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province, renowned for producing lanterns. It is often referred to as 'China's first village of lanterns' and 'the only village located between the north and south of the Yangtze River'. The craft of making gauze lanterns in Gao Cheng has a history of 2,000 years, dating back to the Eastern Han Dynasty and continuing through the Sui, Tang, Ming, and Qing dynasties. This information is based on the earliest available record, which is found in the Gao

Cheng County Record.



Figure1:Tun Tou Village Landmark

Source: Kun (2023)

Since the development of Hebei Gaocheng Palace Lanterns, they have carried rich historical and cultural connotations, signifying the reunion of the whole family, happiness, national prosperity, peace, auspiciousness, and joyous festivities (Zhang, 1999). In addition to their lighting function, these lanterns represent red-hot prosperity and grand enthusiasm. The Gaocheng Palace Lantern combines traditional Chinese cultural and folkloric techniques, including paper-cutting, calligraphy, mortise and tenon, and prick stitching. Its deep historical background, rich cultural connotations, and unique production techniques make it an outstanding example of traditional Chinese handicrafts.



Figure2: Ligustrum Palace Lantern from the beginning of the use of lighting to the evolution of modern decorative works of art

Source: Li Na (2023)

The picture above illustrates the evolution of the Ligustrum Palace Lantern from its earliest use as lighting to a modern decorative work of art, showing the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture, changes in people's aesthetic needs, the development of production techniques and materials, and the combination of art and commerce. This evolution highlights the multiple meanings and values of the lantern as a cultural symbol and art form.



Figure 3 : Crafted paper lanterns featuring auspicious and symbolic themes.

The craft paper lamp shown in the picture above is a new product developed through the collaboration of Zhang Fengjun, a non-genetic heritage expert of the 2004 Gaocheng Palace Lantern, and Shi Youquan, a senior craftsman in Uixian paper-cutting. The lamp is a result of their joint efforts. The craft paper lanterns draw inspiration from the traditional hexagonal palace lanterns and feature Uixian paper-cutting patterns. The design is exquisite and delicate, following the dao pry principle of traditional Chinese architectural art. The lanterns combine Chinese folk crafts and auspicious culture, showcasing national characteristics. Additionally, they are easy to dismantle and install. The lamp's appearance enhances the cultural significance of the Gaocheng Palace Lantern, expanding its application and appreciation. This also brings new vitality and economic value to the lantern.

The Gaocheng Palace Lantern is a unique work of art that expresses aesthetic value through fine craftsmanship and various modelling designs. The lanterns are a three-dimensional art form that presents a rich sense of hierarchy and dynamic effects through the illumination of light. The design of the Gaocheng Palace Lantern integrates traditional Chinese cultural elements, resulting in beautiful lines and rich colours that provide people with a sense of inner peace and enjoyment of beauty. The Gaocheng lanterns carry deep historical and cultural connotations, reflecting the characteristics and styles of local folk art. By studying the Gaocheng Palace Lantern as a work of art, we can better appreciate and understand the

uniqueness of traditional Chinese art, as well as the influence and revelation of history and culture on art.

1.2 Analysing the 'social process' of the Gaocheng Palace Lantern and its impacts.

The commercialization of folk art has become an objective trend due to the needs and constraints of market economy development. Additionally, the high development of modern communication media has provided motivation for this trend (Bai & Song 2010). The Gao Cheng Gong Lantern is facing challenges and opportunities of commercialization and merchandising due to the development of the social economy and the rise of the cultural market. This paper analyses the 'social process' of the Gaoxiong Gongliao while exploring the concepts of commodification and commercialization. The impact of this trend on the Gaocheng Palace Lantern is also discussed.

By collating literature on the important historical events in the evolution of the commercialization process of the Gaocheng Palace Lantern, it can be divided into two stages to analyse the development of the commercialization of the Gaocheng Palace Lantern: the first stage is the development of the Gaocheng Palace Lantern before the year 2000. At this stage, the production of lanterns mainly relies on handmade methods, and the sales model is fragmented and not centralised. The second stage is after 2000, thanks to the development of science and technology and government support, Gaoxiong lanterns into the rapid development

of commercialization stage.

After the 21st century, the government attached great importance to the construction of culture and issued many protective documents. With the support of these documents, the market began to intervene, and these protective policies became the first driving force, which had a multifaceted impact on the social process, such as policy support, the development of tourism, cultural exchanges and education, and the local economy.



Figure 4: Tuntou village e-commerce practitioners in the network

live broadcasting room live sales Gaocheng Palace Lanterns

Source: Club Ningbo (2023)

In the picture above is the village of tuntou e-commerce practitioners in the network live broadcasting room live sales ligao city lanterns, into the 21st century, tuntou lantern industry to catch the rise of e-commerce this 'fast train'. 2013 began to "90" as the

main body of a new generation of lantern artisan People, began with the help of e-commerce power, Ligao City lanterns gradually in overseas sales. Tuntou village has more than 300 registered e-commerce sellers in the industry and commerce, e-commerce practitioners more than 2,000 people, e-commerce turnover of more than 600 million yuan, accounting for all sales of 30%.



Figure 5 : Gaocheng Palace Lanterns on display at the Shanghai World Expo

Source: Li Na (2023)

The above picture shows the appearance of Ligao City Palace Lanterns at the Shanghai World Expo and the participants' visit to the Hebei Expo Exhibition Hall, which illustrates that the organisation of the 2010 Shanghai World Expo has given a boost to the development of e-commerce in China. By selling and promoting the Gao Cheng lanterns through online platforms, the market scope has been expanded and is no longer confined to geographical

location. This means that Ligao City Palace Lanterns can be sold both at home and abroad, attracting more consumers and buyers.



Figure 6: Scene of the 9th Jingji Yanzhao Folklore Temple Fair

Source: Xiaofeng (2024)

The picture above is Shijiazhuang Gao Cheng District in the "Palace City India Lane - Gong Li Street" held the ninth jingji-Yanzhao Folklore Festival site photos, the entire temple will be launched during the giant dragon lanterns to celebrate the New Year, enjoy the lanterns, send Spring Festival couplets, and other activities, held in the Gao Cheng District in the heavy "Palace culture" precipitation, which explains the activities held in order to rich Gao Cheng Temple Fair regional connotation, so that people increase the understanding of the lanterns to enhance the Gao Cheng lanterns of the visibility and influence.

Overall, as a traditional art form, the Gaocheng Palace Lantern has undergone evolution and development in the course of

society. Its development has had a multifaceted impact on society, including cultural heritage and preservation, tourism and economic development, as well as social and cultural exchanges and folklore activities. Through its unique artistic charm and cultural connotation, the Gaocheng Palace Lantern has brought the enjoyment of beauty and the transmission of culture to the society, and at the same time promoted the prosperity of the local economy and social development.

1.3 Analyse the cultural value, social value and commercial value of the Gaocheng Palace Lantern as a folk art in the process of Commercialization.

Through the in-depth analysis of the value of Gaocheng lanterns, we can discuss from three latitudes: first, from the cultural value, Gaocheng lanterns as an important carrier of folk art, witnessed the vicissitudes of the times, carrying the deep heritage of regional culture. Secondly, from the dimension of social value, Gaocheng lanterns highlight the diversity of folk art and regional characteristics, while conveying a positive value orientation. Thirdly, in terms of commercial value, as an important economic pillar of Gaocheng District, Gaocheng Palace lanterns satisfy people's demands in economic and material aspects, and at the same time, they have the function of cohesion of social centripetal force and consensus. Through the promotion of Commercialization, the Gao Cheng Gong Lantern has become one of the representatives of regional culture, enhanced the people's awareness of the protection

and innovation of the Gao Cheng Gong Lantern culture, and enhanced the pride and identity of the local people in their local cultural traditions. This helps to strengthen the cohesion of the local community and the inheritance of regional culture.

1.3.1 The Cultural Value of Gaocheng Palace Lanterns as Folk Art in the Process of commercialization

As a folk art form, Gaocheng Palace Lantern carries deep cultural connotations and historical traditions. It has produced rich cultural value in the process of Commercialization. Gaocheng Palace Lantern is a representative of traditional Chinese lantern art, originated in Ligustrum District, Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province. It has attracted the attention of many audiences and collectors with its unique shape, exquisite craftsmanship and rich symbolism. It has gained wider dissemination and recognition through the process of commercialization. In the past, Gaocheng Palace Lanterns were mainly used on occasions such as traditional festivals and weddings, with a relatively narrow audience. However, with the development of market economy and the rise of tourism, the Gaocheng Palace Lantern has gradually become a cultural tourism product. Through commercial promotion and sales, the lanterns have been able to enter more people's field of vision, so that more people understand and appreciate this traditional art form.



Figure 7 : Craft Paper Sculpture Lamp Hand Carved

Source : Kun (2023)

The picture above shows the technique of carving a craft paper sculpture lamp, illustrating the craft paper sculpture lamp combined with the craftsmanship of Weixian paper cutting.

1.3.2 The social value of Gaocheng Palace Lanterns as folk art in the process of commercialization

The Gaocheng Palace Lantern has important social value as a form of folk art. Firstly, the production and sales process of the lanterns involves many craftsmen and related practitioners, which provides local employment opportunities and economic income, and promotes social development and stability. Secondly, as a symbol of local characteristics and culture, the lanterns attract the attention of many tourists and art lovers, promote the development of tourism, and bring certain economic benefits to the local economy. In addition, the display and production process of palace lanterns has become a platform for people's

communication and interaction, promoting social and cultural inheritance and exchange, and enhancing social cohesion and identity.



Figure 8 : Shijiazhuang gaocheng district downtown main street hanging lanterns scene

The picture above shows that Shijiazhuang Gaocheng District started to hang strings of red palace lanterns on New Year's Day 2024 in the main streets, parks and squares, unit shops, and landmarks, allowing residents to feel the atmosphere of the Chinese New Year, which illustrates the creation of a strong atmosphere of the Chinese New Year for the residents, enhances the development of community and cohesion, increases the sense of cultural identity of the residents, and brings the residents a joyful and festive experience of the holiday season.

1.3.3 The commercial value of the Gaocheng Palace Lantern as a folk art in the process of commercialization Gaocheng Palace Lanterns also have commercial value in the process of Commercialization. The production and sale of palace lanterns has

formed a certain industrial chain, involving material supply, production and processing, sales promotion and other links. As a unique artwork, the lantern has certain market demand and commercial potential. Businessmen can gain certain profits and economic returns through the design, production and sale of lanterns. At the same time, the promotion of commercialization also provides certain financial and resource support for the inheritance and development of the lanterns, and promotes the prosperity and innovation of the lantern industry.

To sum up, the Gaocheng Palace lantern as a folk art has produced rich cultural value, social value and commercial value in the process of commercialization. It inherits and carries forward local cultural traditions through the promotion and sale of commercialization, stimulates people's interest in and recognition of traditional culture, and contributes to the inheritance and promotion of culture. At the same time, the production and sale of palace lanterns brings certain economic benefits to the local economy, promotes the development of tourism, and enhances social cohesion and identity. In addition, the promotion of Commercialization has supported the prosperity and innovation of the lantern industry.

Conclusions

This paper takes commercialization as the research perspective, analyses the historical development of the "Ligustrum Palace Lantern" and the process of Commercialization and the

impact it has had, so as to derive the value of the Ligustrum Palace Lantern in the process of commercialization and the advantages and disadvantages arising from the commercialization process, and ultimately concludes that: "The Ligustrum Palace Lantern is the most popular lantern in the world.

Table 1 The significances of the conclusions.

Conclusions	Significance
1. The commodity value of the Ligustrum Palace Lantern has more advantages than disadvantages	The significance of this finding is to communicate to the government, relevant stakeholders and the community that Commercialization is an important pathway for the development of the Ligustrum Palace Lantern industry and can bring positive benefits to the local community and economy.
2. Ligustrum palace lamp industry development needs to pay attention to individual needs	The significance of the conclusion is to remind industry practitioners to maintain a balance in the process of commoditisation, not only pursuing commercial interests but also focusing on cultural preservation and heritage.
3. The value of Commercialization of the Ligustrum Palace Lantern is conducive to the promotion of sustainable economic development	The significance of the conclusion is to highlight the important value of Commercialization at the economic level and to remind the government and relevant stakeholders to focus on the long-term benefits of sustainable economic development while supporting the Commercialization of the Ligustrum Palace Lantern.

The researcher discussed the research summary, research limitations, and relevant suggestions. Prior to this study, scholars mainly focused on the cultural industry, arts and crafts, and education and teaching perspectives of Gaocheng palace lanterns, with less research on the commercialization of Gaocheng palace lanterns. Therefore, studying the value of Gaocheng palace lanterns requires a broader academic perspective. Based on previous research, this study focuses on the commercialization of folk art, which is of great significance for expanding its research field. Secondly, limitations of the research: This study focuses on the commercialization of Gaocheng palace lanterns, highlighting the impact and value of commercialization. Other scholars can further study the field of intangible cultural heritage, which is conducive to the development of cultural connotations and values.

Recommendation

1. It is recommended that Ligustrum Palace Lantern strengthen brand building, improve brand awareness and reputation, to attract more consumers.
2. Suggest that Gaocheng Palace lanterns in product design and innovation, combined with modern aesthetic and technological elements, to develop more products to meet market demand.
3. Suggest that the government in the education industry to strengthen the students of Gaocheng Palace lantern culture learning and practical courses.

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