

The Process, Technical, Characteristics and Inheritance of Yang's Clay Sculpture in Ningxia

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ABSTRACT

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Yang's clay sculpture, a significant representative of Ningxia's intangible cultural heritage, plays an essential role in preserving the traditional culture of China. Known for expressing religious ideals and life emotions through artistic modeling, these sculptures are valued for their folklore and historical significance. In 2008, Yang's clay sculpture was recognized as part of the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage expansion projects by the State Council of the People's Republic of China, sparking increased scholarly attention. However, most prior research has focused on the origin, development, and artistic style of these works. This study aims to investigate the technological processes, artistic characteristics, and inheritance practices of Yang's clay sculpture. Using a mixed-method approach that combines field research and a literature review, this study identifies and systematizes the unique technological processes of Yang's clay sculptures. The findings reveal distinct artistic features. The study concludes that these unique artistic and technological traits, coupled with the inheritance practices, contribute to the cultural and artistic significance of Yang's clay sculpture. The insights gained provide valuable guidance for the preservation, development, and promotion of this intangible cultural heritage.

Contribution/Originality: This study summarizes the historical evolution, artistic techniques, and regional characteristics of Yang's clay sculpture through qualitative interviews and literature analysis. It highlights innovations and provides a framework for preserving and inheriting Yang's clay sculpture, thus enriching intangible cultural heritage research and practices.

1. Introduction

The intangible cultural heritage of traditional art in Ningxia is an important component of the traditional culture of the Chinese nation. After long-term development, it has high

cultural and artistic value in terms of themes, materials, and craftsmanship, representing the historical, cultural, and spiritual context of the Ningxia region. There are many kinds of "intangible cultural heritage" in Ningxia, such as Helan inkstone production, clay sculpture, Paper Cuttings, embroidery. Yang's clay sculpture is an important representative. Yang's clay sculptures are adept at expressing religious ideals and life emotions through artistic idol modeling. It has high research value in folklore and historical culture, and was included in the second batch of national intangible cultural heritage list in 2008 ([China Government Network, 2008](#)).

Yang's clay sculpture is a traditional art form in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and a national intangible cultural heritage. It originated during the Daoguang period of the Qing Dynasty (1832). The founder, Yang Kuishan, visited various places to learn clay sculpture from Master Liu in Fengxiang, Shaanxi due to his love for clay sculpture. The painted clay sculptures in Fengxiang, Shaanxi began during the pre Qin and Western Zhou periods and have been popular among the people for three thousand years ([Zhu & Sun, 2014](#)). It is the oldest and most distinctive clay sculpture handicraft preserved in China to this day. Yang Kuishan completed his studies in 3 years and later created the Yang family clay sculpture, which he passed on to his sons Yang Tingfu and Yang Tingbi. After taking over the mantle of his ancestors, Yang Weifu, the third generation inheritor, went to Xinjiang to continue learning and developing clay sculpture techniques, ([Yang 2018](#)) integrating the artistic style of Western region culture into clay sculpture art, and having great achievements in shaping temples, gods, temples, and Buddha statues. He also widely recruited disciples and had influence in surrounding areas. People who love clay sculpture art made a living by opening workshops and operating clay sculpture businesses. Historical records indicate that by the peak period of Yang's clay sculpture development, the industry had become widespread in the local community, with approximately 53 workshops and over 100 artisans engaged in clay sculpture production ([Yang 2018](#)). This development not only reflected the cultural significance of Yang's clay sculpture but also demonstrated its role in the local economy and community life. A folk handicraft production pattern of men kneading and women and children coloring was also formed, and the development of the Yang family clay sculpture entered its heyday. Yang Qihe, the fourth generation descendant, not only learned and mastered the clay sculpture skills, but also absorbed the advantages of various folk arts and integrated them to develop Yang's clay sculpture into a characteristic colored sculpture integrating clay sculpture, painting, wood carving, seal carving, Paper Cuttings, and hot stamping, initially forming the basic artistic style of Yang's clay sculpture ([China Government Network, 2008](#)).

Yang's clay sculpture has a history of nearly 200 years from its inception to the present. During the long process of development and evolution, artists of Yang's clay sculpture have created unique style clay sculpture works based on the changes of the times and the living conditions of the people. Especially since the 1980s, clay sculpture skills have been widely valued by various sectors of society. ([China Intangible Cultural Heritage Network, 2009](#)). On the basis of inheriting the skills passed down from previous generations, Yang Qihe, the elderly, It has also developed a design technique that combines traditional and modern elements, especially in the selection of work content, with a wider range of themes, including excellent works such as "Chairman Mao's Passing Over the Six Pans" and "Opening Mountains to Build Plains". With the development of society, Yang's clay sculptures have undergone changes in subject matter selection, modeling techniques, color selection and other aspects. The unique

artistic style of Yang's clay sculptures has also undergone innovative development, presenting a unique spiritual temperament ([China Government Network, 2008](#)).

At present, the Yang family in Yangpo Village, Wenbao Township, Longde County, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region continues to actively promote the Yang clay sculpture, which has been passed down to the sixth generation. On the basis of inheriting tradition, Yang Jianian, the fifth generation inheritor, continuously learns and draws on the characteristics of numerous art genres ([Li, 2015](#)) constantly tries to actively innovate clay sculpture techniques, establishes Yang's Clay Sculpture Art Co., Ltd., and serves as a visiting professor in multiple universities to teach clay sculpture techniques ([Yang 2018](#)). The sixth generation inheritors Yang Xianlong, Yang Xianxiong, Yang Xianqi, and others have also achieved remarkable achievements in the field of clay sculpture. Yang Xianlong has long taught clay sculpture courses at the School of Art and Design of Ningxia Vocational and Technical College, making positive contributions to the inheritance and development of Yang's clay sculpture skills among college students ([Yang, 2018](#)).

1.1. Research Objectives

The goal of this study is to sort out the craftsmanship, technology, characteristics, and inheritance of Yang's clay sculpture, summarize the style characteristics of Yang's clay sculpture, and interpret the Chinese cultural connotations in Yang's clay sculpture.

2. Literature Review

As a representative of Ningxia's characteristic art intangible cultural heritage, Yang's clay sculpture was approved by the State Council of the People's Republic of China on June 7, 2008 to be included in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage expansion projects. The heritage number is vii 47 ([China Intangible Cultural Heritage Network, 2008](#)). Since then, multiple studies have been conducted on Yang's clay sculptures, in accordance with the State Council's Notice on the Announcement of the Second Batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage List and the First Batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage Extension Project List. In these studies, the main focus was on the origin, development, and artistic style of Yang's clay sculptures. From an artistic perspective, this article elaborates on the freehand brushwork characteristics of Yang's clay sculpture, which strive to be refined and summarized, with vivid and natural postures, and moderate exaggeration, as well as the color characteristics of bright colors, clear contrasts, and ancient elegance. For example, the artistic characteristics and cultural inheritance of Yang's clay sculptures, as well as the folk art and artistic characteristics of Ningxia, are detailed and combined with specific works. Rich materials and complete content ([Yang, 2018](#)).

2.1. Production Process of Yang's Clay Sculpture

Some research has also focused on the production process of Yang's clay sculpture. These studies generally summarize the production process of Yang's clay sculpture into three stages: the first stage is the preparation before clay sculpture. It includes two steps: batch processing and creating a modeling framework. The materials used for clay molding include loess, laterite, hemp, and straw. When mixing, mix the selected soil with water, add appropriate grass to make it uniform and soak for 20 minutes, then add some loess, laterite, and hemp fiber. The production of a modeling skeleton is based on the

shape of the modeling object, using wood or steel for general modeling. Small shaped molded objects can be made of wood, while large shaped objects can be made of steel; The second stage is the clay modeling stage. This stage is very important. Whether a sculpture is vivid and vivid depends on the technique of clay sculpture. The clay modeling stage can be divided into five steps: applying coarse mud, applying medium mud, applying fine mud, applying cotton mud, and trimming. Gradually form an image of the molded object through the above steps. After the plastic surface of the formed clay is dry and hard, use a tool to repeatedly polish the uneven surface until it is smooth. Finally, use a wool brush or brown brush dipped in a little water to gently brush once until the surface is smooth; The third stage is the clay sculpture decoration stage. Color decoration is applied to the surface of the molded clay sculpture, making the plain clay sculpture a colorful clay sculpture work and enhancing the visual effect as shown in [Table 1](#). The steps in this stage can be specifically divided into embossing, decoration, color processing, paper pasting, line drawing, drawing, coloring, gilding, and polishing. These discussions focus on the production technology of Yang's clay sculpture, which has important guiding value for learning and understanding Yang's clay sculpture.

Table 1: Summary of the Production Steps of Yang's Clay Sculpture in Existing Studies

Phase	Step	Description
Phase 1: Preparation	Step 1: Processing the clay	Preparing and conditioning the clay materials.
	Step 2: Creating the framework	Building the basic structure for the sculpture.
Phase 2: Sculpting	Step 1: Using coarse clay	Shaping the initial form with coarse clay.
	Step 2: Using medium clay	Refining the shape using medium-textured clay.
	Step 3: Using fine clay	Adding details with fine-textured clay.
	Step 4: Using cotton clay	Smoothing and finishing the surface with cotton clay.
	Step 5: Refining the sculpture	Final adjustments and refinements to the sculpture.
Phase 3: Decoration	Step 1: Applying paper	Applying a paper layer to prepare for painting.
	Step 2: Applying a white base	Creating a white base layer for the surface.
	Step 3: Drawing the design	Sketching the design onto the sculpture.
	Step 4: Painting the colors	Applying colors to complete the decoration.

Source: [Yang \(2018\)](#)

2.2. The Inheritance of Yang's Clay Sculptures

In the article "The Spirit of the Earth", Yan Wenxin described in detail that Yang's clay sculptures were made from folk customs, mountains, rivers, and mythological legends. His works have a simple and realistic design, lively and full of local flavor. On the basis of inheriting ancestral skills, they absorbed and learned various folk arts, forming a "Yang Family Art" style that integrates various forms such as clay sculpture, painting, and wood carving, which is highly local and folk. The preliminary study on the industrialization of Yang's clay sculpture art in Ningxia attempts to achieve the industrialization of Yang's clay sculpture through process improvement, while fully understanding the production process. By reading these literature, we can not only gain theoretical support, but also provide new research perspectives for the inheritance of Yang's clay sculptures, from which we can gain greater inspiration ([Yan, 2023](#)).

Through literature search, the inheritance and protection of traditional folk arts and crafts have become a research hotspot in recent years, and the protection of intangible cultural heritage has become an important component of cultivating cultural confidence (Zhu & Sun, 2014). With the development of the times, a large amount of research on the intangible cultural heritage of art is being carried out in full swing.

3. Research Methods

This project adopts qualitative research methods to explore the production techniques and inheritance process of Yang's clay sculpture in depth. The study is conducted in Yangpo Village, Wenbao Township, Longde County, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, where the inheritors of Yang's clay sculpture reside. In 2017, the Yang's Clay Sculpture Base and the Yang's Clay Sculpture Museum were established, housing many physical examples of the clay sculptures. Both Yang Jianian, the national inheritor, and Yang Xianlong, the regional inheritor, live in Yangpo Village, making it convenient to conduct in-depth interviews with the inheritors.

This study adopted a qualitative research design to deeply explore the cultural practices, meanings, and artistic techniques embedded in intangible cultural heritage, as these aspects are best understood through detailed, personal narratives rather than numerical data. The research involved in-depth interviews with two inheritors of Yang's clay sculpture: Yang Jianian, a fifth-generation national-level inheritor, and Yang Xianlong, a sixth-generation inheritor. These inheritors were selected based on their expertise, lineage, and significant contributions to Yang's clay sculpture. Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes, specifically focusing on production techniques, artistic innovations, and cultural inheritance. The interview content was transcribed in detail and subjected to qualitative analysis to better understand and organize the specific methods and techniques of Yang's clay sculpture. To ensure ongoing research, the project also uses online communication methods, such as video conferences and remote interviews, to gather additional research materials and oral histories from Yang Jianian.

Yang's clay sculpture has a long history, and a comprehensive understanding of its development and techniques requires literature review in addition to field investigation and interviews. In the research process, relevant literature, particularly local chronicles from Longde County, were consulted to gain a deeper understanding of the origins and cultural context of Yang's clay sculpture. The Yang family has conducted a systematic summary of the development of Yang's clay sculpture over the past 200 years. The 2018 book *Ningxia Yang's Colored Sculpture* provides a detailed account of the origins, development, technical features, and innovations of Yang's clay sculpture, serving as an essential reference for this study. (Yang, 2018)

By integrating qualitative interviews and literature review, this study comprehensively organizes the technical characteristics and cultural inheritance of Yang's clay sculpture, aiming to offer an in-depth understanding of its production techniques and innovative development.

4. Results

4.1. The Historical Origin of Yang's Clay Sculpture

The ancestral courtyard of Yang's clay sculpture is located in Yangpo Village, Wenbao Township, southwestern Longde County. Longde County is located at the western foot of Liupan Mountain in the southern part of Ningxia. The county borders Jingning and Xiji to the northwest, Jingyuan and Zhuanglang to the southeast, and Guyuan to the northeast. Between latitude 35 ° 21 ' -35 ° 47' north and longitude 105 ° 48 ' -106 ° 15' east. The county is 47 kilometers long from north to south and 41 kilometers wide from east to west, covering an area of 991 square kilometers. Looking east at Guanshan, west at Hetao, south at Qinzhou, and north at Ningshuo, it is known as the "key to Guanlong" (Li, 2015).

Longde has a profound historical and cultural heritage, and is a famous ancient silk city and hometown of calligraphy and painting in the northwest. After years of protection, inheritance, and development, traditional villages in Longde County have been well preserved, and the advantages of cultural resources have gradually become prominent. By 2023, seven villages including Hongya Village, Yangdian Village, Liangbao Village, Xinhe Village, Yangpo Village, Yuhe Village and Qicha Village have been included in the list of traditional Chinese villages. There are three national intangible cultural heritage representative lists, namely, Yang's Clay Sculpture, Gaotai Ma Shehuo, Wei's Brick Carving, Longde folk painting, Longde folk Paper Cuttings, Longde folk embroidery, Longde Wei's Brick Carving, Longde Jiulong Lotus Pool sacrifice folk custom, Longde folk mountain sacrifice, Longde folk community fire mask 11 autonomous region level intangible cultural heritage, including Longde folk dance stilts and Longde Qin Opera Opera. The simple folk customs and strong artistic atmosphere are the unique cultural calling cards of this land. Yang's clay sculpture is rooted here and has undergone six generations of inheritance and development, forming a rich regional style (Li, 2015).

Longde County is rich in mineral resources. There is a large amount of high-quality red clay resources near Yangpo Village in Wenbao Township, which is a high-quality raw material for making clay sculptures. Yangpo Village has a humid climate and abundant rainfall, providing natural climatic conditions for the production and preservation of clay sculptures, allowing Yang's clay sculptures to be passed down and continuously developed here. Yang's clay sculptures are also intertwined with the unique customs and traditions of this land, forming a unique style of concise summary, vivid posture, and bright colors (Li, 2015).

4.2. The Technique and Production

The development of clay sculpture in China can be traced back to the Neolithic Age. Early clay sculpture works have been unearthed multiple times in the ruins of the Neolithic Age in China, and since then, they have mainly developed in the form of surface colored sculptures. Clay sculpture has become an important art variety in the Han Dynasty. After thousands of years of development, clay sculpture artworks still endure and have developed different regional styles in various parts of China. Yang's clay sculpture is a representative of clay sculpture in Ningxia region. The production technique of Yang's clay sculpture is very complex, divided into several main stages such as material selection, preparation, production, and coloring. Each stage can be further divided into multiple steps to complete a clay sculpture work (Yang, 2018).

4.2.1. Material Selection

High-quality clay resources in Longde County provide essential raw materials for Yang's clay sculptures, significantly contributing to the development of this traditional art form (Yang Jianian, personal communication, April 10, 2024).

Typically, red clay, white clay, loess, and black loess are used in Yang's clay sculptures, with the selection varying according to seasonal and environmental conditions. For indoor production, especially considering the dry climate and low humidity in Ningxia, softer clays such as loess and black loess, characterized by lower viscosity, are preferred. In contrast, when working in more humid conditions, materials like cotton fibers or fine gravel are often added to the clay to enhance viscosity and sculpting performance (Yang Jianian, personal communication, April 10, 2024). [Figure 1](#) shows Yang Jianian selecting clay materials.

Figure 1: Yang Jianian Inspecting The Soil



Source: [Yan \(2023\)](#)

Sand and gravel must be added to the clay for shaping. Different thicknesses of sand and gravel should be selected based on the size of the clay model. For larger clay models, coarse sand with larger particles can be used. For smaller clay models, washed fine sand can be used. Blue sand and gravel with yellow rice grain size are commonly used as the main material in clay modeling. The use of sand and gravel divides the soil into different textures, which can adapt to the personalized clay needs of different parts and details in clay sculpture ([Yang, 2018](#)).

In addition to soil and sand, hemp thread, cotton, straw, etc. are also commonly used for clay molding, forming together with clay materials. Hemp is the straw of flax. After soaking in water, the wood on the straw is removed, leaving only soft, clean, and lint free hemp fibers. The tensile strength of hemp fibers is very strong, which can improve the toughness of mud. Cotton needs to be made from natural cotton fibers, which can freely stretch and contract according to the shape of the mud. Adding materials such as hemp

fibers and cotton makes clay easier to form and maintain its shape, and the stability of dried clay is better (Yang, 2018).

4.2.2. Preparation

To ensure long-term storage and resistance to erosion, clay must undergo a brewing process before it is shaped. The brewing methods vary depending on the thickness of the soil, and there are differences in the proportions of materials used based on this factor (Yang, 2018). Typically, fine sand, cotton, and hemp silk are added to the soil in specific proportions. Water is then used to adjust the soil to a level of softness that is suitable for sculpting (Yang, 2018).

Large grass mud is prepared using red and white clay, which has high viscosity, combined with loess, which has low viscosity. A certain amount of straw and wheat husks are added to the mixture. When shaping large clay molds, it is especially important to increase the proportion of straw and wheat husks, as this enhances the stability of the mud and ensures it maintains its shape during the sculpting process. (Yang, 2018).

Coarse mud is typically applied as the first layer over the skeleton of the sculpture. This layer requires high soil strength and excellent support, which is achieved by adding grass knots and wheat bran after the soil has been fully saturated with water. Coarse sand is incorporated in multiple layers, followed by ample trampling and pressing to ensure uniformity. The mud is brewed for 20 to 40 minutes, which allows it to achieve the necessary consistency for sculpting (Yang, 2018).

Medium mud is an intermediate stage in the creation of clay sculptures, and it plays a crucial role in determining the specific form and action of the sculpture, as well as the contours and details of the clothing patterns. The mud used at this stage needs to have moderate viscosity and strength, so wheat bran, coarse sand, and a small amount of hemp thread are added. The mixture is then stepped on and pressed to ensure thorough integration. To further refine the consistency, the mixture is hammered two or three times with a wooden rod to achieve the required viscosity and strength (Yang, 2018).

Fine mud is used to shape the intricate details of the sculpture, and it requires a very fine texture. For this reason, the soil used must be of high purity. Red and white clay with high viscosity are preferred as the primary ingredients. The clay is dried, crushed, and sieved to remove impurities, leaving only the finest dry soil. After soaking the soil in water for 5 to 8 hours, it is leveled and mixed with pulp, ensuring that the consistency is even. Once leveled again, cotton is layered and pressed into the mixture, and fine sand is sprinkled. The mud is then hammered multiple times from different directions using a wooden stick to ensure that the cotton and sand are evenly and densely distributed throughout the mixture (Ding, 2024).

Cotton mud is used for small, detailed parts of the sculpture, such as the hands, feet, and accessories. It is the most delicate of all the clay materials used. The preparation of cotton mud is similar to that of fine mud, involving the removal of impurities from fine dry soil, soaking it in water, and adding pulp cotton for continuous beating. However, unlike fine mud, no sand or gravel is added to cotton mud. Figure 2 shows the process of beating pulp cotton into the clay (Yang, 2018).

Figure 2: The Inheritor of Yang's Clay Sculpture is Brewing Clay Materials



Source: [Yang \(2018\)](#)

4.2.3. *Sculpt*

The production of Yang's clay sculpture follows a step-by-step process from the inside out. This process is divided into multiple stages, including the framework, coarse clay, medium clay, fine clay, cotton clay, polishing, embossing, and decoration, to complete the sculpture's shape (Yang Jianian, personal communication, April 10, 2024).

For larger works in Yang's clay sculpture, a wooden frame is used to create the skeleton. Once the frame is completed, straw is tied to the surface to help the clay adhere better. For smaller works, coarse clay is used to shape the rough outline directly, without the need for a skeleton. [Figure 3](#) shows the process of making the framework.

Figure 3: The Inheritor of Yang's Clay Sculpture is Tying the Skeleton of the Clay Sculpture



Source: [Yang \(2018\)](#)

The first layer of mud for large clay molds is usually large grass mud. During the coating process, a wooden hammer is continuously used to beat out the air, ensuring the mud and straw bond tightly and preventing the mud from peeling off after drying. When adding grass and mud, attention must be paid to the dynamic shape of the sculpture and to shaping the approximate outline (Yang, 2018).

Coarse mud is applied evenly onto the skeleton, ensuring it is not too thick to avoid the mud falling off easily. Since additional layers of mud will be applied in subsequent processes, it is better to apply a thin, small layer of coarse mud to prevent overfilling in later stages, which may cause the mold to be too full and distort the shape (Yang Jianian, personal communication, April 10, 2024).

When the coarse mud is semi-dry, it is the best time to apply the upper and middle mud. The brewed medium mud is pressed tightly onto the coarse mud to form the general shape and contour. Attention to fine details is not necessary at this stage, as these will be addressed in the later fine mud and cotton mud stages (Yang Jianian, personal communication, April 10, 2024).

The application of fine mud is a key process in shaping the sculpture. Once the middle mud is fully dried, water is sprayed on its surface, and the fine mud, soaked in water, is evenly applied in layers. Multiple layers are applied to ensure proper thickness and are gently pressed and shaped. Areas where the mud is thick should be reinforced to prevent cracking. During this fine mud stage, focus is placed on shaping the facial expressions and posture of the sculpture. By carefully refining the contours, the shape becomes clearer. Wooden tools should be used to refine the details, especially for clothing patterns, which must follow the dynamic laws of the human body, ensuring density and fluidity in the design (Yang, 2018).

The cotton paste stage involves adjusting the clay mold's shape. Wooden tools are used continuously to press and tighten the surface, ensuring it does not crack or deform upon completion. This stage gives the sculpture a smooth, solid surface. Materials like pulp and cotton wool are added to the cotton mud, making it ideal for creating various decorations and details. Cotton mud is used for delicate work such as forming hair buns, hands, feet, and other small details, enhancing the sculpture's three-dimensional effect and fine detailing (Yang Jianian, personal communication, April 10, 2024).

Polishing is the final critical step in the surface treatment of the sculpture. Once the sculpture is dry and firm to the touch, wooden tools are used to press and grind the rough surface, starting from the back to the front, top to bottom, and from thin to thick layers until smooth. Figure 4 shows the inheritor Yang Jianian polishing the surface of the sculpture (Ding, 2024).

A hard bristle brush is then used with a small amount of water to ensure a polished, smooth surface. The surface can be further smoothed using continuous pressure, resulting in a glossy, mirror-like finish. Yang's clay sculpture requires meticulous calendering, which demands years of training to achieve the desired smoothness and roundness (Yang, 2018).

Figure 4: The Inheritor of Yang's Clay Sculpture is Polishing the Clay Sculpture



Source: [China Intangible Cultural Heritage Network \(2009\)](#)

Wooden tools are used to press decorative patterns, such as flowers, clouds, and geometric shapes, onto specific areas like whiskers, weapons, and jewelry. As shown in [Figure 5](#), different thicknesses and straight lines are employed to make the details of the clay sculpture more dynamic and flowing.

Figure 5 :The Inheritor of Yang's Clay Sculpture is Pressing and Scratching the Surface of the Clay Sculpture



Source: Yang Jianian, personal communication (2019)

In some complex clay sculptures, it is challenging to complete both the main body and the local decorations simultaneously. Therefore, the decoration can be made using the flipping mold technique, connected by metal wires, and then attached to the main body as an additional decorative element. The decoration typically includes flowers, clouds, and continuous patterns, which enhance the aesthetic appeal of the sculpture. (Ding, 2024)

4.2.4. Coloring

The use of color is one of the most distinctive features of Yang's clay sculpture. The artistic approach to coloring emphasizes "three parts carving, seven parts color," and the color style is characterized by "single-color flat painting, glorious and magnificent." The coloring process is complex and rigorous, fully reflecting the rich content and diverse forms of traditional folk art from the Liupanshan region (Yang, 2018). Figure 6 shows Yang Jianian coloring the clay sculpture.

Figure 6: The Inheritor of Yang's Clay Sculpture is Coloring the Clay Sculpture



Source: Ma (2023)

Small cracks may appear on the surface of the clay mold after drying. To ensure the smooth progression of subsequent coloring and painting processes, boiled gelatin should be brushed onto the surface to repair these gaps. Once the glue has completely dried, further steps can be carried out (Yang, 2018).

Yang's clay sculptures typically use mulberry paper, a material with a thousand-year history that dates back to the Han Dynasty. Known as the "living fossil" of the paper industry, mulberry paper has a clear fiber structure, making it soft, insect-resistant, strong in tensile force, and highly absorbent. This makes it ideal for reinforcing the surface of clay sculptures. During the paper-pasting process, the paper is trimmed and applied according to the shape of the sculpture, with an overlap of about 1 cm between sheets (Yang, 2018).

Whitening helps to unify the color tone of the clay sculpture surface, facilitating later coloring. Once the white paint is applied evenly, most of the subsequent coloring can be completed in one layer, and the colors will be more visible. Traditionally, a white paint mixture of white porcelain clay and gelatin was used. However, after years of improvement, lithopone paint mixed with a small amount of talcum powder and gelatin is now commonly used, as it offers better coverage and a more uniform color than porcelain clay paint. The white coating should be applied evenly in two layers, from top to bottom, and once dried, the coloring can begin (Yang, 2018).

Patterns are drawn on the surface of the clay sculpture to determine the areas and range of the post-coloring process. To create semi-relief lines, pencils or carbon strips are used, or powder is directly applied (Ding, 2024).

Yang's clay sculpture is known for its rich use of color. The pigments used are primarily mineral pigments, with some acrylic pigments also employed. Mixing mineral and acrylic pigments creates bright colors with strong coverage, producing a vibrant visual effect. This unique method of color application results in rich, well-organized colors and uniform layers. The coloring sequence follows strict guidelines based on the sculpture's shape. First, the inner color of the garments is applied, filling in small areas such as corners and gaps, starting with light colors and progressing to dark colors. Then, a wool brush is used to apply a layer of white along the edges of the garment pattern to cover any potential color overflow and clarify the garment's outline. Coloring proceeds from light to dark, with decorative accessories colored first. Excess color can be covered to ensure clean and neat edges, giving the effect that the accessories are embedded within the sculpture. The overall color is brushed twice, and to increase brightness, egg yolk is added to the pigment. Facial details such as eyebrows and eyes are painted with a wolfskin brush. Finally, after the overall coloring is complete, a smooth oil is applied to the surface of the sculpture to fix the color (Ding, 2024).

4.3. Style Characteristics of Yang's Clay Sculpture

Yang's clay sculpture art has rich connotations and diverse forms. Its works are a physical representation of inheriting people's emotional and ideal life, as well as a display of the national, regional, and contemporary nature of traditional culture. Starting from the fourth generation representative inheritor Yang Qihe, the fifth generation inheritor Yang Jianian, the sixth generation inheritor Yang Xianlong, Yang Xianqi, Yang Xianxiong, and others, on the basis of inheriting the skills of their predecessors, have focused on innovation and development on themes such as cultural relic restoration and reflection of the times, gradually forming the Yang's clay sculpture art, which mainly focuses on traditional colored sculptures and combines diverse materials and forms (Li, 2015).

Yang's clay sculpture strives for exaggeration and moderate freehand brushwork in terms of form expression and depiction, while pursuing delicacy and roughness in terms of craftsmanship, emphasizing both decoration and realism. It has formed the characteristics of concise and concise form, vivid and natural posture, and moderate expression exaggeration. Especially in the shaping of characters, the proportion is accurate and the expressions are different. The military image is majestic, majestic, and majestic; The literary image has a peaceful and wise posture; Bodhisattva is graceful and graceful, with agile clothing and decorations; The elderly have experienced many hardships and are in a state of old age; Adolescents are innocent and lovely, with a

charming and naive demeanor (Li, 2015); The posture of birds and beasts is vivid and lifelike; Reaching a visual effect of thousands of people and faces, various decorative accessories are interspersed, and the combination of rough and delicate design and decoration makes the design rich and full.

In terms of color, Yang's clay sculpture pursues harmony and unity in bright and vibrant tones through techniques such as flat coating, dot decoration, and gilding, with distinctive colors, clear contrasts, and ancient and elegant color characteristics. The pigments used in Yang's clay sculpture are mainly mineral powder pigments, and some acrylic pigments are also used. By mixing mineral pigments with acrylic pigments, these pigments have bright colors and strong covering power. At present, Yang's clay sculptures mostly use this mixed pigment, forming a very unique method of color application, forming a cold color system represented by green, blue, black, and deep red, and a warm color system represented by pink, light yellow, and pink green. By relying on the comparison of cold and warm colors and the use of intermediate colors, the colors produce a constantly changing, orderly, and evenly layered visual effect (Ding, 2024).

5. Conclusion

As a national intangible cultural heritage protection project, Yang's clay sculpture has been passed down for nearly 200 years. After six generations, it has formed a complete theoretical system and artistic techniques, condensed unique production skills and operational experience, and continues to be passed down with strong vitality among families and apprentices.

The development of Yang's clay sculpture in the past 200 years has mainly focused on Longde County, Guyuan City, Ningxia. Longde not only boasts the magnificent scenery of the Northern Kingdom, but also the beauty of the Jiangnan water town. Longde has a profound historical and cultural heritage, and has been awarded the titles of "Hometown of Chinese Calligraphy, Hometown of Chinese Folk Culture and Art, Hometown of Chinese Modern Folk Painting and Painting, Hometown of Chinese Social Fire Culture," etc. It has been imbued with thousands of years of traditional culture, nurtured a profound historical and cultural heritage, and also maintained the unique regional characteristics of Yang's clay sculpture. With the vigorous development of the cultural tourism industry in recent years, tourist souvenirs have also become a new sales growth point. Yang's clay sculpture, relying on its corporate management, is also striving to seek innovative ways of development. Corresponding to the new themes are new expressive techniques. New themes and techniques have prompted the generation of new creative styles. At present, the fifth and sixth generations of inheritors have shifted their focus of creation to the production of small tourism souvenirs, and the theme of their works has shifted more from traditional character modeling to reflecting social life and cultural composition. Keeping up with the times and inheriting the past and expanding the present, Yang's clay sculptures demonstrate their pursuit and temperament of adapting to the development of the times and constantly innovating and changing.

The Yang's clay sculpture was initially passed down within the family through oral instruction and hand holding. According to the "Yang Family Genealogy", the Yang's clay sculpture originated in the late Qing Dynasty. Yang Kuishan was the first generation of clay sculpture inheritors of the Yang family, and he studied under his master in Shaanxi. After completing his studies, he founded the Yang family clay sculpture. "The family's

ritual of clay sculpture was flourishing, and he recommended his mountain as the head (the mountain is Yang Kuishan), abandoned his hometown to visit his teacher's traces, and pursued the Zhou Fengzu. He worked hard to repay his skills and became a master for three years, It truly records the scene of Yang Kuishan, an elderly man, leaving his hometown and learning from his master. In his middle age, he made sculptures and colored paintings in the Chenghuang Temple in Pingliang Prefecture, Gansu Province, and got the plaque "Double Happiness in Arts and Virtue" written by the official of the prefecture at that time . This was a high recognition of Yang's clay sculpture skills at that time. His sons Yang Tingfu and Yang Tingbi followed his father's footsteps and became the second generation inheritors of the Yang family's clay sculpture. They opened a workshop and began operating clay sculpture works. Yang Tingfu passed down the ancestral skills to the third generation Yang Weifu. On the basis of inheriting family education, Yang Weifu, the third generation inheritor, visited and studied extensively, traveling to Xinjiang to learn statue art, continuously enriching Yang's clay sculpture skills, especially in shaping and drawing sword and horse figures. Yang Weifu later passed on the skills to Yang Qihe, the fourth generation inheritor. Yang Qihe was a key figure in the inheritance of Yang's clay sculpture. He not only mastered the skills of clay sculpture and color painting, but also developed a skilled hand in making wood carving, dramatic costumes, and stage hats and props. He drew on and integrated the characteristics of various techniques, resulting in significant development in the themes, techniques, and production of Yang's clay sculptures. He excelled in using traditional clay sculptures to create works with strong contemporary characteristics, laying the foundation for Yang's clay sculptures to adhere to the development concept of keeping up with the times in the future (Ma, 2023). Yang Qihe attaches great importance to the inheritance of skills and has devoted great efforts to the cultivation of the fifth and sixth generations of inheritors. Yang Jianian, the fifth generation inheritor, established Yang's Clay Sculpture Art Co., Ltd., which has enabled Yang's clay sculpture to achieve leapfrog development in the form of a company. Under the leadership of the fourth and fifth generations of inheritors, Yang's clay sculpture broke the old tradition of "it is better to lose the tradition, not to pass it on lightly", opened doors to attract apprentices, inherited culture, and trained talents, The fifth generation inheritor Yang Jianian has repeatedly given lectures as a guest professor at universities such as Ningxia Normal University and Ningxia Vocational and Technical College. The sixth generation inheritor Yang Xianlong and others have been teaching in universities for a long time, offering clay sculpture courses at the School of Art and Design of Ningxia Vocational and Technical College, expanding the inheritance scope of Yang's clay sculpture to the field of higher education and bringing more young people closer to this ancient art, Effectively promoting the inheritance and development of Yang's clay sculptures.

Yang's clay sculpture is deeply rooted in the fertile land of Longde. After several generations of hard work, it was included in the second batch of national intangible cultural heritage list in 2008; In 2014, the inheritance base of Yang's Clay Sculpture Art Co., Ltd. was awarded the "National Intangible Cultural Heritage Productive Protection Demonstration Base" by the Ministry of Culture. The base is committed to cultivating clay sculpture apprentices, in order to alleviate the shortage of traditional skills and professional skills talents; In 2017, with the support of the Longde County Government, the "Yang's Clay Sculpture Art Museum" was built. The museum collects physical materials, tools, representative works, picture albums, honor plaques, and pigment samples of the six generations of Yang's clay sculpture, making it a high-quality platform for comprehensive understanding of Yang's clay sculpture; In 2018, Yang's clay sculpture was awarded the title of "Excellent Inheritance Base for Intangible Cultural

Heritage Protection" by the Cultural Department of the Autonomous Region. At the same time, efforts were made to carry out "Yang's clay sculpture" campus activities, offering professional courses, lectures, experiential activities, and other forms of clay sculpture skills teaching to students. By combining theory with practice, students were able to perceive clay sculpture skills from a zero distance; The achievement of these iconic achievements has condensed the hard work of generations of inheritors, and also continuously inspired the younger generation of inheritors to constantly strive for progress, focus on inheritance and development, and create artistic masterpieces that are more distinctive of the times.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). All procedures involving human participants in this study were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Institutional Research Board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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