

## Original Paper

# Transmission of Non-Legacy Classics and Renewal of Culture: A Survey and Analysis of Woodblock Prints in Zhuxian Town

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### **Abstract**

*Henan Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints is the originator of Chinese woodblock prints and a treasure of Chinese classic traditional culture, which not only carries the reverence and praise of generations of Kaifeng craftsmen for woodblock prints, but also carries the deep historical memory and rich cultural connotation of the Chinese nation. However, the protection and inheritance of non-heritage work is not an overnight thing, through the publicity and promotion of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints, can enhance public awareness and understanding of non-heritage culture, and improve the cultural consciousness and cultural self-confidence of the whole society. This paper will mainly focus on the inheritance and protection of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints and the current situation of the cultural development of the market situation of the two aspects of the analysis and research, and at the same time for the problems existing at this stage of the proposal has a strong focus on the resolution of the measures.*

### **Keywords**

*Zhuxian Town woodblock prints, heritage protection, cultural innovation*

The woodblock prints of Zhuxianzhen with rich artistic characteristics have a long history, which is not only an important item for families to decorate and pray for blessings during the New Year, but also a precious material for the study of traditional Chinese folklore and classic culture as well as religious beliefs. With the constant change of the times and the national emphasis on the protection of cultural relics and cultural heritage, Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints were successfully listed in the first batch of

national intangible cultural heritage in 2006 with the approval of the State Council. This means that there is a new progress in the protection and inheritance of woodblock prints, but at the same time, it also means that it is facing difficulties such as the inheritance faults of traditional skills and changes in market demand, which are gradually surfacing. Therefore, in-depth analysis and research on the historical background, artistic characteristics, inheritance value, market development and other issues of woodblock prints in Zhuxianzhen is of great significance to promote the protection and development of traditional culture.

## 1. Research Background

With the increasing attention of the state to the protection of intangible cultural heritage, the woodblock prints of Zhuxianzhen, Henan Province, as an intangible heritage project has also received more attention and protection. At the same time, the old craftsmen of woodblock prints in Zhuxianzhen have made unremitting efforts to keep them intact until now, and at the same time, they also provide new ideas for the cultural development of woodblock prints in the market. But although the woodblock print is a treasure but dying, how to realize the inheritance and development on the basis of protection, let this classic culture new life, is still an urgent problem. Therefore, this article mainly focuses on the analysis of woodblock prints in Zhuxian Town, Henan Province, to investigate and study its historical development as well as the protection and inheritance, and to make specific measures to solve the problems and difficulties faced in these two aspects.

## 2. The Research Value and Significance

As a treasure of Chinese traditional culture, woodblock prints of Zhuxian Town not only carry rich historical information, but also reflect the aesthetic concepts of the Chinese nation and the consciousness of God. It not only has profound cultural value, but also has great practical significance to the cultural development and non-heritage protection of contemporary society.

From the historical point of view, Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints originated in the Northern Song Dynasty when the country was unified, the society was stable and the economy was prosperous, and this social background created good development conditions for the rise of the art of Zhuxianzhen New Year Prints in Kaifeng City, Henan Province. In particular, the widespread use of engraving and printing at that time laid a solid foundation for the wide dissemination of the art of New Year's Paintings. Under such a historical background, woodblock prints of Zhuxianzhen came into being, and in the hands of a group of craftsmen, they gradually developed into an art form with distinctive local characteristics, which is the crystallization of the wisdom and creativity of the Chinese nation.

From a cultural point of view, Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints draw on traditional painting techniques and colorful and rich decorative techniques to form an artistic style with bold lines and strong and thick colors. It reflects the peasants' yearning and hope for a better life, their ideological feelings of helping the right and repelling the evil, and their love and hatred, and is an important carrier of folk culture.

However, with the rapid development of modern society and the continuous innovation and progress of science and technology, the traditional culture, including woodblock prints of Zhuxianzhen, is facing an unprecedented impact and challenges.

From a practical point of view, with the advancement of globalization and the acceleration of modernization, many traditional cultures are facing the danger of disappearing. As one of the classic non-heritage items, the survival of Zhuxian Town woodblock prints is not optimistic. By investigating and analyzing the current situation of its inheritance and protection, we can find out the problems and challenges it is facing, and at the same time put forward effective protection measures to ensure the continuation of this classic culture.

Therefore, based on the investigation and analysis of woodblock prints of Zhuxian Town, it is of great practical significance and theoretical value to study the current situation of its protection, inheritance mechanism and innovative development path. This research not only reflects the respect and inheritance of traditional culture, but also reflects the needs and expectations of modern society for cultural innovation.

### **3. The Historical Background and Artistic Characteristics of Woodblock Prints of Zhuxian Town**

#### *3.1 Historical Background of Woodblock Prints in Zhuxianzhen*

##### **3.1.1 Origin and Development**

Originating from Zhuxian Town, Kaifeng City, Henan Province, China, the long history of Zhuxian Town woodblock prints can be traced back to the Northern Song Dynasty. Initially, these were mainly used for festive decorations during the Spring Festival, mainly to drive away evil spirits and pray for good luck. Their creation and development is closely related to China's ancient engraving and printing technology, which allowed the images to be reproduced in large quantities to meet a wide range of market demands. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints entered their heyday, becoming a nationally famous production base for the carving and printing techniques and the variety of prints. At the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Civil War, with the social unrest and war, the production of woodblock prints in Zhuxianzhen was seriously affected, and many workshops were closed while few craftsmen were left.

##### **3.1.2 Social Function and Cultural Significance**

Zhuxianzhen New Year paintings are not only characteristic decorations, but also carry rich social functions and cultural significance. They reflect the people's living customs as well as moral and aesthetic concepts. Auspicious motifs such as "Fortune", "Longevity" and the God of Door, etc., which are common in the New Year paintings, reflect people's desire for a better life and the expulsion of evil forces. In addition, it records historical events, legends and folk heroes, and is an important window for the study of Chinese history and culture.

##### **3.1.3 Preservation of Existing Woodblock Prints in Zhuxianzhen**

Despite the important cultural value of woodblock prints in Zhuxianzhen, many precious works and

engravings of New Year's Paintings have disappeared or been damaged due to a variety of reasons, including natural erosion, man-made destruction, and the impact of modern lifestyles. Currently, national and local governments have begun to take measures to protect this intangible cultural heritage, including the establishment of museums, the development of digital archives and the organization of training courses in traditional techniques. However, the traditional production process of woodblock prints in Zhuxianzhen is still facing the problem of a lack of successors, which means that the protection and inheritance of the paintings are threatened, and the support and close attention of all sectors of the community are urgently needed.

#### 3.1.4 Subjects and Contents of Woodblock Prints in Zhuxianzhen

The subject matter of Zhuxian Town's woodblock prints is wide and rich in content, including traditional mythological stories, historical figures and folk legends, as well as works reflecting the social life and customs of the time. Among them, images of the God of Door, the God of Wealth and the God of Fortune are the most common, and there are also a large number of works depicting farming scenes, city life and festivals, which vividly show the daily life of ordinary people and the atmosphere of festivals.

#### 3.1.5 Comparison between Woodblock Prints of Zhuxianzhen and Representative New Year Paintings of other Regions

Compared with other regional New Year paintings, Zhuxianzhen New Year paintings have obvious regional characteristics and artistic styles. Compared with the exquisite and delicate Tianjin Yangliuqing New Year Paintings and the strong ethnic flavor of Sichuan Mianzhu New Year Paintings, Zhuxianzhen New Year Paintings pay more attention to the strength of lines and the fullness of colors. In addition, Zhuxianzhen New Year Paintings are also different in the choice of themes, reflecting more cultural characteristics and folk beliefs of the Central Plains. Through comparative analysis, it can be found that Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints occupy an irreplaceable and important position in the art of Chinese New Year paintings.

### 3.2 *Inheritance Value of Woodblock Prints in Zhuxianzhen*

#### 3.2.1 Status in Folk Beliefs

Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints are not only works of art, but also material carriers of folk beliefs. In Chinese traditional culture, New Year paintings carry people's respect for gods and their prayers for the future. The most typical example is the Door God New Year Painting, which is believed to be able to guard the door of the house and drive away evil spirits. In addition, images of various gods and historical heroes were also widely printed in the New Year paintings, which conveyed people's wishes for peace, health, wealth and longevity. Therefore, woodblock prints of Zhuxian Town occupy an important position in folk beliefs.

#### 3.2.2 Educational Value and Dissemination Channels

As an educational tool, Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints can help the younger generation understand and learn about traditional Chinese culture and art. Knowledge of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints can be

effectively disseminated by incorporating them into school art education curricula, organizing exhibitions and seminars, and publishing related books and materials. At the same time, the use of digital media and Internet platforms can bring more people into contact with this traditional art form and enhance public awareness of its value and protection.

### 3.2.3 Protection and Inheritance Strategy

Facing the challenge of the gradual loss of traditional skills, the protection and inheritance of woodblock prints in Zhuxian Town is particularly important. Government agencies should formulate relevant policies and provide financial support to encourage the research and innovation of traditional crafts. At the same time, a master-apprentice system should be established to allow experienced veteran artists to pass on their skills to the younger generation. In addition, by combining with cultural tourism and creative industries, new market demand can be created for Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints so that they can be revitalized in modern society.

Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints are a valuable cultural heritage of China, which not only reflect the customs and beliefs of ancient Chinese society, but also show the unique charm of folk art. In modern society, the inheritance value of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints is not only reflected in the cultural and artistic level, but also lies in its revelation of modern design and its contribution to education. In order to protect and pass on this intangible cultural heritage, the joint efforts of the government, society and individuals are needed. Through effective protection measures and innovative inheritance strategies, Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints will continue to shine in China's cultural treasury.

## 4. Zhuxian Town Woodblock Prints Inheritance and Protection Status and Future Development

### 4.1 Inheritance and Protection Status

#### 4.1.1 Recognition of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints were included in the first national intangible cultural heritage list in 2006, which provides official recognition and support for its protection and inheritance.

#### 4.1.2 Establishment of Educational Bases and Training Courses

In order to better inherit this intangible cultural heritage, Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints came into the campus and set up an education base to cultivate a new generation of inheritors through education and training. At the same time, the Kaifeng City Nongenetic Inheritors Study and Research Training Program class has been formally established and successfully opened, which shows that the local government and organizations are actively taking measures to improve the skill level and innovation ability of the inheritors through professional training.

#### 4.1.3 Display of Cultural Heritage

Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints have been exhibited at various cultural events and fairs, and its spectacular appearance at the 12th China (Shenzhen) International Cultural Industries Fair helped to increase its public visibility and cultural influence.

### 4.2 The Future Development Direction may Show the Following Trends

#### 4.2.1 Innovative Development and Digital Preservation

Facing changes in the market and diversification of consumer demands, Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints may need to innovate on the basis of retaining traditional features, such as developing more new subjects and styles to attract the attention of more young consumers. At the same time, utilizing digital technology to record and display the production process and finished products of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints can spread this art form more widely, while facilitating long-term preservation and research.

#### 4.2.3 International Cooperation and Policy Support

Cooperation with cultural institutions and art groups at home and abroad and the organization of exchange exhibitions can promote Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints to the world and enhance its international influence. The government can continue to provide policy and financial support to encourage the older generation of craftsmen in good health to help the inheritors with their creations and researches, and at the same time provide more innovative opportunities and development platforms for the marketization of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints.

In short, the future development of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints needs to maintain a balance between traditional culture and technological innovation, not only to maintain its unique cultural connotations, but also to adapt to the needs of the market-oriented development of the modern society, so as to achieve the sustainable development of the paintings through the efforts of the local community, the government and the groups of craftspeople in various aspects.

### 5. Market Development of Woodblock Prints in Zhuxianzhen

#### 5.1 Current Situation of Cultural and Creative Development Market

At present, with the rise of cultural and creative industries, the influence of woodblock prints of Zhuxianzhen in the cultural and creative development market is gradually expanding.

On the one hand, as a national intangible cultural heritage, Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints have received more and more people's attention and love. People have begun to pay attention to the inheritance and protection of traditional culture, and have developed a strong interest in Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints with unique artistic style. This has contributed to the increasing demand for Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints in the cultural and creative market, which has promoted the development of related industries.

On the other hand, Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints have shown great potential and value in the design and development of cultural and creative products. By integrating the elements and patterns of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints into various kinds of apparel, household products and jewelry, not only do they enrich the cultural connotation and artistry of the products, but also enhance their added value and market competitiveness. These cultural and creative products are continuously injecting new vitality into the inheritance and development of woodblock prints in Zhuxian Town. With the continuous development and growth of the year-painting cultural and creative industry, the related

industrial chain has been gradually improved, attracting more and more investors and entrepreneurs to join. This not only creates more local employment opportunities, but also promotes the prosperity and development of the local economy.

All in all, Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints have a broad prospect and great potential in the cultural and creative development market. As people's awareness of and attention to traditional culture continue to increase, it is believed that Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints will play a more important role in the future cultural and creative market, and make a greater contribution to the inheritance and development of traditional culture.

## *5.2 Further Expanding Market Influence*

### *5.2.1 Strengthen Brand Image and Positioning*

Establish the unique brand image of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints, emphasizing its long history, rich cultural connotation and high artistic value.

Define the brand positioning and carry out precise marketing for the target audience groups, such as cultural enthusiasts, collectors or consumers of tourist souvenirs.

### *5.2.2 Strengthen Media Publicity and Promotion*

Utilize traditional media such as TV, radio and newspapers, as well as new media platforms such as the Internet and social media, to carry out extensive publicity.

Produce multimedia content such as promotional videos and microfilms to show the production process and artistic charm of woodblock prints in Zhuxian Town.

### *5.2.3 Organize Cultural Exhibitions and Activities*

Organize exhibitions of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints in museums, art galleries and other cultural venues to attract audience attention. Organize yearbook production experience activities to let the public experience the charm of woodblock prints and increase interaction and participation.

### *5.2.4 Integrate into the Tourism Industry Chain*

Promote Zhuxianzhen woodblock print yearbook painting as a local specialty tourism product, and combine it with tourism to increase its popularity. Set up sales points of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints in tourist attractions to provide tourists with opportunities to buy and experience, realizing the win-win situation of cultural value and economic value.

To sum up, to improve the market visibility of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints is not a one-step solution, and it is necessary to comprehensively use a variety of means and methods, starting from the brand image, product design, media publicity, cultural exhibitions, cooperation between industries, universities and research institutes, the tourism industry chain as well as international exchanges and other aspects, to jointly promote the expansion of its market influence. Traditional culture is not static, but needs to be constantly innovated on the basis of protection to meet the needs of modern society. Through investigation and analysis, we can explore the combination point of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints with modern design and modern life, and promote its integration with modern culture to renew its vitality and vigor.

Finally, the study also has a wide range of social significance. Through publicizing and promoting Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints, it can enhance the public's knowledge and understanding of non-heritage culture, and improve the cultural consciousness and cultural confidence of the whole society. At the same time, it can also provide reference for the protection and inheritance of other non-heritage projects, and promote the in-depth development of the whole non-heritage protection work.

## **6. Problems and Solutions**

### *6.1 Problems*

#### **6.1.1 Difficulty of Traditional Skills Inheritance**

With the passing away of the old generation of artists, the new generation of young people have little interest in this skill, resulting in a fault in the inheritance of the skill. In addition, the cost of making Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints is high and the profit is thin, and the learning cycle of the traditional skills is long, which requires a lot of time and energy, which is undoubtedly a great challenge for the young generation pursuing a fast-paced life in the modern society.

#### **6.1.2 Rapidly Changing Market Demand**

With the rapid development of society and the impact of foreign cultures, the aesthetics and needs of consumers are constantly changing. Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints with traditional colors present the image of Chinese New Year characters in modern aesthetic concepts no longer a large number of consumer attention, while the machine offset printing a wide range of New Year's paintings are more in line with the public's aesthetic needs. This has led to a decline in the competitiveness of Zhuxianzhen woodblock print New Year's paintings in the market, and the sales situation is not so satisfactory.

#### **6.1.3 High Cost of Raw Materials**

The production of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints requires the use of high-quality wood and paper and other raw materials, the prices of which are greatly affected by market fluctuations. In recent years, with the implementation of environmental protection policies and the reduction of raw material resources, the cost of raw materials has been rising, which has brought great pressure to the production of New Year paintings.

#### **6.1.4 Insufficient Technological Innovation**

In today's rapidly changing technology, the production technology of woodblock prints in Zhuxian Town is relatively lagging behind. Although the traditional production process is exquisite, it is difficult to meet the demands of the modern market in terms of efficiency and quality. The lack of technological innovation has limited the development space of the New Year's Paintings industry. In modern society, consumers have higher and higher demands for product diversity and personalization, while Zhu Xianzhen woodblock prints are obviously unable to meet the market demand in this regard.



## 6.2 Specific Solutions to the Problems

### 6.2.1 Reinforcement of Skill Training

In order to solve the problem of difficult inheritance of skills, the training of skills can be strengthened. Through the opening of skills training courses, experienced veteran artists can be invited as lecturers to teach traditional skills to the younger generation. At the same time, it can cooperate with educational institutions to incorporate Zhuxianzhen woodblock print technique into the vocational education system and cultivate more professionals.

### 6.2.2 Expand Market Channels

In view of the fast-changing market demand, we can actively expand market channels. Through the combination of online publicity and offline physical sales, the New Year painting products can be promoted to a wider group of consumers. At the same time, it can develop cultural and creative derivatives of New Year's paintings, as well as cooperate and co-brand with famous brands to meet the needs of different consumers.

### 6.2.3 Optimizing Raw Material Procurement While Introducing Modern Technology

In order to reduce the cost of raw materials, raw material procurement can be optimized. Establish long-term cooperative relationships with suppliers to ensure stable supply and quality of raw materials. At the same time, the use of environmentally friendly and renewable alternative materials can be explored, which not only meets the requirements of environmental protection policies, but also reduces costs. In order to enhance technological innovation, modern technology can be actively introduced. For example, digital technology can be used to record and preserve traditional skills to facilitate inheritance and learning. At the same time, the use of modern printing technology, digital design software and other tools can be explored to improve production efficiency and product quality.

In conclusion, in the face of the difficulties and challenges faced by Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints, we need to start from many aspects, strengthening the inheritance of skills, expanding market channels, optimizing the procurement of raw materials as well as the introduction of modern technology and other aspects of the proposed solutions. Through the implementation of these measures, we believe that Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints this traditional art treasure will be able to renew new vitality and vigor.

## Conclusion

As a bright pearl of Chinese traditional culture, Zhuxianzhen woodblock print carries thousands of years of artistic and cultural heritage. It is not only the crystallization of the wisdom of the working people over the generations, but also an important representative of Chinese intangible cultural heritage. In the future, the protection and development of Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints will require the joint efforts of many parties. First of all, we need to deepen the understanding of its artistic value and strengthen the inheritance and protection of non-heritage culture. By organizing various exhibitions, seminars and other activities, more people can understand the historical origin, production process and artistic characteristics of woodblock prints of Zhuxianzhen, so as to stimulate the public's interest in

and love for non-heritage culture. In short, the protection of non-heritage classics and the revitalization of culture is a long-term and arduous task. We need the joint efforts of the whole society, through the combination of inheritance and innovation, so that Zhuxianzhen woodblock prints in the new era glows with a more brilliant luster.

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