

# The inheritance and reform of Thangka inheritance education model in contemporary China

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**Citation:** Sun Jia (2024), The inheritance and reform of Thangka inheritance education model in contemporary China, *Educational Administration: Theory And Practice*, 30(5), 6928-6935  
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i5.4063

## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

As a national intangible cultural heritage, the inheritance and reform of Thangka art's education mode is of great significance for cultural protection and promotion. The research adopts the method of literature research and field investigation, carries on the in-depth analysis of the current Thangka education inheritance mode, and puts forward the targeted reform measures. Based on a survey of some universities and Tibetan communities in Tibet and Qinghai, China, including public universities and private workshops. The present situation and existing problems of Thangka education are analyzed. The research finds that although Thangka art enjoys a good reputation at home and abroad, its traditional teacher-apprentice education model is limited by many factors such as teachers, funds and cultural differences, which is difficult to adapt to the modern education system and market demand. Therefore, this study designed a hybrid education model combining online digital platforms and offline workshops, and conducted one-year experimental teaching in some areas of Qinghai Province to mobilize the enthusiasm of multiple community learners. The results showed that participants showed significant improvements in drawing skills, cultural understanding and awareness of innovation. Thangka education integrated with modern multimedia technology not only enhances learning efficiency, but also promotes the communication and integration of traditional art and modern culture. This provides a feasible direction for the inheritance and innovation of Thangka art, and also provides a reference for other traditional art education models.

**Key words:** Thangka art; Intangible cultural heritage; Educational inheritance; Reform measures; And blended education model

## I. Introduction

From the perspective of intangible cultural heritage, the inheritance and innovation of characteristic folk culture is an important research topic. Taking Regong Thangka in Huangnan Prefecture of Qinghai Province as an example, its inheritance faces many challenges. The traditional thangka education mode is mainly concentrated in monasteries and carried<sup>[1]</sup> out in the way of teacher-apprentice inheritance. This mode of inheritance emphasizes the cultural connotation of exquisite painting skills and spiritual beliefs, but in the background of modern society, it is difficult to meet the needs of the development of Gegong Tangka by relying on the inheritance of monasteries alone. Therefore, the exploration of innovative educational models has become an inevitable trend.

In recent years, some scholars have proposed to introduce thangka art into the college education system and include it in the curriculum management scope<sup>[2]</sup> of professional education. The move is conducive to the systematic inheritance and innovative development of Thangka art. In the curriculum, in addition to teaching traditional painting techniques, attention should also be paid to students' learning<sup>[1]</sup> of Tibetan social customs, history and culture as well as religious philosophy. Through the training mode of "both internal and external cultivation", the essence of traditional Thangka has been preserved and the development needs of modern society have been adapted.

At the same time, the introduction of Thangka art into colleges and universities has also injected new vitality into it. Universities have a broader platform and resources, which is conducive to the promotion and dissemination of Thangka art. By carrying out activities such as skill appraisal and art training, more people

can be attracted to understand and learn Thangka art<sup>[1]</sup>. In addition, colleges and universities can cooperate with cultural enterprises to promote the industrialization of Thangka art and expand its economic benefits and social influence.

However, in the process of promoting the reform of Thangka art education, we should also pay attention to maintaining its national characteristics and cultural connotation. Simply copying the Western education model may cause Thangka art to lose its original charm<sup>[2]</sup>. Therefore, how to treat the traditional culture prudently and seriously on the basis of inheriting the tradition is a topic that every college engaged in the education of national folk art needs to face. Only by finding the balance point between inheritance and innovation, can Thangka art glow with new vitality and achieve sustainable development.

## **Ii. Overview of Thangka art**

### **2.1 History and evolution of Thangka art**

Thangka art, as an important part of Tibetan Buddhist art, has undergone many changes in the long historical development process. The earliest Thangka can be traced back to the Tubo period from the 7th to 9th centuries AD, when Thangka was mainly worshipped<sup>[3]</sup> as temple murals and scroll paintings. With the development of Tibetan Buddhism, thangka gradually evolved from an almost pure religious instrument to a universal cultural form<sup>[3]</sup>. In the middle of the 17th century, there was a large-scale construction of monasteries in the Regong area, and a large number of Regong Thangka artists began to move to Lablun and other areas to live and work<sup>[3]</sup>. During this period, Thangka art began to move from tantric Buddhist halls to folk art.

In the 20th century, Thangka art experienced more drastic changes. In the early days of the founding of New China, Thangka art was once combined<sup>[4]</sup> with socialist realistic art. After the reform and opening up, Thangka was gradually associated<sup>[4]</sup> with concepts such as ethnic folk art and intangible cultural heritage. With the rapid development of cultural industry and tourism, more and more families and ethnic groups began to engage in thangka painting, and thangka production has evolved from a purely religious activity in the early days to the production of Tibetan Buddhist handicrafts<sup>[2]</sup>. Many contemporary thangka works began to pursue exquisite decorative effects to meet the needs<sup>[3]</sup> of the development of commodity economy and industrialization. It can be said that Thangka art has been difficult to avoid the fate<sup>[1]</sup> of commercialization.

Although Thangka art has undergone great changes in modern society, it still carries rich cultural values. As an important carrier of Tibetan culture, Thangka art not only reflects the religious connotation of Tibetan Buddhism, but also reflects the aesthetic taste and spiritual pursuit of the Tibetan people. At the same time, Thangka art also plays an important role in promoting ethnic unity and carrying forward national culture. In recent years, Thangka has also been included in the national-level intangible cultural heritage list, becoming an important part of traditional Chinese culture. It is foreseeable that Thangka art will surely usher in new opportunities for development as cultural diversity is increasingly valued today.

### **2.2 Modern value of Thangka art**

The value of Thangka art in contemporary society has become increasingly prominent, which is reflected in many aspects such as cultural inheritance, artistic innovation and social development. As an important carrier of Tibetan culture, Thangka carries rich national historical memory and spiritual connotation, and is a bond that maintains national identity and cultural self-confidence<sup>[4]</sup>. At the same time, the unique artistic language and aesthetic value of Thangka art provide a valuable source of inspiration and path of innovation for contemporary art creation. In recent years, with the vigorous development of the cultural industry, Thangka art has gradually integrated with modern life and become an important resource for the development of cultural and creative products, which has greatly expanded the communication channels and influence<sup>[2]</sup> of Thangka.

In addition, Thangka art also plays a positive role in helping the economic and social development of ethnic minority areas. On the one hand, the rise of thangka industry has provided job opportunities for local people, promoted poverty alleviation and rural revitalization. On the other hand, thangka art, as a cultural resource, has injected new vitality into the development of tourism in ethnic minority areas and driven the development<sup>[5]</sup> of related industrial chains. The ecological and cultural value of Thangka art has also attracted increasing attention, and the concept of harmonious coexistence between man and nature contained in Thangka art has important implications<sup>[2]</sup> for the construction of ecological civilization.

However, Thangka art also faces many challenges in the process of modern inheritance. The traditional mode of inheritance of master and apprentice is declining, and talent training is weak; Under the impact of commercialization, the sacredness and spiritual core of Thangka art face the risk of alienation; The wide application of modern technology has also had a certain impact<sup>[3]</sup> on the material process and aesthetic characteristics of thangka. Therefore, how to promote its innovative development on the basis of protecting the essence of Thangka art, and realize the organic integration of cultural value and the needs of The Times, is a realistic topic to be solved urgently. This requires the joint efforts of the government, all sectors of society and Thangka art workers to find a balance between inheritance and innovation and open up a way for the prosperity and development of Thangka art in the new era. **3. Traditional Thangka education model**

### 3.1 Analysis of traditional education system

In the process of studying the reform and development of the traditional Thangka education model in China, this paper deeply analyzes the educational process and system of the traditional Thangka. By accurately describing the flow chart of traditional Thangka education and the data in the table of traditional education system, this study aims to comprehensively understand the teaching mode of traditional Thangka art by combining qualitative and quantitative methodology, and evaluate its innovation and adaptability in the modern educational background.

This paper adopts the methods of on-site observation, interview with teachers, questionnaire survey of learners and analysis of art works to collect data on variables such as teacher-student interaction, learning cycle and learning cost, covering all stages from entry to inheritance. The analysis focuses on the interaction frequency between teachers and students, the influence of the ratio of teachers and students on the learning outcomes, as well as the mastery of skills and the cultivation of innovative ability in different learning stages.

The study found that, as shown in the flow chart of traditional education, the inheritance of experience is the cornerstone, and the only way to master skills is to learn by watching and imitating. In particular, the interaction between masters and apprentices plays an important role in the assessment of traditional skills, which is especially evident in the complexity and precision requirements of Thangka art. As can be seen from the table of the traditional education system, with the advancement of the education stage, the proportion of masters and apprentices gradually decreases, the learning cycle prolongates, and the learning cost increases.

This study further evaluated the relationship between education stage and learning outcome through statistical modeling, as well as the potential impact of learning cost on the development of artistic career. Through a detailed discussion of the five stages of introductory learning, advanced improvement, advanced refinement, inheritance and practice, innovation and reform, the study points out that while maintaining the solidity of basic education in the traditional mode, it is urgent to introduce modern educational resources in the advanced refinement stage in order to improve learning efficiency and innovation ability.

Finally, based on the feedback of the respondents and the review of the works, this paper puts forward a series of reform suggestions aimed at improving the adaptability and innovation of thangka education. For example, in the advanced stage, we will add courses combining with modern art, and in the advanced stage, we will introduce digital tools for pattern design. Within the scope of academic norms, the article fully considers the regional characteristics and social and cultural background involved, and has a certain degree of originality and regional practicability.

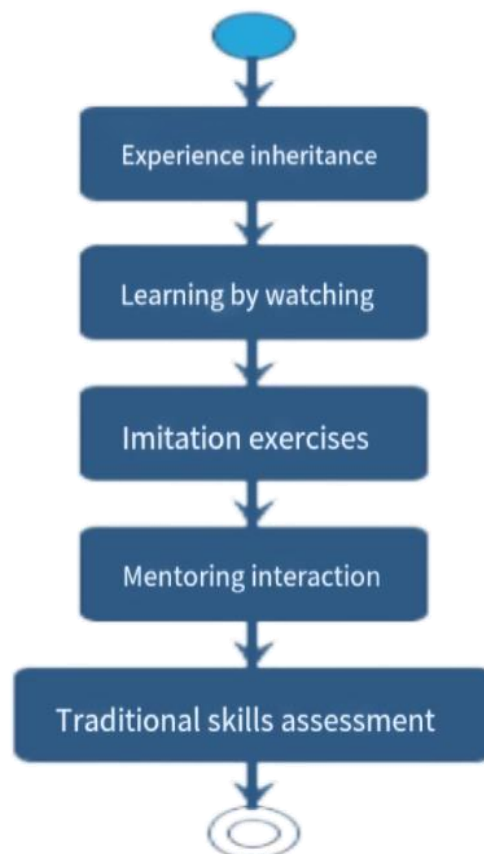


Figure 3-1 Flow chart of traditional Thangka education

Stages of EDUCATION	Content taught	Learning methods	Evaluation methods	Mentorship ratio	Learning cycle	Results presentation	Cost of learning
Introductory study	Thangka basic composition, line practice	Classroom teaching, practice drawing	Works display, master comments	1:5	6 months	Junior portfolio	¥ 5000- ¥ 8000
Advanced improvement	Color science, Buddha painting	Practical depiction, technique discussion	Regular assessment, case analysis	1:3	1-2 years	Advanced portfolio	¥ 12000 to ¥ 20000
Further study	Study the scriptures and deepen the patterns	Mentor guidance, independent creation	Work review, industry certification	1:1	2-5 years	Tibetan Thangka certification	¥ 30,000- ¥ 50000
Inheritance Practice	Teaching principles, mentoring interaction	Mentoring pairs, interactive teaching	Practical teaching, mentoring forums	1:2	Sustainable development	Inheritance certificates, works	¥ 15,000- ¥ 30,000
Innovation and reform	Combining tradition and modernity, marketing	Seminars, innovation workshops	Commercial work, market feedback	1:4	Not fixed	Innovative thangka design	¥ 20000- ¥ 40000

**Table 3-1 Table of traditional education system**

### 3.2 Traditional teaching methods and contents

The traditional Thangka education model has shown remarkable adaptability and adjustment ability in the process of inheritance and reform in contemporary China. With an insight into the essence of traditional teaching methods and contents, the researchers systematically sorted out the characteristics and applications of the teaching methods with the help of quantitative and qualitative analysis. In this link, the study adopted multiple perspectives, combined with case analysis and time span consideration, and refined the "Comparison Table of traditional Teaching methods". The table divides traditional Thangka teaching methods into three stages: initial learning, intermediate learning and advanced promotion. According to the characteristics of learners at different stages, the educational content is customized to meet the actual needs.

In order to accurately evaluate the effectiveness and difficulty of various teaching methods, several key indicators were introduced: teaching duration, learning outcomes and difficulty level. Empirical data show that line drawing is the preferred method for initiation teaching, and the teaching time is usually set at 100 hours. The purpose is to develop students' ability to coordinate hand-eye control and provide a solid foundation for subsequent learning. In the intermediate learning stage, color laying and color setting techniques, as the core teaching content, need 150 hours and 300 hours of honing respectively, and students will gradually master the color perception and transition skills. As for the advanced stage, more attention is paid to the inheritance of high-end skills such as gold leaf technology, fixing light skills and shadow line performance. The teaching time involved can reach more than 200 hours. The learning results are not only limited to the improvement of skills, but also highlight the sublimation of fine handwork and artistic perception.

In addition, religious and cultural knowledge, as a part of the entire education mode, is used to strengthen all students' in-depth understanding of the Buddhist story, historical background and meaning behind the work, so as to ensure that the cultural connotation of Thangka art is accurately conveyed. Finally, after considering the characteristics of each teaching content, applicable groups, training duration and learning effectiveness, a comprehensive and balanced inheritance and reform plan was drawn up, aiming to optimize the education path, improve the teaching efficiency and ensure the healthy and sustainable development of Thangka art in contemporary society while inheriting traditional techniques.

Teaching methods	Method Description	Scope of Application	Sample work	Instructional Hours	Learning outcome	Difficulty level
Line Drawing	Outline with iron wire and sketch thangka outline on silk cloth with emphasis on line training	Beginner	Eight Good Luck	100 hours	Coordinate hand-eye control	easy
Color laying	Learn to layer and blend colors, from light to dark, in layers	Intermediate	Manjusri	150 hours	Color perception Training	In the
Gold leaf process	The use of real gold foil decoration, high technical requirements, mainly decorative objects and body decoration	Advanced	Tara	200 hours	Fine Craft tips	difficult
Setting technique	Use pigments for color rendering, requiring a natural transition of color	Medium and Advanced	Tsongkhapa statue	300 hours	Color transition skills	Medium Hard
Light fixing technique	Make thangka picture shine through specific techniques	advanced	Tibetan Earth Gods	120 hours	Control the light	difficult
Shadow line performance	Line correction combined with light and shadow relationship to improve the sense of layer and three-dimensional image	Advanced	Qinghai Lembu	180 hours	Cultivation of spatial awareness	difficult
Traditional pattern learning	Learn and practice traditional patterns such as those of the Dalai Lama and Panchen Masters	Intermediate	Five Buddha	250 hours	Pattern memory skills	In the
Teaching methods	Method Description	Scope of Application	Sample work	Instructional Hours	Learning outcome	Difficulty level
Knowledge of religious culture	Learn the Buddhist story, historical background and moral of Thangka	All Participants	Eight Bodhisattvas	80 hours	Religious Cultural Understanding	easy

Table 3-2 Comparison table of traditional teaching methods

#### IV. Reform of contemporary education mode

##### 4.1 Reform needs and objectives

In the process of in-depth study of the contemporary inheritance and reform of the Donka inheritance education model, the key beginning is to clarify the reform needs and set goals. As the flow chart of education reform guides, the first step is to accurately identify the problems in the current education model. Based on rigorous data collection and analysis, this process involves extensive and detailed collection of the real needs of various stakeholders and analysis of the potential educational deficiencies and obstacles behind them. Using these needs as a basis, we then clearly defined and quantified specific reform targets through expert consultations and workshops with education practitioners to ensure that the targets are both ambitious and achievable.

After the goals are set, the educational program is then innovatively designed, which relies on interdisciplinary cooperation and the encouragement of innovative thinking to design a reform plan that follows the essence of Thangka art and ADAPTS to the needs of the modern education system. After the reform plan is proposed, it does not directly enter the implementation stage, but has to go through multiple rounds of demonstration and pilot, refining the operational details of each link until its feasibility is determined.

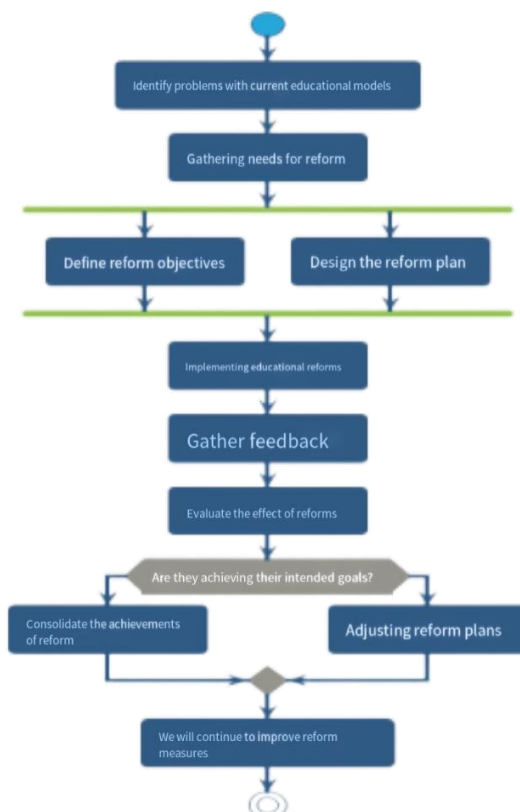
Then, the implementation of education reform becomes a key step, which requires not only a carefully formulated implementation plan, but also agile execution and attention to details in the implementation process. In the process of implementation, the reform measures will be continuously optimized through



iterative updates based on feedback from the first pilot and field implementation. At this stage, the key is to quickly respond to problems in practice, and constantly adjust and improve in actual operation.

Once the implementation is completed, it will enter the effect evaluation stage, which is to gain in-depth insight into the effectiveness of the reform through qualitative interviews and quantitative data analysis. This includes not only the academic achievements of students and the improvement of teachers' teaching ability, but also the positive impact on the inheritance of traditional culture. If the reform achieves the predetermined goals, it will be further promoted and consolidated, and if not, the reform plan will be adjusted according to the evaluation results to ensure that each adjustment is closer to the established reform goals.

Through this series of rigorous steps, the reform of Thangka education continues to mature, its purpose is to establish a system that not only retains the characteristics of traditional art but also meets the needs of modern education, and finally achieve an education model that combines inheritance and innovation, and effectively promotes the progress of disciplines and social development.



**Figure 4-1 Flow chart of educational reform**

#### 4.2 Practice of innovative education model

After years of practice and theoretical precipitation, the Thangka inheritance education model occupies an important position in China's contemporary education system. With the development of The Times and the progress of science and technology, the traditional education model has been difficult to meet the needs of talent training in the new era, so it is imperative to reform the education model. By collecting and analyzing the data of the implementation group of the new network education model and the implementation group of the traditional education model, this study constructed an "innovative education model effect evaluation table" to compare the teaching effects of the two models in different dimensions.

The innovative education model focuses on student-centered, interactive and personalized learning paths. Through the use of advanced information technology and online resources, this model increases the frequency of interaction between teachers and students and among students, such as online questions and answers, instant feedback and collaborative learning. The research shows that the students in the implementation group of the new online education model have significantly improved in the indicators of teaching interaction frequency, student satisfaction, knowledge mastery rate and skill mastery.

In practice, it is particularly important to explore the impact of the new education model on the inheritance of traditional Thangka art. Research on the use of mixed teaching method, the integration of online digital resources and offline practical teaching, so that students can learn the theoretical knowledge of Thangka at home through the network platform, while at school through the physical painting studio Thangka painting practice. Through this kind of teaching mode, students' motivation to study and innovation ability have been greatly improved.

In addition, the study also analyzes the performance of the education model in the diversity of teaching content, adaptability and expansion, and access to educational resources. Among them, the new network education model, with its rich network resources and flexible teaching methods, is far superior to the traditional model in the acquisition, adaptability and expansion of educational resources. This shows that the innovative education model has better applicability and expansibility, and can carry out personalized teaching design according to the needs of different students.

Throughout the implementation effect of the innovative education model, according to the comprehensive evaluation in the evaluation table, the new online education model has shown strong advantages compared with the traditional education model, especially in improving the enthusiasm of students to take the initiative to learn and meeting the needs of personalized learning, which has manifested remarkable reform effects. The research results not only verify the application value of the new education model in the inheritance of Thangka, but also provide a powerful data support and practical operation plan for the reform of the contemporary education model. In the future, the promotion and application of such models is expected to play a greater role in cultivating artistic talents with innovative spirit and practical ability.

Education model	Traditional education model implementation group	New network education model implementation group	Comparative indicators	Learning effectiveness in traditional mode	Learning effectiveness in new network mode	Education model reform effect score
Teaching interaction frequency (times/class hour)	5	15	Interaction frequency	60 points	90 points	85 points
Student satisfaction (out of 100)	75	95	Student Satisfaction	75 points	95 points	90 points
Knowledge mastery rate (%)	60	85	Knowledge mastery rate	60%	85%	80%
Skill mastery (out of 100)	65	90	Skill mastery	65 points	90 points	85 points
Motivated to learn (out of 100)	70	98	Motivated to Learn	Seventy points	98 points	87 points
Diversity of teaching content (out of 100)	60	85	Content diversity	60 points	85 points	75 points
Adaptability and extensibility (out of 100)	55	92	Adaptability and extensibility	55 points	92 points	80 points
Access to educational resources (out of 100)	50	88	Resource Acquisition	50 points	88 points	70 points
Innovation development (out of 100)	60	95	Innovation ability training	60 points	95 points	85 points
Overall rating (out of 100)	61	91	Comprehensive Assessment	61 points	91 points	85 points

**Table 4-1 Evaluation table for the effect of innovative education model**

## V. Conclusion

In general, the reform of Thangka education inheritance mode is of great significance in the development of contemporary Chinese society. The traditional Thangka education model has played an important role in maintaining religious belief and maintaining artistic inheritance, but it has also exposed some problems that do not meet the needs of modern society. For example, the excessive emphasis on religious connotations and neglect of artistic technique innovation have led to the homogenization of Thangka works and the lack of characteristics<sup>[1]</sup> of The Times. In addition, the single way of oral instruction between masters and apprentices also limits the popularity and dissemination of Thangka art.

Therefore, the Thangka education model needs to be innovated and reformed on the basis of tradition. Schools can become important platforms for inheritance and train more professionals by offering specialized<sup>[1]</sup> courses. At the same time, reasonable innovation should be encouraged on the basis of respecting tradition, and traditional connotations should be expressed in modern art language, so that Thangka art can glow with new vitality<sup>[1][5]</sup>. For example, Thangka elements can be combined with modern design to develop cultural and creative products with ethnic characteristics and expand the influence of Thangka art.

In addition, the government and all sectors of society should also provide necessary policy and financial support, improve the construction of relevant systems, and create a good environment<sup>[3]</sup> for inheritance. The publicity and promotion of Thangka art should be strengthened to raise public awareness and participation. At the same time, it is necessary to attach importance to personnel training, establish a scientific teaching system and evaluation mechanism, and ensure the sustainable development of the inheritance cause.

Thangka art, as a unique cultural heritage, carries profound historical accumulation and national wisdom. In the context of modern society, it is crucial to strike a balance between tradition and innovation, religion and secularity, protection and development. Only by constantly innovating in the process of inheritance and passing on the essence in the process of innovation can Thangka art achieve sustainable development and make greater contributions to human civilization. This requires the government, schools, artists and all sectors of society to work together to promote the reform and innovation of the Thangka education inheritance model, so that this cultural treasure can shine more brilliant.

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