

# The Stylistic Characteristics of Wooden Carts

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## ABSTRACT

Wooden carts, as a traditional folk art form with a long history and rich cultural significance, possess unique stylistic features and artistic charm that merit in-depth research and discussion. This paper conducts a comprehensive analysis from multiple perspectives, including the imagery, artistic characteristics, and cultural connotations of wooden carts, to reveal the aesthetic value and symbolic meaning of their design. The study finds that the form, color application, decorative patterns, and material selection of wooden carts all reflect distinct ethnic styles and regional characteristics. Beyond their unique artistic appeal, wooden carts embody profound symbolic meanings and cultural significance, serving as important carriers of ethnic cultural heritage. Furthermore, wooden carts hold broad application prospects in modern design, offering fresh inspiration and vitality to product design, architectural design, and artistic creation. The paper also examines the challenges in the preservation and transmission of wooden carts and proposes corresponding countermeasures, aiming to provide insights for the protection and development of this intangible cultural heritage.

## KEYWORDS

Wooden Cart; Imagery; Artistic Characteristics; Cultural Connotation; Preservation and Innovation.

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## 1. OVERVIEW OF WOODEN CARTS

### 1.1. The Origins and Development of Wooden Carts

Wooden carts, as a traditional folk art form with a long history, can be traced back to the Ming and Qing dynasties. According to historical records, during agricultural off-seasons, people in certain regions would use locally available plants to weave small carts in various shapes. These carts served as children's toys, home decorations, or were used for ritual purposes. Over time, the craftsmanship and design styles of wooden carts gradually developed distinct regional characteristics and spread across different areas. In modern times, as a form of folk handicraft, wooden cart-making has gained increasing recognition for its artistic and cultural significance. It has become an important medium for promoting local ethnic culture and has attracted the attention of artists and designers alike.

### 1.2. Types and Functions of Wooden Carts

Wooden carts can be categorized into different types based on their shapes and uses. The most common designs include horse-shaped carts, boat-shaped carts, and house-shaped carts, often inspired by people's living environments and aesthetic preferences. Besides their decorative and ornamental value, wooden carts serve various functions, such as children's toys and ritual objects. In some regions, people create wooden carts during important festivals as symbols of good fortune,

wishing for prosperity in the coming year. In certain cultures, wooden carts are believed to ward off evil spirits and disasters, acting as folk symbols of protection for family members. Thus, wooden carts are not only an artistic expression but also embody rich cultural meanings, reflecting the local way of life and spiritual beliefs[1].

### **1.3. Craftsmanship of Wooden Carts**

The craftsmanship of wooden carts is traditional and intricate, passed down through generations. The process begins with selecting suitable natural materials such as palm leaves, reeds, and vines, which are flexible and easy to weave. The materials are then processed and woven according to the desired shape, requiring mastery of various weaving techniques, including interlacing, knotting, and braiding, to create delicate cart designs. Proportion and form must be carefully controlled during the process, and colorful decorative elements, such as shells and feathers, are often embedded to enhance the visual appeal[2]. The final step involves painting and coloring, with wooden carts traditionally featuring vibrant hues that showcase strong ethnic characteristics. Despite the complexity of the process, each step reflects the artisan's skill and creativity, demonstrating the unique charm of traditional folk craftsmanship.

### **1.4. Modern Applications of Wooden Carts**

With the growing awareness of cultural heritage preservation, wooden carts, as a folk art form, have found new opportunities and applications in contemporary society. On one hand, wooden carts have been included in the list of intangible cultural heritage, receiving protection from both government and private organizations, ensuring the continuity of traditional craftsmanship. On the other hand, the artistic appeal and cultural significance of wooden carts have captivated designers, leading to their creative adaptation in product design, architectural decoration, and handicraft production, infusing new vitality into wooden cart culture. Additionally, with the influence of new media, wooden cart culture has gained broader exposure and recognition both domestically and internationally, emerging as an important representation of China's outstanding traditional culture.

## **2. ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF WOODEN CARTS**

### **2.1. Morphological Characteristics of Wooden Carts**

The design of wooden carts is distinctive, showcasing unique ethnic styles and regional characteristics. In terms of overall shape, wooden carts are mostly rectangular or oval, with a streamlined structure and smooth, graceful lines, presenting a visually elegant and dignified impression. Their proportions are meticulously balanced, achieving a harmonious visual appeal. The structural design of wooden carts is both practical and decorative, seamlessly integrating functional components such as the body, wheels, and handles with intricate patterns, reflecting the artisan's creativity and craftsmanship. The decorative elements on wooden carts are rich and diverse, featuring common motifs such as various animals, plants, and auspicious symbols, each imbued with deep cultural meanings[3].

#### **2.1.1. Color Application in Wooden Carts**

The use of color in wooden carts is highly distinctive, demonstrating the artisan's refined sense of color and artistic insight. The primary colors used in wooden carts include bright and saturated hues such as red, yellow, green, and blue, along with deeper shades like crimson, dark green, and indigo. The color schemes range from strong contrasts to smooth gradients, adding vibrancy to the carts while conveying profound cultural symbolism. For instance, red represents festivity and good fortune[4], yellow signifies wealth and prosperity, green symbolizes vitality, and blue conveys peace and serenity. The unique color choices not only highlight the artisan's skill but also incorporate the aesthetic

preferences and spiritual aspirations of the local ethnic group, making color a crucial aspect of wooden cart artistry.

### 2.1.2. Decorative Patterns on Wooden Carts

The decorative patterns on wooden carts are crafted with ingenuity, reflecting the artisan's appreciation for nature and aspirations for a prosperous life. Common motifs include animal figures, floral designs, and auspicious totems, all carrying symbolic meanings. For example, bats represent good fortune, fish symbolize abundance and prosperity, and lotus flowers embody purity and integrity. The arrangement of these patterns is carefully designed, whether symmetrical, embedded, simple, or intricate, giving the wooden carts a strong visual impact and a sense of depth. The materials used for decoration, such as shells, feathers, and painted designs, further enhance the artistic appeal of the carts. These exquisite patterns not only showcase the remarkable craftsmanship of folk artisans but also reflect the local people's reverence for nature and their hopes for a better life[5].

### 2.1.3. Material Selection for Wooden Carts

The choice of materials for wooden carts highlights the close relationship between artisans and nature while showcasing the ingenuity and diligence of the local ethnic groups. The main materials used include locally available natural plants such as palm leaves, reeds, and vines, which are flexible and easy to weave, making them ideal for wooden cart production. Decorative materials are even more diverse, including shells, feathers, dried flowers, and paint, all derived from nature's bounty. This use of natural materials not only minimizes environmental impact but also embodies the philosophy of harmonious coexistence with nature. Additionally, these materials are highly durable, allowing wooden carts to be preserved and passed down for generations, making them an enduring testament to ethnic craftsmanship. Overall, the material selection for wooden carts reflects a close affinity with nature, respect for ecology, and a deep-rooted appreciation for aesthetics and functionality.

## 2.2. The Artistic Design of Wooden Carts

The design of wooden carts exemplifies the unique aesthetic principles and artistic aspirations of ethnic cultures. In terms of overall structure, wooden carts feature smooth lines, well-balanced proportions, and a simple yet elegant form, embodying the traditional Chinese aesthetic concept of "harmony between man and nature." This design philosophy seamlessly integrates the beauty of nature into artistic expression. The detailed decorative elements, such as animal motifs and auspicious symbols, further enhance the cultural depth of wooden carts, reflecting the ethnic heritage of the artisans. The use of bold and innovative colors, whether through striking contrasts or smooth transitions, demonstrates the artisans' exceptional mastery of color. Overall, the refined design of wooden carts encapsulates the rich aesthetic values of ethnic groups, making them a remarkable representation of traditional artistic craftsmanship[6].

### 2.2.1. Ethnic Styles in Wooden Carts

Wooden carts encapsulate the lifestyle, aesthetic values, and cultural traditions of the ethnic groups that create them. The choice of shapes often stems from local environments and customs-horse-drawn carts symbolize travel, while boat-shaped carts reflect the cultural ties to water-based communities. Additionally, the decorative motifs, such as auspicious totems and mythical creatures, embody traditional beliefs and cultural symbols. The colors used in wooden carts, including classic shades like ochre red and indigo blue, are rooted in local natural landscapes and artistic traditions. Moreover, the material selection and crafting techniques are closely linked to the ecological environment and traditional handicraft heritage of the region. Thus, wooden carts serve as a microcosm of the ethnic culture, preserving and conveying the values and wisdom of their creators.

### 2.2.2. Symbolic Meaning of Wooden Carts

Beyond their artistic appeal, wooden carts carry deep symbolic significance. The shapes of these carts often hold cultural meanings—horse-drawn carts signify smooth travels, boat-shaped carts symbolize favorable journeys, fish motifs represent abundance and prosperity, and lotus flowers embody purity and virtue. Common auspicious totems, such as sun symbols representing eternal life and thunder motifs signifying power and authority, further enrich the symbolic value of wooden carts. The colors also convey cultural meanings: red denotes celebration, yellow signifies prosperity, and green represents vitality. Wooden carts thus encapsulate the aspirations and spiritual pursuits of their creators, serving as a key medium for cultural identity and heritage[7].

### 2.2.3. Innovation and Preservation of Wooden Carts

While preserving the tradition of wooden carts, it is essential to incorporate innovative elements to harmonize the past with the present. On one hand, modern geometric shapes and abstract patterns can be introduced into wooden cart designs, aligning them with contemporary aesthetics. On the other hand, the adoption of new materials, such as eco-friendly recycled materials, can breathe new life into this traditional craft. While retaining the classic shapes and decorative elements of wooden carts, selectively integrating modern design trends can revitalize their artistic appeal. Additionally, expanding the functional applications of wooden carts—such as incorporating them into product design, architectural decoration, and other creative industries—can seamlessly integrate this traditional art form into modern life. By balancing preservation and innovation, wooden carts, as an invaluable intangible cultural heritage, can continue to flourish and evolve.

## 2.3. The Cultural Connotations of Wooden Carts

### 2.3.1. Cultural Symbolism of Wooden Carts

Wooden carts are not just a unique folk art form; they also serve as an important cultural symbol for local ethnic groups. Their shapes, patterns, and colors are deeply rooted in the natural environment, lifestyle, and spiritual beliefs of their creators. For example, common motifs such as sun and thunder totems represent reverence for nature and early religious beliefs, while animal symbols like horses and fish embody aspirations for smooth journeys and prosperity. The distinctive regional characteristics of wooden carts, including their unique shapes and culturally significant colors, serve as markers of ethnic identity, reflecting a strong sense of cultural pride and belonging. Thus, wooden carts encapsulate the artistic spirit, aesthetic values, and way of life of their creators, making them a significant vessel for cultural heritage.

### 2.3.2. Mythological and Legendary Influences on Wooden Carts

The designs and decorations of wooden carts are often inspired by mythology and folklore, reflecting early spiritual beliefs and a deep respect for nature. In some regions, the shape of wooden carts is linked to sun deities, with solar totems on the carts symbolizing eternal life. In other areas, wooden carts are designed to resemble lightning, signifying power and divine protection against evil[8]. The frequent depiction of horses in wooden cart designs is often associated with sacred messengers believed to bring good fortune. Similarly, motifs such as bats symbolize longevity and happiness, while lotus flowers represent purity and transcendence. These mythological elements highlight the artisans' imagination while expressing the community's reverence for the natural world and their pursuit of harmony.

### 2.3.3. Wooden Carts in Festivals and Celebrations

Wooden carts play a significant role in local festivals and celebrations, serving as cultural symbols and decorative elements. During the Lunar New Year, people create wooden carts with auspicious motifs and hang them in homes or doorways to wish for prosperity in the coming year. During harvest festivals, wooden carts are adorned with grains and fruits as a gesture of gratitude to nature. In some

wedding ceremonies, newlyweds ride elaborately crafted wooden carts, symbolizing a harmonious and blissful marriage. Additionally, wooden carts are commonly used in religious and ritualistic events, serving as offerings and sacred symbols. Thus, wooden carts are deeply embedded in the festival traditions of various ethnic groups, enriching the celebratory atmosphere and reinforcing cultural heritage.

#### **2.3.4. Wooden Carts and Folk Beliefs**

The shapes and decorative elements of wooden carts are closely tied to local folk beliefs. Solar and thunder totems often signify reverence for natural forces, while animals like horses and fish are regarded as sacred symbols of good fortune. Many wooden carts are designed with the intention of bringing blessings, such as ensuring safe travels or warding off evil. In several regions, wooden carts are believed to possess protective powers, acting as guardians of family safety[9]. These folk beliefs are deeply ingrained in wooden cart designs, making them tangible representations of spiritual and cultural traditions.

### **3. THE SOCIAL VALUE OF WOODEN CARTS**

#### **3.1. Educational Significance of Wooden Carts**

Wooden carts are not only a unique form of ethnic folk art but also hold significant educational value. Firstly, the craftsmanship involved in wooden cart making—including weaving techniques, design principles, and color coordination—serves as an excellent educational tool for teaching traditional handicraft skills, fostering students’ hands-on abilities and aesthetic appreciation. Secondly, the intricate patterns and symbolic meanings of wooden carts encapsulate local ethnic knowledge and life wisdom, making them valuable materials for ethnic and cultural education. Additionally, the positive meanings associated with wooden carts, such as good fortune, harmony, and prosperity, can be incorporated into moral and patriotic education, promoting optimism and resilience. Furthermore, the process of creating wooden carts helps develop students’ creativity and teamwork skills. In summary, as a cultural treasure, wooden carts possess both artistic and educational significance, making them worth integrating into the education system for cultural preservation and skill development.

#### **3.2. Tourism Development Potential of Wooden Carts**

As a distinctive ethnic cultural symbol, wooden carts hold immense potential for tourism development. On one hand, wooden carts are visually appealing and carry commemorative value, making them ideal for tourism souvenirs and handicraft markets. On the other hand, the process of crafting wooden carts can be transformed into an interactive cultural experience for tourists, allowing them to engage with and appreciate traditional folk art firsthand. Additionally, wooden cart culture can be integrated into local ethnic festivals, serving as an essential part of celebrations and offering visitors a unique cultural immersion. Some regions could also establish wooden cart-themed parks or museums, showcasing the historical origins, craftsmanship, and cultural significance of these artifacts, thus adding new attractions to cultural tourism. By intelligently incorporating wooden cart culture into the tourism industry, local economies can benefit from increased revenue while simultaneously strengthening cultural heritage and promoting soft power. The fusion of culture and tourism creates a win-win situation for economic and cultural development.

#### **3.3. Market Value of Wooden Carts**

Beyond their cultural significance, wooden carts also hold substantial market potential. As handcrafted folk art, they boast unparalleled artistic appeal and collectible value, making them highly sought-after as cultural and creative products. Furthermore, the unique design elements and symbolic

motifs of wooden carts can be incorporated into modern product design, adding ethnic charm to contemporary goods and enhancing their market appeal. Additionally, wooden cart culture itself can be developed into an intellectual property (IP) brand, leading to the creation of related merchandise and cultural derivatives, thereby opening new revenue streams. Moreover, the craftsmanship of wooden carts can be marketed as an immersive cultural experience, catering to the growing consumer interest in intangible cultural heritage activities. Overall, the market prospects for wooden carts are vast, and with innovative development and strategic branding, they have the potential to become a driving force in the cultural industry[10].

### **3.4. International Influence of Wooden Carts**

As a treasured cultural heritage of China, wooden carts have gained widespread recognition and acclaim on the global stage. The exquisite craftsmanship, intricate designs, and artistic value of wooden carts have earned high praise from the international art community, where they are regarded as masterpieces of folk craftsmanship. Wooden carts have been featured in various international craft exhibitions, winning numerous awards and showcasing the beauty of Chinese traditional handicrafts. Moreover, the cultural depth and aesthetic philosophy embodied in wooden carts have been well-received in global cultural circles, recognized as representations of China's unique artistic identity. Many prestigious foreign museums and art institutions have included wooden carts in their collections as emblematic artifacts of Chinese ethnic culture. Evidently, wooden carts not only serve as cultural treasures of local heritage but also act as ambassadors for Chinese culture on the international stage, playing a crucial role in enhancing China's soft power and promoting its cultural legacy worldwide.

## **4. THE APPLICATION OF WOODEN CART DESIGN IN MODERN DESIGN**

### **4.1. The Use of Wooden Cart Elements in Modern Design**

The unique structural elements, decorative patterns, and color schemes of wooden carts provide new sources of inspiration and creativity for modern design. In the field of product design, wooden cart motifs have been skillfully incorporated into household items, fashion accessories, and more, adding a distinctive ethnic touch. For example, some tea sets or ceramic artworks borrow the smooth lines and well-balanced proportions of wooden carts, while traditional auspicious animal totems from wooden cart designs are frequently used in textile patterns to symbolize good fortune. In graphic and advertising design, wooden cart elements are creatively adapted into brand logos, posters, and promotional materials, creating a strong visual impact. The vibrant and bold colors of wooden carts also serve as a source of inspiration for modern color schemes. Overall, integrating wooden cart elements into modern design not only produces works rich in ethnic charm but also revitalizes China's cultural heritage by infusing it with contemporary appeal.

### **4.2. The Influence of Wooden Cart Shapes on Architectural Design**

The aesthetic principles of wooden cart design have also inspired and influenced modern architectural design. Some architects have drawn from the flowing lines, symmetrical proportions, and balanced structures of wooden carts to create buildings with a distinctive Oriental charm. For example, a renowned museum has adopted an oval shape inspired by the contours of a wooden cart, with its smooth curves and elegant form reflecting the essence of traditional Chinese aesthetics. Additionally, many interior spaces feature decorative patterns derived from wooden carts, such as lotus flowers and auspicious clouds, to evoke an atmosphere steeped in Chinese cultural heritage[11]. The bold color combinations found in wooden carts have also been utilized in architectural color schemes, offering unique visual experiences. Furthermore, wooden cart-inspired sculptures and ornaments have been seamlessly incorporated into landscape and urban design, enriching public spaces with artistic and cultural depth. These examples demonstrate how the aesthetic intelligence embedded in wooden carts

serves as a valuable design language for contemporary architecture, fostering a harmonious fusion of traditional cultural elements and modern architectural innovation.

### **4.3. Wooden Carts in Contemporary Art**

The visual richness and cultural depth of wooden carts have also provided new creative impulses for contemporary art. Many artists integrate wooden cart motifs into painting, sculpture, and installation art, creating works that resonate with ethnic and cultural identity. For instance, a well-known painter has developed a series of artworks inspired by the auspicious symbols found on wooden carts, abstracting and exaggerating these motifs to generate striking visual effects. Some installation artists have incorporated physical wooden cart components into their work, juxtaposing them with modern materials to create dynamic artistic contrasts and reinterpretations[12]. The bold color contrasts and decorative patterns of wooden carts have also been adapted into public art projects, enriching urban aesthetics with a fresh and compelling visual language. Clearly, as a cultural treasure, wooden carts hold immense artistic potential, injecting new energy into contemporary art and fostering the diversification of artistic expression.

### **4.4. The Digital Dissemination of Wooden Cart Culture**

With the aid of digital media and emerging technologies, wooden cart culture has found new channels for dissemination and innovative forms of expression. Cultural institutions have created online virtual exhibitions, digitizing and multimedia-enhancing content related to the history, craftsmanship, and cultural significance of wooden carts, allowing audiences worldwide to appreciate this intangible heritage at any time. Virtual reality (VR) technology further enhances the experience, enabling users to immerse themselves in the making of wooden carts as if they were participating in the process firsthand. Additionally, wooden cart elements have been incorporated into mobile games, animation, and other digital content, engaging younger audiences in a fun and interactive way. Social media platforms and short video applications have also become essential venues for the promotion of wooden cart culture, amplifying its reach and influence[13]. Ultimately, digital technology has propelled wooden cart culture into the modern era, broadening its dissemination while revitalizing its significance and ensuring its continued preservation and innovation in contemporary society.

## **5. THE CURRENT STATE AND CHALLENGES OF WOODEN CART PROTECTION AND INHERITANCE**

### **5.1. Current Status of Wooden Cart Protection**

In recent years, as public awareness of cultural heritage preservation has increased, wooden carts-recognized as valuable intangible cultural heritage-have garnered significant attention from both the government and society. Several local governments have included wooden cart culture in their intangible cultural heritage protection lists, implementing policies and allocating funds for the preservation, exhibition, and research of traditional craftsmanship. Additionally, numerous private organizations and individuals have actively engaged in protecting wooden cart culture by organizing exhibitions and establishing museums to ensure its continued preservation. Furthermore, some educational institutions have incorporated wooden cart-making techniques into their curricula to cultivate a new generation of artisans. These multifaceted efforts have created a favorable environment for the survival and development of wooden cart culture. However, despite these advances, new challenges persist, requiring urgent solutions.

## **5.2. Challenges in the Inheritance of Wooden Cart Culture**

Although significant progress has been made in protecting wooden cart culture, several critical challenges still hinder its transmission. One major concern is the declining interest among younger generations, as the training and succession of artisans remain slow. With fewer young people showing enthusiasm for traditional handicrafts, the risk of skill discontinuity continues to grow. Additionally, the scarcity of raw materials further complicates preservation efforts, as essential natural resources for wooden cart production are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain, making it harder to maintain traditional crafting techniques[14].

Cultural dilution and homogenization also present significant challenges. As wooden cart culture competes with mainstream consumer trends, there is a growing risk that its distinct ethnic characteristics may be lost in favor of mass-market appeal. Striking a balance between authenticity and innovation remains a complex issue. Furthermore, regional disparities in protection efforts contribute to inconsistent preservation outcomes. While some areas actively support and invest in wooden cart heritage, others show less commitment, and the absence of a unified strategy and standardized regulations has led to fragmented conservation efforts. These challenges collectively threaten the sustainable inheritance of wooden cart culture in contemporary society, making it imperative to implement comprehensive and coordinated preservation initiatives.

## **5.3. Intangible Cultural Heritage Application for Wooden Carts**

Including wooden carts in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list would serve as the highest recognition of their cultural value while providing critical support for their protection and transmission. Some regions have already begun working towards this goal. The application process requires a systematic review of the historical origins, craftsmanship, and cultural significance of wooden carts, along with a comprehensive assessment of their uniqueness, representativeness, and current status. Successful inclusion in the heritage list would enhance global awareness of wooden cart culture, attracting greater interest and participation in preservation efforts. Additionally, achieving UNESCO recognition would open new funding opportunities, policy support, and promotional channels, fostering the sustainable development of this traditional art form. Therefore, actively pursuing heritage status for wooden carts is of paramount importance for their comprehensive and systematic protection.

## **5.4. Strategies for the Protection and Inheritance of Wooden Carts**

To effectively preserve and transmit wooden cart culture, a comprehensive approach must be adopted. Government support and policy implementation play a crucial role in this process, with authorities strengthening financial aid, introducing dedicated protection plans, and creating a favorable environment for sustainable development. Standardized regulations should also be established to oversee craftsmanship and product quality. Equally important is the cultivation of talent and education, which requires encouraging young people to engage in wooden cart craftsmanship. Introducing relevant courses in primary and secondary schools can raise awareness, while universities could develop specialized programs to train skilled artisans.

Beyond education, cultural promotion and public engagement are essential. Hosting exhibitions, establishing museums, and organizing interactive events can help a wider audience experience and appreciate wooden cart culture. Efforts should also be made to secure international recognition through intangible heritage designation, increasing global visibility and support. Additionally, integrating wooden cart elements into modern technology and design can ensure its continued relevance[15]. By leveraging new media, virtual reality, and digital storytelling, wooden cart culture can reach contemporary audiences more effectively. Furthermore, its application in fashion,

architecture, and product design can breathe new life into this traditional art form, ensuring its preservation while allowing it to evolve with the times.

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