

The Impediments of Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance and Conversation and the Path Breakthrough in the Context of Digital Survival

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Abstract: As the people-oriented living cultural heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) represents the best embodiment of national culture, tremendously promoting the cultural identity. However, with the dramatic development of social economy, we are in an era of material worship, which narrows down the living space of ICH. This paper identifies three critical challenges in ICH safeguarding, so as to indicate that the majority of precious and prominent ICH is brought to the brink of extinction, in need of effective and energetic protective measures. Nevertheless, in the context of digital survival, the rapid progress of information technology and new media technology provides more possibilities for ICH inheritance and preservation. It's of crucial significance to take the merits of media technology, constructing multi-platform communication channels, thus accomplishing the practical progress of ICH conservation.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Inheritance and conservation, Digital survival

1. Introduction

Although people across the world have overwhelmingly reached an agreement that ICH stands for the crystallization of national culture, the actually available evidences indicate that we still have a long way to go in ICH inheritance and preservation. Diverse scholars have pointed out the obstacles that ICH inheritance and communication needs to address with. There exists a host of Committee criticism toward the Advisory Bodies, which can be glossed as failures of World Heritage system^[1]. There is a lack of representative ICH projects in China's ethnic groups, and the number of ICH project is not equal to the actual inherited one^[2]. Moreover, quite a number of ICH exploitation is under insufficient legal protection. Although the actual situation varies from nation to nation, one of the most common themes demonstrates that the current situation of ICH safeguarding remains serious and severe.

This paper principally illustrates the ICH inheritance and communication in China, encompassing the impediment in the process of preservation and its rise and implementation in the context of digital survival. First, the author elaborates the previous studies on ICH, involving its category, the historical and practical implications and evidence of ICH preservation. Second, by analyzing such three obstacles in ICH inheritance and protection as the breakage of intergenerational transmission, the fruitless decoding of ICH and lack of communication channels, the author places great importance on the emergency and severity of ICH preservation and communication. Therefore, this paper allows readers to comprehend the current situation of ICH protection and come to realize the necessity and feasibility of applying media technologies under the background of digital survival, so that the ICH protection is able to yield practical and major accomplishment.

2. Prior studies on Intangible Cultural Heritage

Before proceeding, the primary and prominent thing required to specify is the category of ICH, and the second thing should be highlighted is the significance and implication of this subject. In addition, previous studies have consistently shown the actual implementation of ICH conservation.

2.1 Category of ICH

The year of 2003 has witnessed the adoption of *The Convention for the Safeguarding of the*

Intangible Cultural Heritage, which defines ICH as the following five domains, encompassing performing arts, oral traditions and expressions, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practice concerning nature and the universe and traditional craftsmanship^[3]. Nevertheless, the specific conceptualizations of ICH vary between diverse scholars. For instance, Bortolotto expounded that ICH proposed by UNESCO rests more on being understood as an evolving process and usage, rather than the intangibility of cultural expression. Precisely speaking, ICH should be perceived as process than objects^[4]. Apart from that, the concept of ICH is also expanded over time by UNESCO, which involves the living expressions and the traditions that a great number of communities or groups have inherited from generation to generation, thus the emphasis on ICH evolving from products to producers^[5]. Although the category varies between studies and changes over time, the most common consensus is that it not only serves as an integral part of specific national culture, but the common cultural heritage and spiritual fortune of human beings across the world.

2.2 Implications of ICH

ICH has been neglected for a considerable period of time, while with the continuous ongoing of cultural heritage and natural protection, people of vision came to realize the particularity and purport of ICH. Nowadays, UNESCO is centered for both the cultural heritage and ICH conservation. Actually, ICH possesses both historical and practical implications, exerting major influence on enriching historical deposit and cultural diversity as well as human creativity and sense of identity. From a historical point of view, ICH which came into being through several years is entitled as the nation's spiritual treasure and the representativeness of human civilization. The essence of its transmission especially for those oral heritage lies in the successful intergenerational inheritance, which provides the nation a sense of continuity. From the practical perspective, while ensuring the national identity and self-confidence, it is also of vital significance to protect the cultural diversity across the world. ICH remarks the prerequisite for promoting dialogue among distinct civilization in the international community, particularly, in the age of globalization. Additionally, under the impact of high degree of material civilization, spiritual civilization should be put on an equal footing for the sustainable development of human society. Based on these two major implications of ICH and its current living situation, lots of measures have been take to ensure the effective rise and implementation of ICH preservation.

2.3 Evidence on ICH Conservation

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003 which enjoys remarkable values was perceived as a new prospect for the protection of ICH. While due to the specific circumstance in distinct countries, the implementation of ICH conversation varies between diverse nations and scholars. Zhang JW argues that there exists a cultural self-healing mechanism in Chinese culture, enabling the successful development and production of human cultures^[6]. After the thorough understanding of six essays about this specific issue in diverse nations, Valdimar considered intangible heritage as diagnosis and its safeguarding as treatment^[7]. Kathy believed that after the declaration of ICH from 2001 to 2006, new ICH convention replaced the previous program and Japan has provided appropriate and available models for ICH program^[8]. Jihon indicated that the 2003 UNESCO Convention represented the universal standard for protecting the ICH, while in protecting the living heritage, some concepts or principles are not compatible with the actual settings. Therefore, The Republic of Korea has proposed a new legislation in 2015^[9]. In general, in face of the current obstacles of ICH preservation, studies are all striving for exploring the forceful and feasible approaches.

3. Impediments and Obstacles for ICH Inheritance in China

3.1 The breakage of intergenerational transmission

As far as the subject of ICH protection is concerned, the main force of ICH is relatively single, mainly inheritors. Besides, as the leading force of ICH inheritance, the number of inheritors is exceedingly inadequate, inducing the breakage of intergenerational transmission. The dominating reasons are as followings. For one thing, ICH especially the oral masterpiece is inherently vulnerable, as it's transmitted from one generation to the next on the premise of blood ties or the apprenticeship system. Owing to physical illness or lack of energy, a host of elderly inheritors have retired from the stage of history without the representative successors. For another, in the multicultural context, high

material civilization leads to spiritual vanity, and the younger generation is so indulged in the diversify and prosperous material life that they are reluctant to devote themselves in this lifelong issue. Furthermore, the fast-paced life somehow provides more occupational opportunities for the younger generation. Due to the low economic rate of return, the total number of ICH inheritors is drastically descending, as the subject is going to consider a career change concerning socioeconomic factors. All of these above-mentioned have led to the insufficient successor, and quite a number of precious ICH are at the brink of extinction.

3.2 The fruitless decoding of ICH

Generally speaking, with the drastic progress of social life and the impact of foreign culture, ICH is losing its living environment. As for the impediments that ICH needs to deal with, the inheriting content fundamentally matters, in spite of the breakage of ICH transmission. With regard to the ICH itself, the general public considers that it's obscure and unappealing, failing to arouse the emotional resonance. First, although such ICH as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has been listed as the *UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*, much remains to be done in its going global. As TCM is fundamentally distinctive from the western medicine, it's difficult for the foreigner to decode such TCM knowledge as Chinese herbal medicine, some ancestral recipes and unique pharmaceutical techniques. Second, in the modern society, a handful of ICH or oral masterpieces are not intriguingly encoded, nor have they created in a intelligible approach full of strategic awareness, while in an era of the unprecedented prosperity of art market and visual consumerism, people are less than enthusiastic about its decoding, thus leading to the fruitless decoding of ICH. Therefore, it's crucial for ICH to seek the particular approach that strikes the balance between ICH inheritance and innovation, in avoidance of its fruitless decoding.

3.3 Lack of communication channels

With the rapid progress of information technology, we are in an era of media convergence, in which media technology is constantly upgrading and more diversified, imperceptibly changing the social communication prospect that the traditional mass media is no longer the only carrier of social information. Nevertheless, word of mouth communication and mass communication media remain primary channels for ICH transmission, each of which possesses its own limitations. On the one hand, in the long course of history, quite a mass of ICH cannot be recorded completely, For instance, on account of the loss of ICH raw manuscripts, the ICH inheritors' exposure to incomplete versions worsens the ICH preserve situation. On the other hand, the chief drawback of the traditional mass media approach is its high cost, as ICH inheritors generally live in remote regions. Therefore, it is difficult to collect and select information. Moreover, under the shock of new media, modern audiences aren't too interested in such traditional mass media as newspaper or TV. In short, with the drastic development of new media technology, there still exists the aphasia of social media and self-media platforms, and ICH transmission lacks the appropriate and effective channels, failing to leverage the merits of new media. Therefore, it's vital to explore feasible and available approaches to overcome the impediments of single mode and communication channels constriction.

4. The implementation of ICH inheritance and conservation in the context of digital survival

4.1 The coupled function of transmission subjects

It's of vital significance to give full play to the coupled functions of the government, non-governmental organizations, ICH inheritors and the general public. First, as for the government level, the government used to invest massive funds and issue relevant laws and regulations in ICH inheritance and conservation, while it came to realize the importance of ICH digital preservation under the background of digital survival. The application of digital technology makes ICH academic classification, information storage and the establishment of ICH term bank possible. Second, at the non-governmental level, social organizations and some new high-tech enterprises are required to strive for the development and implementation of ICH digital information acquisition and virtual scenes modeling. Digital Twin technology enables the 3D modeling of some rare and valuable ICH resources, presenting its overall digital configuration, such as its production mode, consumption mode, and inheritance and transmission mode. Third, at the ICH inheritors level, as the dominating force of ICH transmission, successors that have been certified by the nation are obligated to assume their

responsibilities in its digital preservation. In the end, at the general public level, every citizen should realize the importance and significance of ICH conservation and do his utmost in trivial matters. For instance, by participating in the annual *ICH Protection Day*, enhancing the ICH protection awareness and enjoying its charm to fulfill Chinese practice. In sum, only by the above-mentioned coupled functions can we genuinely yield the benefits of ICH conservation and communication in the context of digital survival.

4.2 Refinement of ICH transmission

What is without doubt is that digital technology provides forceful technology assistance in ICH digital preservation, while there remains some problems in this process, such as the fragmented rendering and pan-entertainment trend, failing to present the dynamic and multi-faceted ICH. The context of digital communication places much emphasis on the interaction between subject and object. Therefore, in the process of presenting the ICH, in order to enhance the interest of ICH communication, the implicit historical deposits and cultural implications are inevitably ignored. Hence, it's reasonable to give priority to the cultural deposits of ICH, instead of the communication means. The digital technology is mainly a means allowing the audience to understand the ICH, while the ICH deposits should be perceived as the standpoint in the process of digital storage. Besides, it's also necessary to pay attention to the common generality of cultural encoding, particularly for the foreign participants. On the premise of remaining the cultural individuality, it's required to apply some internationally recognized language symbols and cultural symbols in the process of communication, in avoidance of cultural default in ICH decoding. Taking TCM as an example, the artistic value of traditional Chinese medicine is recognized by the world, while its communication scope in foreign countries remains limited, as foreigners may not be able to comprehend its cultural and medical implications, thus failing to enjoy its special beauty. What's more, in the process of transmission, the popularity and entertainment of TCM have been shown to be extremely effective. Such TV programs as *The Origin of Traditional Chinese Medicine: On the Classic TCM and Way of Health Preservation* and *The Tale of Chinese Medicine* use popular and intriguing tales to introduce TCM, rather than the whole output of obscure and unintelligible proper nouns, having been well received and recognized by audience at home and abroad. In general, ICH inheritance and communication is rooted in its cultural deposits and it is necessary to use digital means to preserve and disseminate widely recognized ICH resources and oral masterpieces.

4.3 The construction of multiple communication platforms

The development of mobile Internet and digital technology has expanded more channels for ICH inheritance and communication, of which the rapid rise and implementation of new media has drastically changed the social medial prospect. In the past, TV documentaries that recorded the inheritance activities of ICH in a serious and authentic way were the mainstream media for ICH transmission, from which audiences could understand the whole process of its production and transmission, thus appreciating the charm of intangible cultural heritage and obtain emotional identity. In the meantime, they are able to obtain the visual aesthetic experience. With the popularity of such new media as Weibo, TikTok, the mass media and new media integrate and complement with each other, ushering into an era of media convergence. New media characterized by real-time and mobility possesses its own incomparable advantages, turning into audience's preference. At present, various platforms that can be accessed through private computers and mobile phones have been released, and new media has become an important means for ICH dissemination, thus providing a great number of opportunities for ICH inheritance and communication. In particular, with the recent development of Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), Mixed Reality (MR), and even Extended Reality (XR) technologies, the Metaverse digital world combines physical space with digital space to realize the embodied communication of ICH and bring immersive experience to the audience. In the context of digital communication, the mass media and new media make ICH break through the limitation of time and space and be well preserved. In addition, with the construction of multi-platform communication channels, ICH bursts out unprecedented vitality, fueling the audience's enthusiasm for understanding intangible cultural heritage and the strong sense of cultural identity.

5. Conclusion

This paper examines previous studies on ICH, involving its definition, the significance and implications as well as prior studies on ICH inheritance and conservation. Nevertheless, the current situation of ICH preservation remains severe, in need of practical and effective conservation measures. In light of three critical impediments encountered by ICH conservation, it's reasonable and rational to put ICH digital conservation into practice in the context of digital survival. Therefore, the coupled functions of multiple ICH inheritance subjects, refinement of ICH resources and oral masterpieces and multi-platform communication channels are required to ensure the effective and practical ICH inheritance and conservation.

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