

Research on the Value of Rural Documentary Photography in Promoting the Inheritance of Excellent Traditional Culture

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Abstract: *In the context of comprehensively promoting rural revitalization, inheriting and developing excellent traditional culture has become a crucial issue. The vigorous development of rural construction has provided rich soil for photography creation. Rural documentary photography has unique advantages in recording local customs, witnessing the changes of the times, inheriting national collective memory, spreading local culture, and promoting social change. Based on the background of rural revitalization, starting from the current situation of the inheritance and development of rural traditional culture, this paper explores the great value of rural documentary photography in the inheritance of excellent traditional culture from the perspective of the needs of the times and the revitalization of culture through the analysis of the origin of Chinese and foreign rural documentary photography and typical creative practices. It will upgrade rural documentary photography from a simple visual experience to a value leading level, and help cultural inheritance and rural revitalization through the power of images.*

Keywords: *Rural documentary photography, Excellent traditional culture, Inheritance and value*

1. Introduction

Culture is the spirit, soul and blood of a nation, and it is also an important benchmark to consider the comprehensive strength of a country. The protection and inheritance of excellent traditional culture is not only an important measure to maintain and enhance national self-confidence, but also to enhance cultural soft power.

The implementation target of the rural revitalization strategy is the countryside, and the villages that need to be revitalized are not only the villages that are becoming more and more modern in the process of urbanization, but also the traditional villages that are highly traditional but increasingly declining. The root of excellent traditional culture lies in the countryside. After nearly half a century of social changes, Chinese rural areas now present a more complex state of development. In the era of rapid urbanization, the process of "hollowing out" of rural areas is also accelerating. The original state of rural areas in the past is gradually disappearing, or towards extinction, or towards the transformation and development of a new socialist countryside. Those villages that are gradually disappearing mean the annihilation of many village landscapes, folk customs, traditional culture and spiritual beliefs. In the new socialist countryside that is developing towards urbanization, the original village society is gradually changed by external forces and concepts, and the appearance is still there, but the community composition and interpersonal relationship are quite different from the old rural society.^[1]

The countryside is the soil of Chinese culture. In the process of urbanization, the countryside and its culture are worrying to disappear. Protecting the rural culture is an urgent task at present. With the proposal of the rural revitalization strategy, the scattered ruins of the vicissitudes of life scattered among the people, the buildings that agglomerate the wisdom of the ancients, the folkways and customs spread among the people, the folk houses, the traditional festivals, the intangible cultural heritage, the means of production, the way of life, the religious philosophy, the folk craft, the regional culture, the clothing and clothing, the antiques, the culinary arts, the legends and myths, the famous mountains and rivers, and so on, gradually returned to the public view, Its inheritance has become a hot topic of concern from all walks of life.

As a recording carrier, photography bears the important mission of recording in rural development. Taking the opportunity of rural revitalization, photographers took the initiative to record the development of the countryside, consciously and faithfully recorded the development, changes and

current situation of the countryside with the camera. The rural documentary photography creation was in full swing, and local photographer associations held competitions on rural topics, and called on the whole society to participate in the creation of rural images, which aroused the public's enthusiasm for the protection of rural culture.

2. The connotation of rural documentary photography

Since the birth of photography on August 19, 1839, documentary has become its natural mission. Gu Zheng, a famous photography critic, once said, "In a broad sense, as a means of visual recording, the historical process of documentary photography can always accompany the history of photography, and there is documentary photography." [2] As a major battlefield in the field of photography, documentary photography involves a wide range of subjects, and all phenomena related to people, their lives, times and social development can become the subject and object of documentary photography.

As a major branch of documentary photography, rural documentary photography is an important part of documentary photography. Rural documentary photography is a kind of documentary photography with the theme of rural areas. It takes the vast rural society as the background, takes agriculture, rural areas and farmers as the specific objects of expression, objectively and truly records rural real life, pays attention to farmers' living conditions, and reflects rural issues through documentary photography, which is the image expression method of local literature. Countryside documentary photography has played a positive role in recording the appearance of the countryside, witnessing the changes of the times, and disseminating local culture. Especially in the context of China's rural revitalization strategy, rural documentary photography gradually shows its important value.

3. The origin and development of rural documentary photography

3.1. Western rural documentary photography

In the early stage of its birth, photography was mainly used to shoot people and landscapes in cities because of its expensive equipment and difficult to carry, coupled with the limitations of many technical factors. It did not involve much in the shooting of rural subjects.

By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, with the development of science and technology and the intensification of social change, documentary photography began to focus on the real society, and the countryside gradually came into the camera lens. For example, Curtis, an American photographer, has visited more than 80 Indian tribes and taken more than 40000 pictures of North American Indian tribesmen in 30 years since 1900. Especially in the 1930s, the United States Agricultural Security Administration launched a seven-year "FSA documentary photography activity", which is an official photography activity. The government has hired more than 30 excellent photographers to go deep into the rural areas of the United States, record the lives of farmers affected by the economic depression, and take photos of the current agricultural situation as information. FSA is a far-reaching government photography act, and also an unprecedented large-scale documentary photography action. This activity has collected more than 270000 photos and left a large number of valuable visual documents. This is the first time that documentary photography has paid so direct and extensive attention to rural areas, and it has become a worldwide model of "rural photography".

Since then, with the accelerated development of urbanization in western countries, from the 1950s to the 1970s, the development of rural documentary photography has shown a prosperous scene in the West. Documentary photographers have adhered to the humanitarian spirit, paid attention to the living environment and destiny of human beings, and recorded all the activities of the countryside in a full and true way with the camera, which has made rural documentary photography develop greatly.

3.2. China's rural documentary photography

Compared with the west, China's rural documentary photography started late, developed unstable, and the system is imperfect, and has taken a long detour. Photography, as an exotic product, entered China with the Opium War, and the social conditions at that time did not meet the conditions for the development of photography. Until the 1920s and 1930s, the development of documentary photography in China's rural areas reached its first peak. The photographer Zhuang Xueben spent 10 years in Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, Yunnan, etc., and used the camera to record the rural social organization,

natural ecology, ethnic characteristics, religion Customs and culture. This is the first time in the history of modern photography in China to conduct a large-scale and long-term documentary photography practice in the countryside.

Since then, under the influence of the war and the Cultural Revolution, photography has gradually become a tool of political propaganda in China. Rural documentary photography has entered a vacuum for a long time. Until 1976, after the "Fourth Five-Year Photography" movement, China's documentary photography has undergone major changes. The "April Film Festival" is the first folk photography group in China after the Cultural Revolution, He put forward the slogan of "focusing on life and returning art to photography", which started a new wave of documentary photography in rural China.

After entering the 1990s, China has entered a period of accelerated development, with the gradual improvement of social and economic conditions, and the gradual opening of people's minds. Many books about western documentary photography concepts and documentary photography have been translated and published. A group of young scholars have transferred the photography theories learned abroad to China. Some photographers, inspired by western humanitarian thoughts, began to consciously target the countryside and the people at the bottom of the society, China's rural documentary photography has entered a high production period. Photographer Xie Hailong focused his camera on the education problems in remote rural areas and took a series of pictures of "Project Hope" for decades, which attracted the attention of the national level to rural education. At the same time, Hou Dengke's "Maikou", Yu Deshui's "People of the Central Plains", Xiao Quan's "Our Generation", Wang Zheng's "The Last West Sea Gu", Yuan Dongping's "The Poor", Zhang Xinmin's "Liukeng", Lu Yuanmin's "Suzhou River", Lu Nan's "Rural Catholicism", Li Lang's "Liangshan Yi People" and other excellent documentary photography works all revolved around the countryside, and the rural documentary photography was in a prosperous period.

Now, China's rural areas are in a period of social transformation. The country, society and media have given high attention to rural documentary photography, which has an unprecedented development prospect. More and more photographers and the general public have participated in the practice of rural documentary photography, which has greatly improved the subject matter, form and shooting style of rural documentary photography.

4. The value of rural documentary photography in the inheritance of excellent traditional culture

4.1. The recording value of rural documentary photography to excellent traditional culture

Photography is endowed with the unique charm of photographic documentary because of its inherent "ability to faithfully reproduce things". The real state of things is objectively recorded at the moment of pressing the shutter. The documentary nature of photography determines its authenticity. People believe that the camera will not fake. The camera, like our second pair of eyes, is precisely the characteristics of this true record, which makes photography have a strong sense of objectivity, authenticity and credibility. It is worth a thousand words.

Countryside photographers regard the "decisive moment" theory of French photographer Henri Cartier Bresson as the bible. They faithfully record the instant slices in the rural development process with the attitude of humanistic care, equality and respect, and leave us countless valuable historical image data, which also become the most intuitive way for us to understand the past. Rural documentary photography has the documentary value of recording history and preserving history, and has the unique qualification of being a social witness.

Countryside documentary photography is of great significance to China. With the help of the power of images, we can record the villages and traditional culture that are about to disintegrate by shooting rescue village image archives and excellent traditional culture image records; The formation of "live village image record" will leave precious visual archives for mankind. In 2014, at the initiative of Mr. Feng Jicai, the Chinese Folk Literature and Art Association, the Chinese Photographers Association and other cultural organizations jointly launched the "Filing Survey of Chinese Traditional Villages" project, calling on Chinese folk literature and art workers and photographers to go deep into the countryside and record the contemporary style and the inheritance status of excellent traditional culture in the countryside with images, and published the "Field Manual of Filing Survey of Chinese Traditional Villages", Record all aspects of the original ecological information of the village in an accurate way of combining pictures and texts, and file the excellent traditional cultural resources and wealth of the country.^[3]

Influenced by this activity, various cultural organizations, non-governmental organizations and photographers at all levels have carried out a wide range of shooting activities of rural image archives and excellent traditional cultural image archives. For example, Liu Lei, a new photographer, spent 14 years shooting more than 40000 image archives reflecting his hometown Panzhuang Village (Feicheng, Shandong Province), and made a special topic entitled "Panzhuang Village: Contemporary Image Archives of a Chinese Village". He also held a grand exhibition in his hometown. In the past 14 years, he has hardly missed the major and minor events of the village. Under his camera, there are only more than 300 villagers in Panzhuang Village. Their daily life, farming in four seasons, red and white affairs, etiquette and customs, handicraft skills, general election, village doctors, New Year's Day, catch up and other images show us the three-dimensional rural society of Panzhuang. The internal social, economic and cultural status of Panzhuang Village, to a certain extent, reflects the changes of contemporary Chinese rural areas and the inheritance and development of traditional culture. Liu Lei left a real rural life in the long history with his image archives.

Ning Zhouhao, a photographer from Shandong Province, coincided with Liu Lei. He also spent more than 10 years focusing on Maojia Village, a small village with a history of 600 years. There are 135 households, 462 people and 658 mu of arable land. In the past ten years, Ning Zhouhao witnessed the development and changes of Maojia Village and the rise and fall of culture with his camera, and held a video exhibition with the theme of "Maojia Village Time" in the village at the time of the overall relocation of the whole village.

Nowadays, China's rural culture is in an unbalanced stage, and the wave of modernization continues to impact the rural culture. These photographers use the rural images recorded from multiple angles for a long time to retain those feelings and things that are gradually disappearing. These photographic works have quite high documentary value for the development and research of rural culture in later generations.

4.2. The social and cultural value of rural documentary photography to excellent traditional culture

The rural documentary photography takes the rural traditional culture as the creation theme, presents the traditional culture in various ways, from different angles and at different levels through the way of images, and provides a large number of authentic picture materials for the research of traditional culture. These picture materials are not only the evidence of the inheritance of rural traditional culture, but also can awaken the Chinese people's awareness of protecting rural culture and enhance the sense of identity of cultural protection, Then expand the mass base for the inheritance and development of rural excellent traditional culture, and provide assistance for the realization of rural revitalization. In addition, the rural image data recorded by photographers will gradually show great social value with the continuous development and deepening of urbanization, and play its profound cultural value in anthropology, sociology and the history of national image.

4.3. The dissemination value of rural documentary photography to the inheritance of excellent traditional culture

With the development of digital technology and the popularization of the Internet, we have inevitably entered what Martin Heidegger called the "world image era". As a visual symbol, photography has become the leading media in the information age because of its simple and understandable communication process. At the same time, photography, as a universal language in the world, has broken through the limitations of language, writing and region, and has achieved cross-border, cross-cultural and cross-regional communication.

The creation of rural documentary photography plays a positive role in promoting the inheritance of excellent traditional culture. Through photography, the excellent traditional culture is intuitively and truly recorded, and the rich and unique traditional Chinese culture is presented to the public in visual language, so that people in different countries and regions can realize a deeper understanding and interpretation. It can be said that the presentation of rural traditional culture in the form of rural documentary photography has opened a window for China and the world so that people in other countries can understand the traditional culture of China and even China.

Many foreign photographers have a strong interest in Chinese countryside and have traveled thousands of miles to China to take photos. These works span languages and borders, presenting a real China to the West, and letting more Westerners understand the profound and brilliant traditional Chinese culture. For example, Marc Riboud, a famous French photographer, visited China dozens of

times in 1957. He used the unique perspective of western photographers to carry out photography practice for half a century, took a large number of photos reflecting the changes in the countryside, and witnessed the great changes in the countryside from the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China to the reform and opening up. These photos taken by him are regarded as the "collective memory" of the Chinese people.

French photographer Yann Layma came to China for the first time since 1985. He went deep into the Dong ethnic minority inhabited areas in Guangxi and Guizhou, and recorded with his camera the wind and rain bridges, spectacular terraces, moving songs, shy and friendly villagers, historic wooden buildings, lively bullfighting festival and firecracker festival with Dong characteristics. He showed the daily life of the Dong ethnic minority people. He has shot more than 60 consecutive video reports about China, and his representative work *China* was released in six countries in the world in 2004, with a print volume of hundreds of thousands, which also made him the most influential documentary photographer in China's rural areas in the West. The Dong ethnic minority is now attracting worldwide attention, and the Dong ethnic minority songs have been included in the national and United Nations intangible cultural heritage list. Yan Lei's image publicity has played an important role in the process of the Dong ethnic minority culture going out of the mountains and overseas.

4.4. The educational value of rural documentary photography for the inheritance of excellent traditional culture

The countryside is the mother of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation and the most important cultural heritage of agricultural civilization. With the continuous acceleration of the urbanization process, China's rural areas are facing the continuous impact of the modernization wave. A large number of modern culture, western culture and rural culture collide and blend, resulting in the increasingly serious imbalance of rural culture. People's awareness of the inheritance of traditional culture is becoming weaker and weaker, and many young people have a panic on cultural identity. Countryside is the root of countless Chinese people, and it is also their homesickness. As the old saying goes, "If you lose your courtesy, you will seek the wild." The concepts of filial piety, mutual help in the neighborhood, and the state of the country contained in traditional culture are undoubtedly the best way to save the current lack of faith and moral decline. [4] By means of photography, the excellent traditional culture will be framed into real pictures, and the splendor and charm of rural culture will be displayed in the public view. This has important educational value for strengthening people's rural cultural concept, boosting villagers' cultural confidence, continuing rural culture, and building a cultural concept of coexistence of urban culture and rural culture.

5. The evolution of rural documentary photography

China, as a traditional agricultural country, has a very long history of rural existence and diverse forms of rural culture, providing an endless source of material for rural documentary photography. In addition, the arrival of the era of mobile phone photography has provided a lot of convenience for photography creation. Photographers have joined in the practice of rural photography, and many rural image works have enriched the color of the countryside. Nowadays, the creative method of rural documentary photography has changed a lot. Photographers have constantly tried various new shooting forms and presentation methods, trying to tell rural stories with Chinese characteristics in the best image state and spread excellent traditional culture.

5.1. Humanistic care of traditional documentary photography

China's rural documentary photography began to recover from the "Fourth Five-Year Plan" activity in 1976, experienced its initial stage in the 1980s, and gradually matured in the 1990s. A group of photographers with humanistic care and social responsibility have focused their cameras on the countryside, using photography as the carrier of recording, exposing social problems and carrying out social improvement with real images. They are known as "sociologists" with cameras, that is, documentary photography in the traditional sense, such as Hou Dengke's "Maikou", Xie Hailong's "Project of Hope", Zhang Xinmin's "Surrounding the City in the Rural Area", Yuan Dongping's "The Poor", Li Lang's "Liangshan Yi", etc., which are representatives of traditional documentary photography.

Generally speaking, traditional documentary photography is characterized by realism, humanism,

artistry and criticism, and follows the shooting principles of "truth", "goodness" and "beauty". The "truth" is reflected in the traditional documentary photography, which uses the "decisive moment" of Bresson to capture the true feelings of real people, real events and characters. It is not allowed to manually manipulate the subject in advance, and it is not allowed to tamper with the photo facts in the post-production (not to add, reduce, move various elements in the picture or over-modify, etc.). The creators take the objectively existing events as the source of creation, and take a long time to pursue the essence of the events. They hope to take a picture of the times through the real pictures. At the same time, the visual impact of the real pictures will often leave a deep impression on the audience, achieve a shocking effect, and play a subtle role in education.

"Goodness" is reflected in the respect of the subject of traditional documentary photography and the humanistic care reflected by the theme and content of the work. Traditional rural documentary photography is not a simple and mechanical record, but photographers, with a strong sense of social responsibility and a deep spirit of humanistic care, carry out in-depth and detailed observation and analysis of the current situation of rural development and the plight of traditional cultural heritage, and let viewers have a deeper understanding and reflection through the works, in order to let more social groups have attachment to their homeland and feel the charm of excellent traditional culture, Actively participate in cultural heritage activities to retain the foundation and blood of human spiritual culture.

"Beauty" is reflected in the traditional documentary photography that pays attention to the unity of the beauty of the subject content and the form of the picture. Without the presentation of profound theme content, documentary photography works are like a body without soul, and do not follow the rules of the beauty of the form of the picture. It is like a medical scan image, which is of cognitive value, but it is difficult to leave a beautiful impression. Therefore, only when the content and form reach a harmonious unity can people feel the joy and value of beauty. The sociologist Roy Styer once said that every stage of our era and everything we have is of great significance. The photographer's responsibility is to clarify the subject matter and find out the relationship and function between the importance of the subject matter itself and the environment and the times. ". Countless rural photographers went deep into the actual life of the village, keenly paid attention to the villagers' meticulous living conditions, details and spiritual outlook, focused the camera on people and things with unique significance, captured typical moments, and made comprehensive and in-depth records through long-term and multi-dimensional image creation, ensuring the depth of the theme and content. At the same time, creators pursue the novelty and beauty of the form of the picture. With unique aesthetic intuition and keen observation, they use composition, light and shadow, color and various photographic techniques to build the beauty of the form, and improve the readability of the work.

5.2. Alternative perspectives of new documentary photography

With the gradual relaxation of China's social and political environment and the impact of conceptual photography in the middle and late 1990s, traditional documentary photography began to degenerate, showing a trend of integration with conceptual photography. A group of pioneer artists, represented by Mo Yi and Liu Zheng, began to carry out new documentary photography practice. Photographers no longer followed the traditional documentary photography techniques and rules, and took a neutral position without judgment. Highly personal and personalized images, using symbols and metaphors to express their views and attitudes towards the people around them, their environment and interpersonal relationships. It is this change that makes the expression of documentary photography more diversified.

From the photography exhibition of "Chinese people-oriented documentary photography in the contemporary era" hosted by Guangzhou Art Museum in 2003, to the Houdenke documentary photography award in 2006, and to the "China Huangshan International Rural Photography Festival" in 2016, the creation of rural themes has changed significantly. In addition to the traditional documentary photography works of humanistic care with grand narrative, new documentary photography works with strong emotional feelings and personalized perspectives have been emerging. They use the camera to express their views on the world implicitly and inwardly. For example, "New Village" by Bird Head Group, "Breath" by Gao Shan and La Hei, "New Man" by Li Zhengde, "Red Line Zone" by Dong Lixin, and so on, all kinds of contradictions and conflicts between the countryside and the city under the surging tide of urbanization are created in a self-viewing way using new artistic language and image concepts, which has received a good response.

5.3. Innovation in presentation

In this era of technological explosion in which video and multimedia are highly developed and art installations and VR technology are combined, flat pictures are no longer the best means to express things or tell stories. Many photographers begin to try to innovate in the presentation of their works. A good presentation will deepen the core of the works, express the theme of the works more intuitively, and make the overall impression of the works more profound. For example, photographer Zhou Huacheng's "Father's Paddy Field" moved the thresher and stone mill into the exhibition hall. While viewing the exhibition pictures, the audience can also interact with each other and touch the objects presented in the works, highlighting the authenticity of the picture and making people impressed. New photographers Liu Lei and Ning Zhouhao chose to place the exhibition hall directly in the village they had taken, so that these photos would remain in the village forever. They hung the photos on the threshing ground that the villagers are most familiar with, pasted them on the wall of the village, and hung them in the grove at the entrance of the village, so that the exhibition and the daily life of the villagers could be integrated. This way of integrating the works in the exhibition with the exhibition space has a strong sense of substitution, allowing the audience and villagers to participate in it, and arousing the public's awareness of protecting rural culture and the responsibility of inheriting excellent traditional culture.

6. Conclusions

Nowadays, with the development of new media technology and the popularization of new technologies such as H5, virtual reality and 3D interaction, the way of image creation is not only limited to the form of photographic pictures, but also the shooting tools are not limited to the single tool of cameras. The form of image documentary integrating pictures, sounds, words, music, animation, etc. is also booming. With the development of the Internet, Kwai The rapid popularity of short video APP on mobile terminals such as Tiktok has expanded the speed of information transmission, made the rural images created by photographers available on major media platforms in a timely manner, and also provided more opportunities for these works to be displayed. In today's media environment, the subject matter of rural image is increasingly rich, and the development of network media makes the communication channels of rural image works more smooth and extensive. Relying on emerging means of communication, inject new vitality and vitality into the dissemination of excellent traditional culture.

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