

The Analysis of the Current Situation and Countermeasures for the Inheritance of Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage Skills

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Abstract: Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) techniques, as treasures of Chinese traditional culture, boast a long history and remarkable vitality. However, in recent years, the development of ICH techniques has faced significant challenges, particularly in terms of inheritance. The root causes of these challenges are closely tied to issues such as the scale of this industry and income, as well as the constraints imposed by traditional perceptions. This article will delve into the current state of ICH techniques in their contemporary development, and based on the real situation, propose reasonable suggestions and strategies to strive for the sustainable development of ICH techniques.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage techniques; inheritance challenges; industrial structure, employment; female inheritors

1. Representative Intangible Cultural Heritage Techniques

1.1 Sichuan Gong Fan Manufacturing

Gong fans, also known as Sichuan Zigong bamboo fan, were created by Gong Juewu, a renowned fan maker during the Guangxu era, Qing Dynasty. These fans are thin as silk, with intricate patterns of flowers, birds, and figures woven from extremely fine bamboo strips on the fan surface. The handles are made from materials such as cow bone and jade, making them highly valuable for collection and historical significance. However, with changes in urban life and the widespread use of electrical appliances, demand for fans has plummeted[1]. Additionally, the tradition of Gong fans has been passed down exclusively to males for three generations, and even today, only descendants of the Gong family can learn the weaving techniques. These factors have severely hindered the inheritance and development of Gong fans.

1.2 Sichuan Wool Textile Rolling Techniques

Sichuan wool felting and textile techniques originated among the Yi people of Liangshan, and according to historical records, they first appeared during the Han Dynasty. These techniques were primarily used to create daily attire and utensils for the Yi people, as well as ceremonial garments for important occasions, with the textile techniques predominantly mastered by Yi women. The woollen products produced by this technique are thick and warm yet light-weight, effectively serving the Yi people's pastoral and daily lives. Additionally, due to their exquisite craftsmanship, woollen felt textiles possess durable and moisture-resistant properties, capable of being worn for eight to ten years.

1.3 Yunnan Dai Slow Wheel Pottery Making

Yunnan has a pottery-making history of over 4,000 years, with Dai traditional pottery representing China's primitive pottery art. It is widely used in daily production, life, and Buddhist rituals, typically undergoing multiple processes such as soil extraction, sun-drying, sieving, adding sand, shaping, drying, and firing. Pottery made using traditional slow wheel techniques cooks food quickly and retains its flavour, keeps water cool and refreshing, and preserves the optimal properties of medicinal herbs when used for boiling medicine. It is deeply loved by local residents[2]. However, the economic benefits of earthenware production are low, and the technique is primarily mastered by a small number of elderly women, making its inheritance extremely challenging.

2. Challenges in the Development of These Techniques

2.1 Strict requirements for inheritors

Intangible cultural heritage techniques place high demands on the practical skills, patience, and attention to detail of practitioners. This means that becoming a qualified inheritor of intangible cultural heritage techniques is no easy feat. They require extensive learning, training, and practical experience, as well as a sufficient passion for the techniques they learn, and the ability to stand firm in tradition while daring to innovate[3]. Therefore, the requirements for inheritors of intangible

cultural heritage techniques are not low.

2.2 Lack of a stable industrial chain

Currently, most intangible cultural heritage skills are transmitted through master-apprentice relationships, resulting in slow progress and low efficiency in transmission. Even after apprentices master the skill, most of them complete the craft individually and sell or display their work, leading to a point-to-point dissemination of such skills. This makes it difficult to achieve industrialisation or clustering effects, and also makes it hard to attract more investment and employment.

2.3 Low income issues

The primary means of income for practitioners of intangible cultural heritage skills is through the manual production of goods, which are sold on an individual basis. The quantity and efficiency of production by an individual are limited, and the prices of such products are generally low. For example, postcards and other paper products made primarily from Dai ethnic group handmade paper typically range in price from 20 to 70 yuan, while clothing items like Yi ethnic group woollen shawls from Sichuan are priced between 70 and 300 yuan per piece. Additionally, some products are subject to seasonal or cyclical sales fluctuations, leading to unstable income and a limited income model for practitioners of intangible cultural heritage[4]. This issue significantly impacts the transmission of intangible cultural heritage and reduces young people's willingness to engage in such practices.

3. Women's Development Issues

3.1 The current challenges faced by female practitioners of ICH

Additionally, female practitioners generally have lower educational attainment, with over 40% holding a high school diploma or lower. This has limited their ability to learn and innovate within the craft. Meanwhile, their income is unstable, with the highest annual household income contributed by female practitioners ranging from 20,000 to 50,000 yuan, and over 60% contributing less than 20% of household income, while only around 5% contribute up to 80% of household income.

3.2 Limitations on Women's Learning of Traditional Crafts

Due to various complex factors, such as cultural and religious beliefs, family traditions, and physical requirements, some intangible cultural heritage crafts have long adhered to the rule of "passing down to sons but not daughters" or "passing down to daughters but not sons." This rule significantly limits women's ability to learn and inherit these crafts, thereby affecting their employment and long-term development in the intangible cultural heritage industry. Typical examples of "passing down to women but not to men" include the Dai ethnic group's traditional paper-making and slow-wheel pottery-making, while "passing down to men but not to women" includes the Miao ethnic group's silverware forging, which requires significant physical labor, and most Tibetan Thangka painting, which is prohibited for women due to religious beliefs.

4. Solutions

4.1 Establish intangible cultural heritage courses and scholarship programs

Currently, based on existing Chinese intangible cultural heritage inheritor training plans and programs, China has established intangible cultural heritage-related courses and programs in some universities in Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Guangxi, and other regions. The establishment of these courses has significantly promoted the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage skills, making inheritors younger and more educated. In this process, the author suggests that scholarship programs could be appropriately established, such as reducing tuition fees based on comprehensive academic performance, with the top 20% of students eligible for full tuition waivers and the top 50% eligible for half-tuition fees.

4.2 Startup subsidies for young intangible cultural heritage inheritors

The author believes that to encourage more young people to engage in the inheritance and practice of intangible cultural heritage skills, government support should be provided to alleviate their concerns. For example, those who pass certain assessments or outstanding graduates from intangible cultural heritage-related majors mentioned in Section 4.1 could apply for low-interest or interest-free startup loans to launch their own intangible cultural heritage-related businesses, thereby preserving intangible cultural heritage skills while also addressing employment issues to some extent.

4.3 Improve the thorough industrial chain and integrate it with the local business ecosystem

China has already established multiple ICH workshops in regions such as Yunnan, Sichuan, and Tibet, in collaboration with enterprises. These workshops operate under various models, including "ICH workshop + company + farmers," "ICH

workshop + cooperative + base," and "ICH workshop + subcontracting points," enabling advantages such as local material sourcing, local processing, local product completion, and nearby employment[5]. This effectively promotes the formation of industrial clusters in these regions. In the future, the government can leverage the industrial cluster models of such regions to attract more investment, while fully protecting the local environment and ecology.

5. Conclusion

Given these issues, the author believes that measures should be taken to deeply integrate the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage techniques with the economy. This could include offering more relevant courses at the higher education level, providing corresponding incentive mechanisms, employment and entrepreneurship subsidies, and establishing government-led initiatives centred on regional development to improve the upstream and downstream industrial chains. Additionally, integrating science and technology with intellectual property rights for innovation could help establish a comprehensive ecosystem for the intangible cultural heritage industry.

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