

Preliminary Study on the Survival Mode of Intangible Cultural Heritage Based on System Theory

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ABSTRACT: *It is vital to explore and grasp the essence of a survival mode of intangible cultural heritage's inheritance and development based on system theory. Hence, this thesis has composed a survival system of intangible cultural heritage resources at a macro-angle, which includes cultural memory of nations and communities; present status of private individual particular hobbies and skills; organization base of clans, traditional rural communities and grass-roots units; the mode of being of traditional festival customs and seasonal production; inheritance tracks handing down from mouth to mouth and from generation to generation; restraint mechanisms of villagers councils and village conventions and stipulations. We purpose to get well-known about the survival mode of intangible cultural heritage is consciously and spontaneously to establish a guarantee system in respect to its protection and management.*

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage, System Theory, Survival Mode

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1. Introduction

In accordance with *Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* promulgated by UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage(hereafter refers to as “ICH”) is known as various practices, performances, forms of expression, knowledge system and skills as well as related tools, objects, crafts and cultural sites which are considered as cultural heritage by communities, organizations and sometimes individuals.

As to studies on the concept of ICH in China, there are scholars Yang Yi (2003), Wang Ning (2003), Wu Xinping (2004), Bai Yunju (2004) etc. who made some achievements. They discussed in detail ranging from concept, category, and content to the extension of ICH, which functioned as practical guidance to the after study.

A clear definition of ICH was given by *Notification on Strengthening the Protection Work of Cultural Heritage* promulgated by the State Council of China in 2005. It was stated that ICH refers to various traditional cultural manifestations expressed in nonmaterial form, closely related to the well-beings of the masses and handed down from generation to generation, including

folk tradition; traditional performing arts; activities of folk custom; manners and festivals; conventional knowledge and practices about nature and universe; techniques of traditional crafts as well as related cultural opens of those traditional cultural forms mentioned above. This definition took the specific condition of ICH projects in China into consideration so that constructed an operable framework for China's academic and application study of ICH [1].

Different from substance culture heritage, the kernel of ICH is spiritual culture, which emphasizes on the inheritance of human spiritual culture connotation, or rather, the interpersonal spiritual communication [2] aided by oral account, body demonstration, life style, production method, conception or psychology accumulation and so on³. ICH as tourism resources shares some common traits with general resources, such as locality, ornamental value, integrity or diversity, yet it has distinct features from general resources, such as technique, intangibility, mobility, off-season and non-sustainability [3]. However the domestic research on it has just started, therefore, this thesis steers to the practical demand for exploring a mode of survival and development of ICH.

2. A Review on ICH Management

In recent years, achievements in ICH researches increased in a trend. The significance of the research on ICH management and inheritance manifests in respecting human civilization achievements, safeguarding cultural diversity, and promulgating culture essence etc. Reviewing related literatures from CNKI, we find that studies on ICH tourism resources management are mainly focused on two aspects, namely development and protection.

As to the studies on its development, Hua Chun-xia (2007) discussed the feasibility and significance of ICH tourism development [4]. Xia Fen (2008) put forward development approaches for ICH tourism resources [5]. Xiao Gang (2008) proposed a series of measures for ICH tourism development, such as products design, building of talent team, laws and regulations perfecting, government administrative protection, etc [6]. Gu Jin-fu (2008) warned us against the undesirable tendency of ICH tourism development and summarized the principles for ICH tourism development [7]. Zhang Zhi-min (2009) discussed the patterns and ways of ICH development and suggested different development methods respectively for different types of ICH resources [8]. Xu Wen-yan (2010) explored the flexible interaction between ICH protection and tourism development in terms of culture and economy [9]. Tan Hong (2011) argued that tourism development based on ICH should take six aspects into consideration—namely the scope, speed, and features of development as well as government interference, academic guidance, and public participation [10].

Likewise, as to the studies on protection, Xu Gan-li (2005) discussed the correlation between government, tourism enterprises, cultural entities and scholars within a frame of protection work [11]. Zhang Ting (2006) argued for adopting protective utilization measures [12] in ICH's inheritance and development. Xu Wen-yan (2010) offered that it is essential to introduce a mechanism integrated of interest—marketing—communication—and laws to realize ICH's self- protection, sustainable development, tradition perpetuation, and cultural status [13]. Li Yi (2011), from the perspective of cultural-ecology, approached the benign development of ICH and Xi an tourism [14].

Apart from these, Lv Hua-xian (2009) expounded the interaction between tourism development and ICH protection [15] in a case of Mongol nationality's matouqin music culture. Zhang Yan (2010) evaluated on the feasibility of tourism development in Henan Province by means of RMP and put forward corresponding strategy [16]. Han Fu-gui (2011) summarized existing ICH protection model and found a sensible way for Tibet's ICH tourism development [17].

To sum up, these researches mainly focused on ICH's development and protection as tourism resources, which confined to the effects produced in exogenous process and measures have to take. But few concerns on the survival mode of ICH based on its native existence from the perspective of system theory. As an important cultural resource, intangible cultural heritage has gradually been recognized by public and has drawn more and more attention recently. So the central issue of this dissertation is to find a comprehensive, holistic, systematic mode of survival for ICH and provide a resolution to the inheritance mechanism of such a mode which aims to value on the primitive ecology of ICH.

3. ICH Under The Framework of System Theory

Intangible cultural heritage is precious treasure accumulated down from the perpetual human history, which has condensed into national culture memory and the gene in the innermost recesses of national soul, its inheritance and continuity is the source

power for future generations to trace historical culture vein and so as to create modern civilization. Therefore, it is an inevitable choice for sustainable development of human society to grasp the essence of the inheritance law and system of ICH. After achieving that try to get a clear idea about the basic principle of ICH survival, namely its system theory, so as to lay a theoretical foundation for the development and protection of ICH. As is well-known, system is an organism that composed of several interacting and interrelated parts or elements with certain structure and function. The whole system altogether shows new features that component elements do not have when they are separated. Once they interact with each other, they will produce greater pool efforts. Actually any type of ICH should rely on a systematic protection to survive and develop, which involves the interaction and interrelation among elements, such as the natural ecology at the country of origin; social environment; life style; mode of production protection awareness of communities; and inheritance mechanism of human beings. In such a system ICH itself turns out to be a proper-structured and well-functioned organic whole. In a word, all the researches on inheritance of ICH must be carried out under a framework of system theory.

4. Survival System of Intangible Cultural Heritage

As a flow factor of ethnic group's culture; code of national cultural heritage; even the spiritual mark and cultural symbol of human being, ICH has constructed a close-knitted system of its existence, survival, inheritance and development, which, if put under the social governance, was beyond the boundary of the government's regulation, and mainly includes:

Firstly, its existence—which was embodied in cultural memory of nations and ethnic groups as well as special hobbies and skills of individuals. In other words, the oral account of human beings—one part of ICH, is the cultural memory of a nation and ethnic groups, which inherited through people's living and production from generation to generation[18]. They are cultural factors, heritage codes, spiritual marks and cultural symbols which distinguished their owner from other nations and groups, such as tribal language and spiritual belief of a nation or living style and production method of an ethnic group. Obviously, the other part of ICH existed in the special hobbies and skills of individuals, such as paintings on plaque (in the early stage) and miniature engraving on ivory in Nanchang.

Secondly, its carrier—no matter the clans tied with a blood or the traditional rural communities formed through geographical links, both remained under the administration of rural governing structures which mainly consist of villagers' autonomous organizations. Hence, it is necessary to learn China's countryside if you want to learn Chinese traditional culture. Confronted with the up-roaring of urbanization and internationalization, one can only impulse the modern change of China in city but touch the authentic culture of China in country. Then, it is followed that only clans tied with a blood or traditional rural communities formed through geographical links, which were mainly governed by the villagers' autonomous organizations, can bear the weight of ICH.

Thirdly, its survival mode—ICH yet survived through the living and production activities which centred on traditional festivals and farming. The nonmaterial culture is reflected in the process of people's daily production and life, especially during traditional festivals, people tend to sing, dance, eulogize, pray heartfelt and even organize various ceremonies, performs or events etc. on joyful occasions. In addition, people usually arrange production of farming according to climate and season, thus various production skills, traditional crafts, work songs, etc. were generated, by which, the non-material culture is normally handed down and widespread.

Fourthly, its inheritance mechanism—to hand down by means of hearsay and from generation to generation is ideal for the survival and development of ICH in a primitive state. At present, people often complaint that some traditional rural arts and folk handicrafts were at the risk of being lost to the world owing to the youth's unwillingness to learn, which fully proved that ICH is still inherited from generation to generation and new inheritance mechanism is far from being established.

Lastly but not least, its restricted mechanisms—various councils spontaneously organized by villagers and village regulations and conventions of conduct laid down consciously. In the process of its inheritance, clans and traditional communities functioned as the old routine driving force as well as constrained force. But in a new-model of rural governance, councils of villagers and village regulations and conventions of conduct, as an emerging power, has become a dominant force and produced more and more great effect on inheritance and development trend of ICH. Some large-scale communal activities are organized by councils of villagers and enacted by village regulations. So the initiative of various councils of villagers and the restriction of village regulations become a guarantee of the perpetuity of non-material culture.

In short, the existence forms and survival mode is the proper core of such a system, which is the gene that ensure ICH can be inherited for generations; the carrier the pillar of the system, which perpetuate ICH; the inheritance mechanism the administration pattern, which set in ICH heredities an old routine; the restricted mechanism is the dominant factor, as well as an effective dependence of the development of ICH.

5. Conclusions

The survival system of ICH has attracted more and more attention. Recognizing the existence of such a system is the essential prerequisite to the protection and inheritance of ICH resources, but to elaborate the system is the key to solve problem. Through a preliminary study, this thesis constructs a macroscopically existence and survival system for ICH, which consists of its existence in forms of cultural memory of nations and ethnic groups as well as special hobbies and folk skills of individuals; carriers like clans tied with a blood or traditional rural communities formed through geographical links which were under the administration of rural governing structure that centred on villagers' autonomous organizations; the survival mode through living and production activities held on traditional festivals and arranged by climate and season; inheritance mechanism by oral account and from generation to generation; restricted mechanisms composed of various villagers councils and village regulations and conventions to conduct. Undoubtedly, the existence, survival, inheritance and development of ICH not only set a question of "folk-culture" but of "production-method"; even of social-life and local-governance. On the other hand, there are multidimensional factors that restrict and influence the inheritance and development of this system. This paper cannot explore all-around and instantly grasp the essence of this complex system, but the survival mode of ICH based on system theory that presented in this paper aims at furnishing the decision maker of grass-roots, tourism developer of ICH, tourist interested in folkways and customs with a kind of valuable enlightenment and inspiration.

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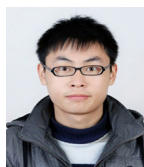
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