The Integration of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Popular Culture: Mechanisms and Implications

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Abstract: The paper explores how to build a bridge between intangible cultural heritage and popular culture, enabling the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage in a more trendy and fashionable way. As a crucial carrier of human civilization, the protection and transmission of intangible cultural heritage hold multidimensional profound values. Firstly, intangible cultural heritage serves as a gene pool of human civilization, preserving collective ethnic memory and sustaining cultural diversity. Secondly, as a new quality productive force, it can boost consumption and be contributed to promote economic growth. Finally, intangible cultural heritage provides cultural identity in modernization. However, the transmission of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) faces critical bottlenecks. The issues mainly focus on the rigidity of communication channels, the lack of novelty in narrative methods, and intangible cultural heritage media narrative carrier "rejuvenation". How to address these challenges through modern approaches and identify synergies between intangible cultural heritage and popular culture is pivotal for achieving sustainable ICH development. The introduction of traditional embroidery examples to propose the concept of IP and establish a complete IP industry chain represents a crucial step in integrating intangible cultural heritage into modern life.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Popular Culture, Sustainable Development.

1. Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage refers to the expressions, practices, knowledge, and skills that communities recognize as integral to their traditions and background [1]. As one of the four ancient civilizations, China has a long and profound historical and cultural heritage and has created splendid cultural achievements in the history of mankind. China is a major country of intangible cultural heritage, and has inherited unique cultural genes with rich intangible cultural heritage items. As of 2017, China has a total of 39 world-class intangible cultural heritage items, ranking first in the world in terms of the number of intangible cultural heritage. These intangible cultural heritages are not only China's national memory, but also the world's precious wealth, with immeasurable intangible value [2]. The Chinese government has been attaching great importance to the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. The Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China encourages the rational utilization of intangible cultural heritage on the basis of effective protection.Since 2017, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China, in collaboration with relevant departments, has implemented the Revitalization Plan of Traditional

Chinese Crafts, making comprehensive arrangements to revitalize traditional crafts. This initiative aims to promote the new and widespread application of traditional craftsmanship in modern life, thereby better meeting the public's demand for consumption upgrades [3]. However, with the continuous evolution of the information society, the development of intangible cultural heritage has been hindered. This essay aims to investigate the methods and technologies that could enhance the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage.

At present, the most commonly used definition is the definition in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereinafter referred to as "the Convention"), which defines intangible cultural heritage as "social practices, conceptual expressions, expressions, knowledge, skills and related tools, objects, artifacts and cultural sites that are regarded by communities, groups and, sometimes individuals, as part of their cultural heritage." Intangible cultural heritage is divided into five categories, namely: (1) oral traditions and expressions; (2) performing arts; (3) social practices, rituals and festival activities; (4) knowledge and practice of nature and the universe; (5) traditional handicrafts [4]. It can be seen that intangible cultural heritage is the embodiment of the living habits and spiritual civilization of people in different regions. While retaining its national and local characteristics, it should be in line with modern life and integrate with modern popular elements to usher in more and better development opportunities.

From the overall situation, the current communication activities of intangible cultural heritage items have not reached the public in a real sense, and they have not been integrated into modern life, and the openness and integration are unsatisfactory. Intangible cultural heritage is part of traditional culture, and it is customary to contrast it with popular cultures, or even against them [5]. In this context, how to form a benign symbiotic relationship between intangible cultural heritage and cultural and creative expression? How can we complete the development and innovation of intangible cultural heritage from the perspective of media integration in the modern era? How do we truly inherit and develop intangible cultural heritage so that it can become a "living" cultural expression rather than a real "heritage"?

2. Literature reviews

2.1. The necessity of combining intangible cultural heritage with popular culture

The following challenges confront the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage. Firstly, intangible cultural heritage inheritor media solidified. The "living inheritance" of intangible cultural heritage is inseparable from the passing of the torch from the inheritors, but most inheritors are too old to accept fresh inheritance methods, and young people lack access to intangible cultural heritage, resulting in huge information searches. The interoperability of new media can empower intangible cultural heritage, however, the media environment is a "simulated environment" shaped by the media. It is difficult for intangible cultural heritage to enter the mainstream cultural system, and it will be difficult for it to enter the realm of people's cognition [6]. Secondly, the narrative discourse of intangible cultural heritage media cannot keep pace with the times. Compared with classical narratology, post-classical narratology expands the scope of research on narrative works from text to other media forms, and pictures, texts, and short videos are all narrative texts [6]. In the process of dissemination, intangible cultural heritage can pay attention to the artistic treatment and formal processing of narrative materials. Thirdly, intangible cultural heritage media narrative carrier "rejuvenation". The media function has become an integral part of the narrative content of online media. The traditional media narrative form is a one-way structure, unable to establish an interactive relationship with the audience. While the fragmented, interactive, and scene-oriented features of new media can effectively promote the intangible cultural heritage to young people. However, many non-

inheritors cannot grasp and make full use of these characteristics of new media, resulting in young people not being able to perceive the existence of certain intangible cultural heritage.

Based on the decentralization and interactivity of new media, UGC (User Generated Content) has become an important way of content production in the new media era. The choice of the development path of the creative industry from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage has become a topic that must be faced directly in today's society. In view of these problems, the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage items can try to borrow the current mode of operation and dissemination of popular culture and import intangible cultural heritage into circulating elements.

2.2. Differences in the development of two intangible cultural heritage crafts—from the perspective of ICH inheritance

Based on the preceding arguments, this paper compares Yi embroidery and Miao embroidery—ICH embroidery traditions from distinct ethnic groups—to further underscore the importance of integrating intangible cultural heritage with current policies, modern technologies, and popular culture.

Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province of China is an important area for the Yi nationality to multiply. Out of the needs of life, ethnic rituals, festivals and spirituality, local Yi women are generally good at clothing embroidery [7]. In recent years, Yi embroidery has made frequent appearances at international fashion weeks in New York, Milan, Paris, and beyond. This phenomenon not only marks the evolution of the Yi ethnic group's traditional Sai Costume Festival into the global fashion arena but also serves as a vibrant showcase of China's ethnic minority cultural heritage to the world. Yi embroidery has established a standardized and mature cultural industry, adhering to its original vision of empowering rural women through cultural industries to alleviate poverty, achieve prosperity, and realize their self-worth. Guided by this mission, the government has secured institutional support for Yi embroidery initiatives, including funding from the "Hong Kong Return Poverty Alleviation Fund", the "Provincial Agriculture Department Embroidery Training Program", "Promoting Women's Participation in Cultural Industry Development" project implemented by the China Women's Development Foundation and the United Nations Development Programme [8].

Miao embroidery is a traditional embroidery art passed down from generation to generation by the Miao people, and it is a "living fossil" of the historical and cultural memory of the Miao people. However, unlike the modernized development of Yi embroidery, the Miao people, due to their relatively isolated living environment, have preserved their embroidery culture through traditional inheritance mechanisms. With the impact of modernization, the inheritance order of Miao embroidery has been disrupted, manifesting a trend of overall decline in its developmental trajectory. The inheritance of Miao embroidery intangible cultural heritage faces the following challenges [9]:

(1) Erosion of Ethnic Cultural Identity in Embroidery. With the development of market economy, younger generations influenced by mass culture have undergone significant shifts in ideologies and aesthetic values. Their connection to traditional Miao embroidery techniques has increasingly weakened, accompanied by a loss of reverential appreciation.

(2) Insufficient Economic Empowerment. The craftsmanship of traditional Miao embroidery is extraordinarily intricate, requiring months or even years to complete a single exquisite piece. As the technique cannot achieve mass production through mechanization, it fails to meet modern demands for economic viability.

(3) Aging Practitioners. Traditional Miao embroidery embodies a closed cultural transmission system. Younger generations' reluctance to embrace this mechanism has resulted in most inheritors being elderly practitioners, inevitably causing a disconnect between Miao embroidery craftsmanship and contemporary socio-cultural paradigms.

Both Yi and Miao embroideries are recognized as intangible cultural heritage techniques, yet their current developmental trajectories diverge markedly. To protect ICH in the long term, we need to keep up with modern times by incorporating new technologies and changing tastes in art in a smart way. At the same time, governments and businesses need to use their institutional strengths to strengthen ICH ecosystems through value-chain innovation.

2.3. Introduce IP perspective into the dissemination and development of intangible cultural heritage

IP refers to the exclusive power enjoyed by human beings over the fruits of intellectual labor created in the practice of social life [10]. In today's society, it generally refers to the authorization of intellectual property rights for the use of different platforms, channels, and media, and allows for multi-dimensional creation, complete content distribution, and thus obtaining the power of traffic [11]. To build an intangible cultural heritage IP industry chain, it is first necessary to determine the intangible cultural heritage blueprint suitable for the development of the industrial chain, including literature, film and television works, dramas, animations, games, peripheral derivatives, interest experience and training, theme tourism, etc [12].

Let's take the Palace Museum and its derivatives, "FLASH! The Palace Museum—Digital Palace Museum Pop-up Exhibition," was grandly opened at Tai Kwun in Hong Kong on January 17, 2025. This exhibition integrates the planning concept of the "Central Axis" with "balanced and symmetrical" characteristics and the ancient architectural design concept of "round sky and square earth.". Viewers can appreciate the details of the national treasure painting "A Panorama of Rivers and Mountains" and many precious cultural relics in the Forbidden City through exhibition items such as "Greenish Blue Landscape—A Panorama of Rivers and Mountains," "Appreciation and Collection of Treasures," "Impression of the Corner Tower," and "Personal Experience of Making Imperial Cuisine" They can also experience the exquisite craftsmanship of the imperial cuisine in the Qing Dynasty and the complex construction process of the corner tower and deeply feel the broad and profound charm and exquisite skills of Chinese culture and art [13].

Spring Festival in 2025, with folk cultural feasts such as "Intangible Cultural Heritage New Year's Shopping Month" and "Intangible Cultural Heritage Entering the Block," Xi'an has innovated to create a new consumption model of "intangible cultural heritage + shopping mall + block" integrating intangible cultural heritage performances, experiences, food and markets to build a new one-stop consumption scene. Cultural fields, tourism interpretation markets, etc., have launched a variety of wonderful activities with the theme of intangible cultural heritage. At the same time, offline activities such as "Inheritance of Ingenuity, Entering the Intangible Cultural Heritage," "Hanfu Intangible Cultural Heritage," and "Searching for New Year's Customs in the Museum," were carried out hotly, and online joint platforms launched the global invitation activities of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Year of China, making the "Xi'an Year" full of international style [14]. As the famous scholar John Hawkins pointed out in his book Creative Ecology, modern society is post-modern consumption, and the importance of consumption is no longer the function of the commodity itself, but also contains a cultural intention of cultural symbols and cultural psychology brought about by the commodity itself. Most of the intangible cultural heritage is an aesthetic expression of a unique local culture formed by a combination of certain spirits, beautiful visions or historical reasons. It is necessary to find a balance between youth and sustainability so that intangible cultural heritage can be passed on in a "sustainable" way [15].

2.4. The combination of intangible cultural heritage, short video and animation is analyzed from the perspective of IP

Nowadays, the development of Internet technology and the emergence of virtual reality technology have brought about revolutionary changes and all-round breakthroughs in the media and communication platforms compared with the past. Digital animation technology, with its powerful modeling function, flexible and diverse action deployment technology, delicate and realistic particle system, and virtual reality technology, has created many animation and VR works for people, and turned this comprehensive physical and mental interaction experience into reality.

Chinese cartoonists have regained a lot of relevant story content and cultural symbols from traditional literature, architecture, costumes, performances, skills, and other intangible cultural heritage projects, and created excellent animation works such as *"Big Fish and Begonia," "Nezha's Demon Boy Descends to the World," and "Lion Boy,"* [16] In the film *"Nezha 2"* the Jade Void Palace built by Hetian Yu is magnificent and amazes many audiences. Xiaoyu Hanfei Cultural and Creative Studio, located in Minhou Nanyu, Fuzhou, participated in the scene modeling [17].

As a new type of audiovisual medium popular on the Internet, the rise of short video may be of revolutionary significance in the history of media. The short video medium is a kind of civilian medium in the "post-text era" which awakens and stimulates the communication instinct of ordinary people [18]. The biggest social value of short video media is its "national record" value. As of April 2019, there were more than 24 million videos about intangible cultural heritage on Douyin, with a cumulative total of 106.5 billion views [19]. Anhui Huangmei Opera became the most popular local Chinese opera on the Douyin App in 2018, with content on related topics played 210 million times, while traditional operas such as Henan Opera, Shanxi Qinqiang Opera and Zhejiang Kunqu Opera are also widely spread on diverse platforms [20]. Thus, The form of transmission of intangible cultural heritage will also change in response to changes in the environment. Today, with the help of the Internet and digital technology, China's intangible cultural heritage can be exchanged, studied, and promoted across regions and countries, providing a broader space for the manifestation of the rheology of intangible cultural heritage.

3. Conclusion

The fundamental purpose of establishing the connection between intangible cultural heritage and popular culture is to bring vitality to intangible cultural heritage with the help of young communicators, so as to effectively disseminate intangible cultural heritage. At the same time, however, "rejuvenation" does not mean that intangible cultural heritage will become a temporary novelty or trend, popular culture is prone to fragmentation and commercialization. To protect and pass down intangible cultural heritage, establishing a complete IP industry chain is crucial. As demonstrated by the development of Yi embroidery under the guidance of the Chinese government —through effective internet-based promotion, a comprehensive production line, international trade via e-commerce platforms, and dedicated training bases for inheritors—this integrated approach exemplifies how cultural heritage can thrive in the modern era.

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