

Original Paper

The Safeguarding of Indigenous Intangible Cultural Heritage: From Both Government and Private Sides

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Abstract

ICH, Intangible cultural heritage, including traditional theatre, traditional handicrafts, oral literature and so on, is a concept put forward by the UNESCO in 2003. Its most fundamental characteristic is its “dynamism”, which often changes with the environment. Variables that influence the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage include inheritors, national policies, laws and regulations, etc. And because there are so many variables, it is often more difficult to protect intangible cultural heritage than tangible cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage is an important part of China’s cultural treasury. In recent times, due to the impact of industrial civilisation, some ancient intangible cultures have been faced with problems such as lack of successors and loss of skills. In modern times, the Chinese government pays more attention to the protection of ICH. In this test. This paper will take the national intangible cultural heritage, Jingjiang palm puppetry, as an example to explore the protection and inheritanc localised intangible cultural heritage from two perspectives: the government and the private sector.

Keywords

Indigenised Intangible Heritage, Cultural heritage, Puppetry in the Palm

1. Introduction

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is a term used to describe the legacy of the intangible cultural transmission of oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festivals, knowledge and practical skills of humankind. Intangible cultural heritage emphasises the continuity and transmission of a culture, which is different from the static preservation of tangible cultural heritage (such as

architecture, cultural relics, etc.), and pays more attention to the revitalisation and transmission of traditional skills, cultural performances, oral transmission, etc.

China has a profound history, and countless ICHe cultures have emerged over the long years of its history. According to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China enacted in 2013, ICH is defined as a variety of traditional cultural expressions handed down from generation to generation by people of all ethnic groups and regarded as an integral part of their cultural heritage, as well as the physical objects and places related to traditional cultural expressions. Among them is the Jinjiang Palm Puppetry (Figure 1), a traditional theatre popular in the southern region of Fujian, sung in Quan accent and performed by actors who control the puppets with their fingers. On 31 October 2005, the Jinjiang Puppet Show was selected as one of the first provincial intangible cultural heritage items in Fujian Province, and on 20 May 2006, it was listed as one of the first national intangible cultural heritage items. The Author went to Fujian for research, and found that the protection and inheritance of Jinjiang palm puppetry is under the dual force of the government and the private sector. It is representative to use it as an entry point to explore the protection and inheritance of China's localised intangible cultural heritage.



Figure 1. Jingjiang Palm Puppetry Performance

Safeguarding of ICH at the governmental level

Intangible cultural heritage often carries a deep historical and cultural heritage, and is a unique cultural identity of a region. With the improvement of China's economic level and material life, the pursuit of spirituality and culture is receiving more and more attention, and the Chinese government has attached increasing importance to Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), including policy leadership, financial investment, talent training, publicity and promotion, and international cooperation.

Policy guidance and legal security

In 2011, the promulgation and implementation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China laid a solid legal foundation for the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, and in 2021, the Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage provided a clear goal and direction for the protection of intangible cultural heritage in the new era. In the past ten years from 2011 to 2021, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has promulgated the Measures for the Recognition and Management of Representative Inheritors of National Intangible Heritage, the Measures for the Management of National Cultural Ecological Reserves, and the "14th Five-Year Plan for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage", as well as the Implementation Plan for the Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance and Development Project, and a series of other initiatives to gradually improve the protection of intangible cultural heritage. A series of measures have been taken to gradually improve the policy system for the protection of intangible cultural heritage, and to construct the main framework of laws and regulations for the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. At present, 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities have issued regulations on the protection of intangible cultural heritage, and some cities and counties have also formulated corresponding local regulations. The rule of law and standardisation of the protection and inheritance of ICHe work has been continuously upgraded, and the gradually improved rule of law system and policy framework has also laid a solid foundation for the long-term protection and development of ICHe.

Take the Southern School of Puppetry as an example, Fujian is a large province with rich cultural resources of NHs. The government attaches great importance to the development of ICHe culture, in particular, it has set up the Jinjiang Palm Puppetry Art Protection and Inheritance Centre, whose duties include talent training, repertoire excavation and creation, documentation, etc., and in recent years, it has also added the storage of digital resources. With the times to promote the inheritance of ICHe culture.

After years of efforts, China has now established a ICH protection and inheritance system including field investigation, representative projects, inheritor mechanism, regional overall protection, inheritance experience facilities, theoretical research; established a four-level national, provincial, municipal and county ICHe representative project list system with Chinese characteristics, and formulated corresponding protection measures by combining the protection and inheritance laws of different categories of projects.

Financial investment and resource allocation

In recent years, the central financial authorities have been increasing their investment in the protection of ICHe, and to date have invested a cumulative total of 9.65 billion yuan in national funds for the protection of ICHe, with 1.785 billion yuan specifically allocated for the advancement of national ICHe protection and use facilities. In order to encourage the work of representative inheritors of national ICHe, the central financial administration provides an annual subsidy of 20,000 yuan for each inheritor. Starting from 2022, an additional 5,000 yuan of subsidy funding will be added for those national-level

representative inheritors of NH heritage who have performed well in their inheritance activities. In addition, provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities have also set up special funds to support provincial-level representative inheritors of NH heritage to carry out their inheritance activities.

In 2021, the Ministry of Finance (MOF), introduced the Measures for the Administration of Special Funds for the Protection of National Intangible Cultural Heritage, which further improved the effectiveness of the use of financial funds.

Jinjiang Palm Puppet Troupe, for example, according to the “2022 Jinjiang City Palm Puppet Art Protection and Inheritance Centre Accounts”, the 2022 public budget financial allocations reached 8,266,500 yuan, Jinjiang Palm Puppet Troupe staff said the funds were used for the training of inheritors, traditional repertoire excavation and collation, the creation of new script rehearsals and so on. The government allocates similar special funds each year, specifically for the protection of ICHe culture. While ensuring the availability of funds, the government also focuses on the rational allocation of resources, such as repairing and maintaining traditional theatres and purchasing necessary performance props. Dedicated funding and rational allocation of resources provide the necessary material safeguards for the inheritance of ICHe, such as the Southern School of Opera, so that the ICHe can develop in a stable and long-term manner.

Talent training and inheritance mechanism

The national list divides the intangible cultural heritage into 10 categories, which are: folk literature, traditional music, traditional dance, traditional theatre, Chinese opera, traditional sports, games and acrobatics, traditional fine arts, traditional arts and crafts, traditional medicine and folklore.

Up to now, under these ten categories, there are more than 100,000 representative items of non-legacy at all levels in China, of which 1,557 are national-level representative items; there are more than 90,000 representative inheritors at all levels, of which 3,062 are national-level representative inheritors of non-legacy. Twenty-three national cultural ecological protection (experimental) zones have been established.

Many of the non-hereditary heritage seeks “only to be sensed not explained”, like cultural education, general education is not applicable to non-hereditary education, so the training of non-hereditary heritage bearers is mostly a teacher-apprentice system, the training cycle of the bearer is long, and the training of talents is small.



Figure 2. Lingjingru (Left) in Rehearsal

Jinjiang Puppet Theatre municipal non-genetic heritage Lin Jingru, for example (See Figure 2), she went through a five-year training in Quanzhou Art School, came to Jinjiang Puppet Theatre and follow the old artists to continue to learn, “one minute on the stage, ten years of work under the stage” performers appearing in front of the public, behind the decades of hard work. More than ten or twenty years, as short as five or six years, is the normal training of ICHe talents. At the same time, because the teacher’s energy is limited, the number of apprentices taught is also limited. Lin Jingru and folk puppeteer Wu Jingliang recall that they both came from the Quanzhou Art School, with only a dozen or so trainees in each batch, and that some trainees would give up halfway through because of the tedium of learning.

Although compared to the general education, non-genetic talents are slightly thin, but compared to the previous talent training mechanism, the training of non-genetic talents has made great progress.

The disadvantages of the master-apprentice system of inheritance are obvious, as the only way to learn from a master is through kinship or a network of human relationships. Therefore, early non-genetic inheritance was often limited to the family and circle of acquaintances. At the same time, the rights and interests of apprentices are not protected under the master-apprentice system.

In modern times, the government has taken the lead to break the shackles of kinship and set up schools and specialised institutions to recruit suitable talents on the basis of merit.

In the case of palm puppetry, for example, the Jinjiang Palm Puppet Troupe was set up by the state, and the troupe’s actors mainly came from the Quanzhou Art School. The Quanzhou Art School selects talented children (some with soft fingers, some with good voice conditions) through an audition, hires professional teachers to guide these children, and after studying for a period of time, delivers the talent to the troupe. Formed a positive talent flow mechanism of art school - theatre company.

Advocacy and social participation

In recent years, the Government has taken a series of measures to actively promote ICHe culture among the public.

Firstly, ICH has made frequent appearances at various cultural and arts festivals, gala dinners and cultural performances at home and abroad.

In 2006, the Chinese government established Cultural Heritage Day, which was adjusted to Cultural and Natural Heritage Day in 2017, and since 2009, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage of China has selected a city to hold the main city activities on Cultural Heritage Day every year. 2007 saw the first Chengdu International Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival. In 2007, the first Chengdu International Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival was successfully held in Chengdu, China, and since then it has set a tradition of being held in Chengdu, China, every two years.

Take the Southern School of Puppetry as an example. The palm puppet theatre has become a business card of the Jinjiang region, shining in cultural and artistic events such as the Maritime Silk Road International Art Festival, the Fujian Art Festival, and the National Theatre Festival.

Secondly, the government also makes use of mainstream media and social media platforms to widely publicise NRLs and raise public awareness of NRLs and their protection. Documentaries on NRH themes and the integration of NRH with film and television are proliferating.

At the same time, the government also encourages all sectors of society to participate in the protection of ICHe, provides policy support and financial support, and promotes the integration of ICHe with tourism and the cultural industry. These initiatives have not only promoted the in-depth protection of ICHe, but also stimulated the public's enthusiasm and interest in ICHe.

In the case of the Jinjiang Puppet Theatre Troupe, for example, the troupe regularly organises activities to send theatre to the grassroots and performs puppet shows for free in the folk community, with government subsidies benefiting the public. In the Leicheng District of Quanzhou, puppet-themed cultural tourism and cultural studies are popular among local and foreign tourists.

It is worth mentioning that the government also actively promotes the entry of ICHe into the education system. Schools at all levels, from primary schools to universities, have set up relevant interest programmes, inviting ICHe inheritors to come to campus to communicate with students. Such measures have not only nurtured a new generation of inheritors and audiences, but also laid a solid foundation for the inheritance and development of ICHe culture.

Under the leadership of the government, more and more people in China today are beginning to understand and pay attention to NHM culture and actively participate in its protection and inheritance. The implementation of these initiatives not only promotes the in-depth development of ICHe protection, but also stimulates the public's enthusiasm and interest in ICHe, injecting new vitality into the inheritance and development of ICHe culture.

2.5 International Communication and Dissemination

There is a widely circulated Chinese proverb: "What is national is also international" This saying reveals the universal value and borderless appeal of culture and the arts. Although there are thousands of different languages and cultures in the world, true art is often able to cross these barriers and touch people's deepest resonance. Intangible cultural heritage, as an important part of human civilisation, is precisely such a treasure with historical, artistic and universal infectious power. They carry the historical memory and cultural wisdom of a nation, and with their unique charm and value, they attract

people from different cultural backgrounds. These valuable heritages are not only the pride of the nation, but also the common wealth of the people of the world.

The Chinese government has always been committed to promoting international exchanges and co-operation in ICH culture, encouraging and supporting ICH projects to go out and present them to the world.

In order to achieve this goal, the government has provided support in various aspects, including financial support, building platforms for overseas performances, and international exchange activities, aiming to bring more ICH cultures to the world stage.

According to the staff of Jinjiang Puppet Theatre, palm puppetry, as one of China's unique ICH projects, has also attracted much attention on the international stage. This kind of puppetry originated from China's ancient tradition, by virtue of its deep historical origin, chic shape, high degree of imitation and interactivity, as well as relatively low stage performance action and skill, loved by neighbouring countries Jinjiang Puppet Theatre Troupe has also followed the diplomatic corps on many occasions to visit countries in Europe, Africa and Southeast Asia, and brought wonderful performances to the audience in these countries.

These visits not only enhance the cultural understanding and friendship between the people of different countries, but also bring new opportunities for the inheritance and development of the puppet theatre in the palm. The inheritors within the troupe demonstrated their exquisite skills on the international stage, attracting more audiences and making positive contributions to the dissemination and promotion of ICH culture.

Safeguarding of ICH at the civil level

China's civilian forces play an irreplaceable and significant role in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage; they are the mainstay, promoter and guardian of non-genetic inheritance, and have made important contributions to the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage. Through inheritance and innovation, protection and promotion, social participation and co-construction, they have provided strong support for the safeguarding of ICH. The joint co-operation of the government, community and civil forces has built up a ICH protection system with multi-party participation and synergistic development.

Family-centred heirloom training mechanisms

In the course of its long history, Chinese civilisation has produced a variety of cultural wonders, such as the blossoming of a hundred flowers. These cultural wonders originated from different regions and ethnic groups. Today, they have a common name - intangible cultural heritage. As a prestigious intangible cultural heritage, they have become better known, and governments have led the way in building a specialised safeguarding framework for intangible cultural heritage and implementing a series of corresponding safeguarding measures. But before that - before there was a government-led safeguarding of these cultures, and even before the concept of intangible cultural heritage was born - in China, these cultures were passed on mainly within families. Even today, when the government has

established specialised schools to train inheritors, the training of ICH inheritors is still dominated by the family-teacher-apprentice system of inheritance.

Take Jinjiang palm puppet theatre as an example. A very essential part of Jinjiang palm puppet theatre is the production of puppets. A complete puppet involves three parts: the carving of the puppet head, the making of the puppet body and the sewing of the puppet costume. The carving of the head of the puppet is the core of these three parts, and the good or bad carving of the head is directly related to the final shape of the puppet.

In the field of puppet head carving of Jinjiang palm puppet theatre, Quanzhou Jiangjiazou has always enjoyed a good reputation. (Figure 3)



Figure 3. Jiangjiazou's Puppet Head

Jiangjiazou rose to prominence in the first half of the 20th century as a modern master carver of the past and the future. Through keen observation and careful study of the figure, he summed up an even carving law, he believes that the image of beauty, ugliness, loyalty, treachery, virtue, stupidity and expression of joy, anger, sadness and happiness will be in the eyes, ears, mouth, nose, eyebrows “five shapes” and eyebrow, zygomatic bone, chin bone “three bone “on the brow bone, cheekbone, chin bone” three bones “cause complex changes. By generalising, exaggerating and deforming the facial bones and musculature in accordance with the plot and character, the puppet head that does not move can be turned into a lifelike character with a distinctive personality. The puppet heads made by him are a perfect fusion of carving and pastel colours, with subtle brushwork, pure carving, refined knife skills and exquisite techniques, featuring beautiful shapes, rich images, rigorous structures, precise carving, harmonious colours, beautiful patterns and colours, and vivid and interesting disguises.

The author in Quanzhou field investigation, had the honour to visit the Jiangjiazou go puppet head carving skills of the fifth generation of the heir apparent Mr. Jiang Donglin. According to Mr Jiang Donglin, the carving technique of Jiangjiazou's puppet head is passed down from generation to generation within his family. His grandfather passed it on to his father, who passed it on to him, and

now he carves with his sister, and his daughter, who is in secondary school, also comes to help from time to time. His grandfather was a national-level inheritor, and he himself is a municipal-level inheritor. One point worth noting is that Mr Jiang Donglin says that family inheritance is not mandatory, but freely chosen based on personal interest. Under the influence of his ears and environment, he and his fathers chose this path.

When asked if this unique skill would be lost if one day the descendants of the family were not interested in the craft. He said bashfully that if that day did come, there was nothing that could be done about it. The family does not force future generations to inherit, they only provide options for them. But perhaps it is the call of the bloodline, perhaps it is the subtle influence of the atmosphere, this seemingly fragile bond of family inheritance is unexpectedly indestructible.

Innovative explorations of civic spontaneity

Innovation is an essential initiative for any culture that wants to continue.

In the case of intangible cultural heritage, by incorporating new elements and concepts, it helps to revitalise and update the intangible heritage tradition and make it more responsive to the needs of modern society. At the same time, innovation makes traditional culture more attractive and allows the younger generation to participate in the intangible cultural heritage. In the present time of rapid development of science and technology, with the help of modern scientific and technological means, such as digitalisation, virtual reality and other technologies, intangible cultural heritage can be better recorded, disseminated and protected. It enables it to be transmitted to a wider audience in a more intuitive and rich way. In terms of socio-economic value, innovation helps intangible cultural heritage projects better integrate into the market and bring more economic benefits, so as to reach a virtuous cycle of culture - economy, for example, intangible cultural heritage skills can be applied to cultural and creative products, tourism experience and other fields.

In conclusion, innovation provides new ideas and methods for the protection of intangible cultural heritage. In the process of protection, tradition and innovation complement each other and jointly promote the heritage and development of intangible cultural heritage.

In Jinjiang Puppet Theatre, I learned that the government-led innovation initiatives, mostly focused on the development of the repertoire, and generally still moderately follow the route of inheritance. But in the private sector, Jinjiang palm puppet theatre has begun its unique path of innovation.

Fujian Youth Puppet, a creative workshop of Quanzhou Huang Qinghui Puppet Studio. Mr Huang Qinghui Sr. is another master of puppet head carving and has created many popular puppet figures. Fujian Youth Puppet is represented by Huang Jiangyi, son of Huang Qinghui, as the main agent. Unlike Master Huang Qinghui himself who focused on traditional puppet carving. The young Huang Jiangyi is more focused on the innovation of puppet culture.



Figure 4. Huang Jiangyi Performing with String Puppets

Huang Jiangyi's main focus is the direction of the string puppet, wire puppet in the puppet above the installation of silk thread, a puppet wire has 8 to 16, up to 36. According to the basic movements of the human body, the strings are divided into groups and manipulated by the actor's hands, which is more difficult to manipulate compared to palm puppetry, but both string puppets and palm puppets originated in the southern region of Fujian, China, and they share a common origin.

The first effective attempt they made was: dolls in one.



Figure 5. Wu Jingliang and His "Wukong"

Traditionally, Jingjiang palm puppetry is performed by people standing behind the stage with their

hands raised, but now, they have chosen to step out from behind the scene and come in front of the stage. Performers and puppets appear on stage at the same time, adding eye contact between the actors to the puppet's performance, as in Wu Jingliang's original theatre - The Wukong. Taken from the popular Chinese mythological character - Sun Wukong. At the end, Wu Jingliang draws out the Wukong's golden rod, and the puppets and the actors, at the same time, make a distant bow to the audience. A theatre within a theatre.

In addition to puppetry, Huang Jiangyi has also experimented with combining puppets with modern Hip Hop. The dancers performed a fast-paced dance on stage, while the puppets made the same movements under the puppeteer's control. This unique idea won the audience's applause when it was first shown

Despite the widespread acclaim that the innovation has brought, when it comes to economic gains, Huang Jiangyi admits that they are still generally at a stage where inputs outweigh outputs. The string puppets have been able to become self-sustaining, providing some financial support for their innovative path, but the palm puppets are still lacking in this area and need further work.

But Huang Jiangyi and his team are not dispirited. They are deeply aware that innovation is a long and difficult process, which requires a lot of time and energy. But they also firmly believe that as long as they persevere, keep exploring and trying, they will be able to find a new path suitable for the development of puppet theatre.

Now, they are still actively exploring on the road of puppet theatre innovation, trying to promote the spread of puppet theatre in the world.

In China, there are many more young teams like Huang Jiangyi and Wu Jingliang, who, while taking over the banner of tradition from their elders, are also positively integrating their own ideas and injecting young blood into the protection of intangible cultural heritage.

Folk communication mediated by short videos

According to the 52nd Statistical Report on the Development Status of the Internet in China released by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in Beijing, as of June 2023, the scale of Chinese Internet users reached 1.079 billion, up 11.09 million from December 2022, and the Internet penetration rate was as high as 76.4%. Among them, the scale of short video users reached 1.026 billion. Short videos have short content and low filming costs, and their content production method makes the user overlap between content producers and consumers high, and many people are the consumers of content as well as the producers of new content.

Compared with the intangible cultural heritage documentaries and films produced by official institutions, which have invested huge resources and funds, private intangible heritage bearers often choose short videos as their main medium of communication. Short videos are intuitive and easy to understand, easy to share and interact with, and have become a new channel for folk NHIs to show their skills and pass on their culture, enabling more people to experience the charm of intangible cultural heritage up close.

These folk inheritors of the video, props simple, background in the home or their own small yard, appearing characters simple, almost no skills to speak of, often just a simple splicing of the lens, but it is precisely such a rough shooting, but let a person through the screen feel the sincerity of the face.

Taking “Uncle Xing’s Puppet Theatre” on the Xiaohongshu platform as an example, a somewhat simple-looking theatre, a puppet and the old man in charge of the puppet have amassed a five-digit fan base in just three months.

There are many more inheritors like Uncle Xing on China’s main social media apps, such as Tik Tok and Quick Worker.

Deficiencies in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage

In general, China’s safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage has followed the harmonious path of “government-led, civilian participation”. The government-established safeguarding system serves as a solid pillar to ensure the soundness and sustainability of intangible cultural heritage, while the spontaneous innovative power of the private sector, like a gushing source of energy, constantly injects new vigour into intangible cultural heritage, enhancing the quality and depth of safeguarding work.

But there are problems with the current model. The biggest problem is the interaction between the government and the civil society.

The government and the civil society should be the two pivots of the intangible cultural heritage protection system, and the two are respectively to concentrate their efforts into a “synergy” for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage. However, the fact is that they tend to work “independently” and are unable to form a synergy.

Take Jingjiang palm puppetry as an example. The government organisation Jinjiang Puppet Troupe and members of the Fujian Youth Puppet Folklore, both studying palm puppets, while almost all members of the two come from the Quanzhou Art School, each other are classmates or alumni, but the troupe and the folklore organisation has little to no interaction. During the visit and research, from the two interview statements, and even with a hidden “peer to peer” feeling.

As the “two fulcrums” of intangible cultural heritage protection, the resources and funds received by civil society organisations and government organisations are also unevenly distributed. Almost all of the funds invested by the government for intangible cultural heritage preservation go directly to the theatre troupes set up by the government, with very little going to the private sector.

The reason behind this is not difficult to understand. Folk organisations are smaller and more loosely organised than government organisations, and in Quanzhou, large-scale puppet workshops are often used as a feature of cultural tourism to attract tourists to study and experience. Other puppet enthusiasts also only use puppetry as entertainment outside of work, and their performances are also “festival-limited”, temporarily building a small theatre, and only perform for two or three days during festivals.

Therefore, in the protection system of intangible cultural heritage, folk protection is in a “lost” state, many people do not even know that there are corresponding folk protection organisations exist.

In this case, the government should make some corresponding adjustments, firstly, to “see” the existence of folk organisations, and secondly, to redistribute resources, give some financial support to folk organisations, and regularly organise cooperation and exchanges between official troupes and folk organisations.

In this interactive mode of protection, the government and the private sector can ensure the survival of intangible cultural heritage, and at the same time give it a new lustre in the modern society. The government’s leadership ensures the healthy operation of the overall protection system, while the spontaneous innovation of the private sector injects new impetus into the heritage, and together they construct an organic and vigorous ecology of intangible cultural heritage protection.

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