

Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Promotes Rural Revitalization

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Abstract: The countryside has always been the source of China's development, with many historical events originating from rural areas. From the current social situation, revitalizing the countryside is an important step in the development of the nation. A large amount of intangible cultural heritage has been preserved in rural areas by now. As an indispensable part of rural culture, the development of intangible cultural heritage will promote the economic development of rural areas. The protection of intangible cultural heritage is a favorable means to drive rural revitalization. This paper starts with the mechanism of how the protection of intangible cultural heritage contributes to rural revitalization, explores the protection paths of intangible heritage projects, and studies how to promote rural revitalization through the protection of intangible heritage projects.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection; Rural Revitalization; Mechanism of Action; Protection Pathways

1. Introduction

With the progression of the times, the development of the rural economy is clearly not in line with the pace of the era. Most young and middle-aged people choose to leave their hometowns, leading to a continuous decline in rural populations and a sharp increase in urban populations. Due to the departure of labor, the economic development of rural areas is poor. A large number of intangible heritage projects exist in rural areas, and the protection of intangible cultural heritage is an important means to promote rural revitalization. Intangible cultural heritage, by integrating with tourism and digitalization, promotes the economic development of its region, further driving the development of

rural areas.

2. The Mechanism of Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection in Promoting Rural Revitalization

Rural areas possess an extremely rich resource of intangible cultural heritage. Transforming these cultural resources into industrial resources through innovation, and developing the intangible cultural heritage industry and related industries, is an important way to promote rural development and revitalize the rural economy (Figure 1). The development of the rural economy, culture, industry, and reputation will promote the revitalization of rural areas. The preservation of a large number of intangible cultural heritage projects in rural areas is an important way to work towards rural revitalization.

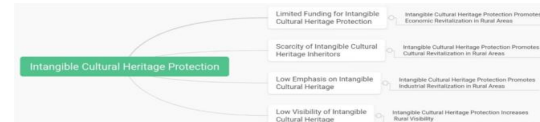


Figure 1. The Mechanism of Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection in Promoting Rural Revitalization

2.1 Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Promotes Economic Revitalization in Rural Areas

Rural areas have always been associated with the impression of being "poor and backward," with most of their facilities not as advanced and complete as in cities. At the same time, rural culture often leaves an impression of being "undesirable," and few people identify with rural culture, leading more and more young people to choose to work in cities. Due to the massive loss of labor, the economic development process in rural areas is slow. The protection of intangible cultural heritage, combined with modern technology and various commercial activities, is used to promote rural revitalization. Integrating intangible cultural

heritage with technology and utilizing the power of the internet can promote local development simultaneously, commercializing intangible heritage projects is also an important way to develop the rural economy. By attracting investment to intangible heritage projects, the local economy is promoted.

2.2 Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Promotes Cultural Revitalization in Rural Areas

Due to the slow development process in rural areas and the significant loss of talent, some excellent aspects of rural culture have disappeared. For example, traditional virtues like hospitality and mutual assistance are fading with the progress of the times. Talent is an important way to promote cultural development, and focusing on talent cultivation not only revitalizes intangible heritage projects but also promotes the revitalization of rural culture. Facing the situation where the vitality of rural culture is fading, the active utilization of intangible heritage, rooted in the local community, transforms intangible heritage resources into cultural products, bringing benefits to rural residents, encouraging talent to return, slowing the hollowing out trend, and revitalizing rural culture. It is necessary to strengthen the development of intangible cultural heritage, make rational use of its resources, endow intangible cultural heritage with new charm for the era, enhance farmers' identification and sense of belonging to rural culture, guide them to consciously participate in cultural protection and dissemination, and practice cultural confidence with concrete actions ^[1].

2.3 Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Promotes Industrial Revitalization in Rural Areas

Intangible cultural heritage is not only a carrier of rich cultural, artistic, and economic significance but also a powerful force in driving rural revitalization. Rural revitalization relies on industrial revitalization; only when industries thrive can they continuously inject energy into rural areas ^[2]. The economic value contained in intangible cultural heritage needs to be integrated into rural life, assisting in rural employment and creating cultural industry chains ^[3]. By combining intangible heritage with modern technology and using popular

methods to promote intangible heritage projects, rural industrial development is enhanced. Attracting investment in intangible heritage culture promotes the immediate economic development and, subsequently, industrial development. Utilizing tourism to attract investors for local construction and investment increases foot traffic, revitalizing local industries.

2.4 Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Increases Rural Visibility

Most people's first impression of rural areas is that of poverty and obscurity. Many villages with intangible heritage projects are not well-known. Extensive surveys have shown that the majority of people are unaware of intangible heritage projects, let alone their locations. The development of intangible heritage projects not only increases people's understanding of intangible heritage but also enhances the visibility of rural areas. Higher visibility is more conducive to local economic development. The integration of intangible cultural heritage with modernization, while preserving the essence of traditional intangible cultural heritage, also meets the aesthetic needs of modern people ^[4], driving rural industrial development and increasing the visibility and influence of rural areas. Enhancing the visibility of rural areas promotes the development of local tourism, brings about a multitude of economic activities, provides an economic foundation for rural revitalization, and better promotes the development of rural economy and culture.

3. Challenges in Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection for Rural Revitalization

3.1 Limited Funding for Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection

According to data analysis from the National Bureau of Statistics, the growth rate of per capita disposable income gradually decreased from 2018 to 2020, but there was a sudden increase from 2020 to 2021. After 2021, it fell back to a level nearly similar to the growth rate in 2020 (Figure 2).

To date, China has acquired 34 UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage listings and 1530 national-level recognitions, becoming the country with the most intangible heritage projects in the world. In recent years, China's

intangible cultural heritage protection activities have been methodically underway. Despite significant achievements, there are still areas needing improvement. The inheritance and development of intangible heritage projects, including training of inheritors, promotion, product costs, etc., require substantial financial support from the state or society. The per capita disposable income in rural areas has been decreasing annually, leading to progressively less funding for intangible cultural heritage protection. Without financial support, it is challenging for intangible heritage projects to thrive.

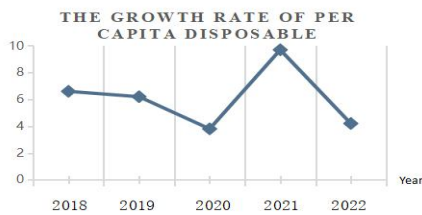


Figure 2. Growth Rate of Per Capita Disposable Income of Rural Residents in China, 2018-2022

3.2 Scarcity of Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritors

According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the rural population decreased by 9.25% from 54,108 people in 2018 to 49,104 people in 2022 (Table 1), while the urban population increased by 6.12% from 86,433 in 2018 to 92,071 in 2022 (Table 2).

Table 1. Rural Population in China, 2018-2022

| Year | 2022 | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Rural Population (People) | 49104 | 49835 | 50992 | 52582 | 54108 |

Compiled according to the data from the National Bureau of Statistics, website: <http://data.stats.gov.cn/easyquery.htm?cn=C01>

Table 2. Urban Population in China, 2018-2022

| Year | 2022 | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Urban Population (People) | 92071 | 91425 | 90220 | 88426 | 86433 |

Compiled according to the data from the National Bureau of Statistics, website: <http://data.stats.gov.cn/easyquery.htm?cn=C01> With the rural population declining and the urban population rising each year, many young

people choose to leave their rural homes for cities, resulting in a significant loss of inheritors for intangible heritage projects. At the same time, many inheritors of intangible cultural heritage can barely make ends meet with their crafts, forcing many to abandon their traditional skills for other industries. This substantial loss of inheritors is leading some intangible heritage projects to the brink of extinction. Promoting the development of intangible heritage projects helps attract talent to rural areas. Focusing on talent cultivation can revive the glory of intangible heritage projects.

3.3 Low Emphasis on Intangible Cultural Heritage

Currently, some rural areas prioritize industry over culture, leading to a lack of cultural depth in rural tourism and a diminished attraction for tourists. The "fast-food" and "fragmented" nature of modern media has led to a decline in the visibility of intangible cultural heritage projects, reducing the development space for folk culture, traditional music, traditional medicine, and specialty cuisines. For instance, some villagers in Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County, after increasing their income, have built brick-and-mortar houses, resulting in a decrease in traditional Dong ethnic wooden structures, affecting the inheritance and protection of Dong ethnic intangible cultural heritage in wooden architectural craftsmanship [5]. The level of attention given to intangible heritage projects determines the extent of their development. Through research, it has been found that most people are unaware of the specific intangible heritage projects in China. Local governments also pay little attention to the inheritance and protection of these projects. Even some villagers in areas with intangible heritage are unaware that their locality is a site of cultural inheritance. The lack of a complete system for inheritance and protection, as well as inadequate records and measures for succession, has led many intangible heritage projects to the brink of extinction.

3.4 Low Visibility of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Rural areas, being in a closed environment with inconvenient transportation, struggle to disseminate information even if they possess rich cultural heritage and resources. The

difficulty in information circulation makes the transmission of intangible heritage particularly challenging. The protection of intangible cultural heritage lacks public support, with inadequate public awareness and efforts in protection measures and exploration. For example, Wuxuan Hongzao vinegar is hardly known outside the central region of Guangxi. Inadequate documentation, sparse online search results, and lack of recognition limit the visibility of this intangible cultural heritage [6]. Local intangible heritage projects are rarely known, and even less so in their own localities.

4. Pathways to Utilize Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection to Boost Cultural Revitalization in Rural Areas

4.1 Increase Funding for Heritage Protection to Promote Rural Economic Development

The development of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) projects requires stable financial investment, especially for those lacking economic resources. Ensuring funding is key to sustaining these projects. Increasing investment in ICH and commercializing certain projects can provide them with tangible prospects for development. In a market economy, focusing on capital investment can ensure effective implementation of foundational protection, and through market operations, achieve sustainable development. Promoting the inheritance and protection of intangible cultural heritage while also advancing rural economic development can not only bring economic benefits but also invigorate the ICH. Villagers should actively participate in ICH protection, engage in training, recognize the value of intangible cultural heritage, and foster a sense of voluntary protection [7], reshaping cultural confidence in ICH and enhancing its influence.

4.2 Cultivate Inheritors of ICH Projects to Promote Rural Cultural Development

In China's traditional cultural heritage inheritance system, inheritors play a crucial role. The transmission and preservation of intangible cultural heritage are essential, and shaping and training inheritors are indispensable steps to achieving this goal. For professional training of inheritors, modern apprenticeships and specialized training

courses should be adopted to strengthen the combination of practice and theory, ensuring the comprehensive quality of inheritors is effectively enhanced. The continuous inheritance and protection of intangible cultural heritage, in line with the strategy of rural revitalization, are long-term and complex processes that require joint efforts and continuous input across different eras. Only by inspiring the public's deep appreciation of the unique charm of intangible cultural heritage can we expect more people to spontaneously participate in its inheritance and protection. Taking Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village as an example, systematic study and training not only improve the knowledge and moral qualities of the inheritors but also focus on cultivating their innovative abilities, promoting the creative transformation and diverse development of intangible cultural heritage [8].

4.3 Increase Attention to ICH Projects to Promote Rural Industrial Revitalization

Governments at all levels and cultural heritage protection institutions should fully recognize and highly value the protection of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and the construction of its inheritance mechanisms. The goal is to delve into the potential value of ICH to promote its positive role in advancing rural revitalization strategies. This involves not only a deeper understanding and respect for the inherent cultural value of ICH but also effectively stimulating its potential to drive rural economic development. Accompanied by proper guidance from the government, the development of tourism and the organization of cultural exhibitions should naturally emerge, further promoting the rural revitalization strategy centered on ICH protection, thereby enriching and enhancing the internal drive and vitality of comprehensive rural development. To continuously raise awareness and social value recognition of ICH projects, efforts should be made to strengthen the intrinsic connection between ICH and local tourism, promoting the joint development of cultural tourism. In this process, diverse communication channels should be actively developed and utilized, leveraging advanced technologies like big data, the internet, and artificial intelligence to expand the influence and dissemination of ICH. By increasing

attention to ICH, local industries can be developed, furthering rural revitalization.

4.4 Promote ICH Projects to Enhance Visibility and Increase Rural Area Recognition

Traditionally, ICH has mainly relied on textual records for inheritance and dissemination, a method often limited by incomplete documentation and singular means of propagation. The application of digital technology has facilitated the transformation of ICH materials into digital formats, converting vast textual records into digital ones, which aids in better preservation of ICH projects. Using scientific methods to preserve ICH culture ensures its comprehensive presence in the world. Additionally, digital ICH projects are more likely to spark interest, and continuous technological advancements provide new avenues for the protection and utilization of ICH. Furthermore, by fully utilizing public cultural resources, integrating high-quality ICH, and through various activities, a solid platform for the development of ICH can be constructed. This strengthens the promotion and dissemination of ICH, enriching the public's cultural experience. It further expands the visibility of the locality, increases public attention to ICH projects, promotes local economic development, and drives rural revitalization.

5. Conclusion

In the process of rural revitalization, the integration of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) with rural development is highly feasible. It provides an excellent environment for the development of the rural economy and aids in the exploration of ICH, thereby promoting the revitalization of rural industries. We have many outstanding traditional cultures, all of which have developed from rural areas, and we should focus on protecting these rural origins. At the same time, ICH is embedded within rural communities. Promoting the development of ICH will drive rural revitalization. To promote the development of ICH in the new era, we should focus on its reform, continuously innovate ICH projects, change their basic modes of development, and better harness the charm of ICH. The revitalization of rural culture and the development of ICH are inseparable; both the

development of ICH and rural revitalization will promote the advancement of the nation and society. Protecting ICH means promoting rural revitalization.

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