

The Dilemma and Optimization Paths of Integrating Shanghai Marine Intangible Cultural Heritage into School Education: A Case Study of Jinshan Peasant Painting in Schools

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Abstract

Integrating intangible cultural heritage (ICH) into school education not only helps promote the innovative development and creative transformation of ICH but also solidifies the cultural foundation of Chinese modernization through the transmission of cultural heritage to the new generation. This paper takes Shanghai's marine ICH as a starting point, examines the Jinshan Peasant Painting initiative in schools, and identifies several dilemmas in the integration of ICH into school education: insufficient teaching staff, varying student learning abilities, and a lack of curriculum development. In response, this paper proposes corresponding resolutions: systematic teacher training, promotion of curriculum development and system construction, and optimization of the teaching model for ICH courses.

Keywords

School Education; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Jinshan Peasant Painting.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Significance

Intangible cultural heritage (hereinafter referred to as ICH) is officially celebrated as the foundation and lifeblood of China's outstanding traditional culture. In 2021, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued "Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage," further clarifying the integration of ICH into the national education system and encouraging ICH activities in schools.[1] In December 2022, General Secretary Xi Jinping issued important directives regarding ICH, emphasizing the need for its systematic preservation and reiterating the importance of promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese traditional culture. [2] School education has long been viewed as a necessary means of ICH transmission. In recent years, the Ministry of Education has conducted nationwide campaigns, such as "ICH in Schools" and "ICH in the Classroom," which have made significant progress. Currently, 1,484 primary and secondary schools in the country are recognized as institutions for "inheriting traditional Chinese cultural arts," encompassing nearly 55% of ICH projects at various levels. Primary and secondary school participation has reached 85%, and the activities related to "ICH in Schools" become increasingly normalized and standardized.[3] Despite significant progress, challenges remain in achieving high-quality development and effective transmission in integrating ICH into schools. Through field investigations, this paper identifies three main challenges currently faced in integrating ICH into school education and offers corresponding solutions.

1.2. Research Scope and Methodology

The field site selected for this study is Jinshan District in Shanghai. Jinshan is located on the coast of Shanghai, with more than 10 items of Shanghai's marine, one national-level, 16 municipal-

level, and several district-level ICH projects. The study primarily focuses on the art-related ICH, specifically, Jinshan Peasant Painting examined in this paper belong to the intangible cultural heritage of fine arts, which originate from the ancient folk art of the Jiangnan region, with the customs of the water towns in the south of the Yangtze River as the main theme, and integrate the folk art expressions such as embroidery, paper-cutting, blue calico, stove murals, sculptures, and lacquer paintings, and use bold artistic exaggeration and strong color contrast to win over ingenuity. This research is based on the Chinese Peasant Painting Village and the inheritors of Jinshan Peasant Painting, which are two important organizations dedicated to the inheritance of Jinshan Peasant Painting. The research employs participatory interviews, participatory observation, and material collection methods to gather data. The study specifically targets primary and secondary school students in the city for further exploration of the topic.

2. Educational Dilemmas

2.1. Curriculum Structure and System Development

When ICH is integrated into the educational system as a course, there are issues of insufficient consideration of students' cognitive abilities. Specifically, there is no clear distinction in the content of ICH skills learned by different age groups (grades 1-2, grades 3-5, and grades 6-9), nor has sufficient attention been paid to the difficulty of ICH skills and the timing of teaching. Taking Jinshan Peasant Painting as an example, the main materials used for painting include rice paper, brushes, and watercolor paints. These materials can be challenging for younger students to handle, resulting in unsatisfactory artistic outcomes and a lack of enthusiasm for learning. Regarding color matching in Jinshan Peasant Painting, the requirement for bright and harmonious colors also poses challenges for younger students who lack basic color theory knowledge. Horizontally, the arrangement of ICH courses needs to consider the subjectivity of ICH skills. Currently, there are 1,557 national-level ICH projects and 3,610 sub-items in China, categorized into ten major categories based on cultural types. As course content, ICH skills should be classified according to specific subjects in primary and secondary education, such as Chinese language, art, history, and music, thus aligning with the curriculum, allowing better integration of ICH courses with these subjects and achieving the goal of cultural transmission through education.[4]

2.2. Shortage of Qualified Instructors

The entering of the digital age alongside tides of globalization has forged a multicultural landscape amid the intensified impact of foreign cultures. Meanwhile, urbanization has altered traditional lifestyles, subjecting many ICH projects to the threat of disappearance due to a lack of inheritors. Among the current cultural inheritors of Jinshan Peasant Painting, over 90% are over 60 years old. Inheritors, crucial for imparting ICH skills, are the primary teachers in ICH courses within schools. As they age, the shortage of qualified instructors becomes an increasingly pressing issue—the development of ICH courses in schools is likely to stagnate.

2.3. Lack of Modern Curriculum Structure

Modern curricula are rigorous scientific activities supported by scientific pedagogy involving classroom teaching, extracurricular practice, and post-class assessments. In contrast, ICH is often rooted in local experience and non-standardized. This results in a dilemma of standardizing curricula while preserving the experiential nature of ICH. If ICH is modernized, scientific, and standardized, it risks stripping its inherent cultural authenticity. Conversely, maintaining its authenticity leads to challenges regarding knowledge and evaluation standards, complicating the implementation of classroom teaching.

3. Optimization Paths

3.1. Layered Teaching

Instructors can design tiered ICH courses based on students' ages and skill levels. For example, younger students can learn simple ocean folklore stories and basic handicrafts, while older students can engage in more complex creative processes. For instance, younger students studying Jinshan Peasant Painting can focus on aesthetics related to color, lines, and composition, helping them better grasp foundational painting knowledge. In terms of painting materials, younger students can use more manageable supplies, such as watercolor pens, oil pastels, and drawing paper, primarily to experience the charm of peasant painting without the pressure of completing a full artwork. Older students can compare Jinshan Peasant Painting with Western traditional one-point perspective and modernist art, appreciating the unique scatter perspective in Chinese painting and understanding why it is referred to as the "Eastern Picasso." They can also use rice paper and brushes to create original peasant paintings from their perspective.

3.2. Teacher Training

Schools can collaborate with ICH inheritors to provide professional training for teachers, enhancing their understanding and teaching capabilities related to ICH. By adopting a model where inheritors train teachers, the techniques mastered by inheritors can be passed on to professional educators. This model addresses the issue of decreasing numbers of inheritors unable to support classroom instruction in various primary and secondary schools while also mitigating the risk of ICH fading into obscurity due to aging inheritors. Moreover, since the teachers involved in ICH education are vetted professionals, this approach avoids misunderstandings by students caused by inheritors' regional accents or lack of basic teaching knowledge. This enables students to better grasp ICH knowledge while reducing the teaching pressure on inheritors.

3.3. Curriculum Integration

Given that ICH is often rooted in local experience and tends to be subjective and non-standardized, it is difficult to incorporate it into a single evaluation system. In the process of integrating ICH into schools, ICH education can be combined with subjects like Chinese language and arts to design interdisciplinary project-based learning, allowing students to experience the charm of ICH through practical engagement. This approach also helps avoid the challenges associated with standardizing assessments when ICH education is set as a standalone course.

4. Conclusion

Introducing Shanghai's marine intangible cultural heritage into primary and secondary school settings is an important avenue for cultural transmission. However, it still faces multiple challenges in practice, including curriculum structures, a shortage of qualified instructors, and inadequate curriculum development. By implementing methods such as layered teaching, teacher training, and curriculum integration, it is possible to effectively promote the dissemination and development of ICH within schools. Ultimately, this will cultivate a new generation of young people who have an understanding and passion for local culture, laying the foundation for the sustainable transmission of ICH.

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