

Reflections on the Connection between Cultural Memory and Female Subjectivity Carried by Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Abstract: Intangible cultural heritage is a living inheritance of the people's lives and customs that links the past with the present. In this life system, women have traditionally served as the main, but often unrecognized, bearers of oral culture, textile skills and family traditions. This paper investigates the deep connection between cultural memory and female subjectivity in intangible cultural heritage. Given the theoretical convergence of collective memory studies and feminist discourse, this paper will investigate how traditional crafts and embodied practices serve as necessary paths for women's liberation and identity formation. Women have been marginalised by patriarchal and monument-oriented societies historically, but in recent years, they have used intangible cultural heritage for economic reasons and also as a way to express their own ideas and revise historical narratives. At present, around the world, these practices have been revived and now serve as cultural symbols by female artisans. The study shows that the protection of intangible cultural heritage is closely related to promoting gender equality, and therefore, women's subjectivity should be taken into account in all parts of the discussion on global heritage protection.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage, cultural memory, female subjectivity, gender identity, cultural preservation, empowerment.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, the inheritance of human history has taken the form of great works of architecture, material culture and written records. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, the world began to change its perception of heritage in a fundamental way. The institution's recognition of intangible cultural heritage has broadened the scope of culture and expanded the space for living culture to include more people. Thus, it was believed that the core of human existence lay not in being carved into stone and paper, but in actively living, being realised and passed down by generations. Among the rich system of living heritage, gender and the role of women are also subjects of research in this field. At various times in history, society has confined women to the private sphere and, thus, their achievements have often been overlooked in official records. However, it is in this domestic and everyday space that most of the intangible cultural heritage practices have been cultivated, preserved and spread.

Women are the mild carriers of culture. With the regular movements of the loom, detailed embroidery is done; at the same time, there are gentle lulling songs and folk songs for the children. These behaviours are not mechanical repetitions of the old tasks, but profound expressions of female subjectivity. These traditional crafts give women a way to express their lives, happiness and sorrow, resistance to the constraints of patriarchy, etc. Therefore, to learn about intangible cultural heritage is also to understand how the women who carry out this living tradition have expressed themselves.

This paper will systematically study the complex connections between cultural memory and female subjectivity in the context of intangible cultural heritage. This study will explore how the living heritage of the Luo people serves to transmit collective memory and how women create and express their sense of self through this heritage in modern

times. The first part of this paper will provide the theoretical basis for the study subject. Based on the above introduction, Section 2 will introduce some relevant theories and research results on the relationship between cultural memory and the development of heritage discourse. Section 3 reviews the history of marginalisation for women's crafts and explores how female subjectivity has been recovered through performative traditions. Section 4 examines the current situation of the above phenomenon and studies how intangible cultural heritage can be used to drive socio-economic and psychological empowerment of women. Finally, Section 5 summarizes the main content and puts forward a concluding idea about the essential role of women in the long-term development of world cultural heritage. In addition to changing the idea of historical value, there has also been attention to intangible cultural heritage, and thus modern scholars of sociology and anthropology have had to adjust their research methods accordingly. In the past, scholars have paid more attention to the public, male areas of state affairs and warfare than to other places. By deliberately shifting the focus of research to the detailed and specific practices of female artisans, we can uncover a richer, more profound pattern of human civilisation. Thus, in addition to correcting the omissions in history, a profound counter-narrative to the homogenising effects of modern globalisation has also been presented. As indigenous and local languages face increasing pressure to disappear, and as mass-produced commercial goods continuously replace unique, handmade products, the close-knit, labour-intensive practices carried out by women are becoming some of the last havens for authentic regional culture. Therefore, the above issues need to be addressed. A close relationship between the artisan and their work reveals deep ideas about human strength; therefore, even when faced with major changes in society and politics, these people have been able to secure a place for themselves and receive recognition.

2. Theoretical Framework of Cultural Memory and Intangible Cultural Heritage

In order to know the deep significance of women in the inheritance of culture, one must first understand how memory is organised. Memory is not an internal storage system of the individual but also a social construction. According to the theory of collective memory, people learn, organise and remember their memories in relation to their society and groups [1]. The family, the religious community and the geographical village all provide a basis for the individual's memory. When women participate in group crafting or communal singing, they are actively contributing to the continuous inheritance of this collective memory and connecting the current generation with their ancestors.

Separately, communicative memory and cultural memory are also distinguished in this way. Communicative memory is based on daily and informal interactions, has a relatively short time scale of about three generations, and is not institutionalised; cultural memory, on the other hand, is transcendent and institutionalised [2]. Cultural memory is transmitted by various carriers, such as texts, monuments and institutionalised rituals, over time. For a long time in human history, women have been systematically excluded from the construction of these institutionalized carriers. They were denied the right to learn, excluded from the building trades, and barred from office. As a result, the mechanisms of formal cultural memory were overwhelmingly male-dominated.

Critical heritage studies have begun to dismantle the patriarchal system gradually. Scholars have started to believe that heritage does not have to be about large-scale, tangible items; rather, it can be a kind of cultural value system [3]. Heritage is an active discourse, a performance in which contemporary societies negotiate their identities by choosing which parts of the past to carry forward into the future. The above theoretical development has expanded the scope of historical value significantly. It validated the transient, the domestic, and the embodied as sites of female cultural power. A change in global policy to protect intangible cultural heritage has lowered the threshold for listing, and now many traditional crafts, food culture and other forms of women's history and life have received official recognition as essential parts of Chinese culture. Moreover, the mode of transmission for cultural memory in intangible heritage also requires an intense, personalised teaching relationship. Formal institutional education generally standardizes and sanitizes historical knowledge; therefore, the transmission of traditional crafts or oral traditions often takes place in a small-scale, matrilineal household setting. A grandmother is showing a little girl how to use a loom to weave, but she is also passing on her own way of life. This local, intergenerational teaching will ensure that the emotional and spiritual aspects of the cultural memory are fully preserved. Physical repetition of these movements can create muscle memory for young people to throw a shuttle, weave a basket, perform all sorts of vocal exercises, and thus inherit the culture of their ancestors. Embodied memory operates independently of textual literacy and provides a resilient, uncensored channel for cultural inheritance that has survived colonisation, war and other aggressive state assimilation measures. Under the terms of a resilient and deeply embodied pedagogical system, the profound endurance of female-led cultural memory can be fully showcased.

3. The Historical Marginalization and Rediscovery of Female Subjectivity

Gender and heritage have long been subjects of institutional exclusion. Traditional architectural monuments and grand historical narratives that led the first wave of heritage protection were overwhelmingly based on male agency, and thus, the subjectivity of women was omitted from the official cultural landscape [10]. The delicate clothes and earthenware that women made, as well as the old stories passed down by word of mouth, were often seen as simple "handicrafts" or "folk arts" and were not considered high culture. This division was not due to a lack of art, but rather a result of patriarchal power dynamics that reduced the value of the home and the work of women at home.

In order to understand how women have regained their freedom through these very crafts, feminist theories of subjectivity and performativity should be used. Subjectivity is not a fixed attribute; rather, it is continuously generated and modified through repeated socialisation and life experiences [6]. When a woman is doing the hard work of traditional embroidery, she is not only making an old design but also passing down the culture of her ancestors. Through the choice of colours, minor alterations to the patterns, and teaching the method to her daughters, she has added her own creative ideas to the collective culture. Thus, these acts of performance break away from the view that women have been passive subjects of history and present them as active shapers of culture.

Feminist ideas at present also point out that the 'embodied subject' has appeared: that is to say, identity is closely related to material life, which is subject to change and expansion by many cultures [5]. The woman artisan is a typical case. Her subjectivity is related to the physical environment in which she works, as well as the quality of the silk and the flow of the spinning wheel; there are also muscle memories for learning difficult techniques. Her body is a living library of intangible cultural heritage. As these traditional practices gain national and international recognition, the female artisans are no longer confined to the home but have become public figures for culture. This rediscovery of women's subjectivity through intangible cultural heritage has broken down the traditional gender hierarchy and shown that the private, repetitive labour of women is also a deep intellectual and cultural achievement. The aesthetic attributes of the above female-led crafts are also worthy of deep study. For many years now, cultural critics have considered the decorative and ornamental nature of women's traditional labour to be simple or devoid of intellect. However, according to an advanced semiotic analysis of these works, elaborate patterns, complex colours and particular structural motifs frequently serve as very high-level visual languages. In the communities where women were systematically excluded from learning written Chinese and attending public assemblies, they expressed their anger and yearnings for a better life through other means. Carefully embroidered clothes and meticulously woven tapestries can thus serve as important historical documents that, with the help of cultural literacy, reveal deep-seated social problems and personal lives. Recognising this visual language compels contemporary viewers to re-examine the intellectual capabilities and strategic intelligence of historical female artisans in their works and perceive these works as sophisticated communication and resistance against the status quo.

4. Intangible Cultural Heritage as a Catalyst for Female Empowerment

In the current era of globalisation, intangible cultural heritage is used to carry on the history of the nation and promote the all-around development of women. Institutionalisation of heritage transforms local daily life into a world-class metacultural phenomenon [4]. When a traditional female craft, such as indigenous weaving or basketry, is officially listed as intangible cultural heritage, it will be recognized by society and the economy. Metacultural Operationally shifts the site of practice from the private sphere of the home to the public economic area.

This will give women more choices in life economically. By commercialising the heritage crafts and integrating them into the market for cultural tourism, female artisans can earn a considerable sum of money independently [9]. Financial independence of the household reduces the power asymmetry between spouses and enhances the social position of women in a highly traditional, patriarchal society. Be cautious about economic capitalisation at the same time. There is an ever-present danger of commercial exploitation; the structural construction of heritage regimes determines which forms of culture are economically feasible and may force female artisans to alter their authentic practices to meet the aesthetic demands of foreign tourists [11]. True empowerment of women includes giving them full creative and economic rights over their traditional intellectual property.

Psychological empowerment for heritage recognition is also provided by non-economic reasons. Intangible cultural heritage offers people and communities a deep sense of ontological security and a place in space in the face of a rapidly changing modern world [7]. Official recognition provides validation for the life's work and knowledge inherited from their foremothers for female artisans. It offers them a public platform to share their stories, organise artisan cooperatives, and take the lead in the community. In addition, these living practices are now being incorporated into the system of progressive ethnographic exhibitions and community-based archives to safeguard and celebrate the original voices of women, rather than diluting them [8]. As the primary custodians and innovators of intangible cultural heritage, women have built a powerful and resilient self-awareness to demand respect, ensure the inheritance of culture, and actively shape the socio-political future of their communities.

At the same time, the promotion of intangible cultural heritage should also take other forms of participation outside the market. If the female artisans are only motivated to produce standardised cultural products for tourists, their subjectivity will be diminished by external commercial demands. A more sustainable model should enable women to take part in the decision-making process for design, price, exhibition language and skill inheritance for the younger generation. Community-based archives, cooperative workshops and women-led heritage associations can be established to ensure that the economic interests of intangible cultural heritage are not excessive compared with its emotional, historical and ethical value. Thus, the two foundations of women's empowerment are material conditions and narrative authority. Women can create cultural and creative works, and they should also have the right to explain the connotations of their works and what they hope to achieve in society through these works.

5. Conclusion

The study of intangible cultural heritage shows that the preservation of cultural memory is also a form of female subjecthood. As shown in this paper, there has been a fundamental change in the world's cultural conditions because of the shift from a monument-oriented view of history to a living and embodied concept of heritage. This new mode has brought to light the historically neglected domestic spaces where women have worked tirelessly as the main builders, guardians and carriers of human culture. Through the mastery of various textile arts, the preservation of oral literature and the continuation of communal rituals, women have ensured the inheritance of collective memory for future generations.

More importantly, the traditional practice serves as an important venue for the exercise of women's individual and collective agency in recent years. Through their creativity, resilience and personal stories, women have added their own subversions to the traditional structure of intangible cultural heritage and forged strong, liberated self-awareness. At present, these activities are promoting the life of women artisans by providing for their own needs and also increasing their social status in their communities.

In the end, the long-term development of world cultural heritage depends on empowering the women who are its carriers. Recognising and protecting intangible cultural heritage also requires safeguarding the rights, economic autonomy and creative agency of female traditional bearers at the same time. With the increasing complexity of globalisation and cultural assimilation in recent years, the embodiment of women's knowledge and resilient consciousness will continue to serve as a compass, helping to keep the diverse and rich heritage of human culture alive for generations to come.

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