



# Tibetan Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Diversity: Analysis of Protection Logic and Characteristics

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**Abstract.** The protection of intangible cultural heritage is the need of human survival and development, as well as the need to build a harmonious society. The intangible cultural heritage fully expresses the excellent cultural values and aesthetic ideals gradually formed by the Chinese nation in the historical process. The protection of intangible cultural heritage is of great significance for adhering to the scientific concept of development, maintaining national cultural security, improving the quality of the people, condensing the national spirit, and building a socialist harmonious society.

**Keywords:** Tibetan intangible cultural heritage · Cultural diversity · Protection

## 1 Introduction

On May 24, 2007, more than 40 experts and scholars from all over the world made clarification through the “Chengdu Declaration on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage” adopted by the China Chengdu International Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival and the first special session of UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Committee for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: “Intangible cultural heritage is the life memory of human beings, the spiritual source of human creativity, the crystallization of human wisdom, the vivid display of world cultural diversity, and the eternal spiritual home of human beings. With the advancement of economic globalization and the acceleration of the modernization process, the cultural ecology has undergone tremendous changes, and the intangible cultural heritage has been increasingly impacted. Many precious intangible cultural heritages are on the verge of extinction, and it is imperative to protect intangible cultural heritage. We call on the international community and governments to pay enough attention to the protection of intangible cultural heritage, raise people’s awareness of the protection of intangible cultural heritage, and effectively strengthen the protection of intangible cultural heritage, so that the intangible cultural heritage will

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Project: The stage results of the self-organized project of Sichuan Minzu College “Research on the Cohesion of Chinese Nation Community from the Perspective of Tibetan Cultural Heritage” (Project No.: XYZB2109SA).

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Y. Pogrebnyak and R. Hou (Eds.): ICLCCS 2022, ASSEHR 689, pp. 188–197, 2023.

[https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-27-5\\_22](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-27-5_22)

continue to survive and be passed on from generation to generation.” It is a kind of public and spiritual wealth that needs to be loved by people and passed on from generation to generation.

## 2 Overview of Chinese Traditional Cultural Diversity

China is a multi-ethnic country composed of 56 ethnic groups with a long history and a unified nationality. Historically, in the long history before the founding of the People’s Republic of China, most of the ethnic minorities in China lived in relatively closed natural and social environments such as frontiers and remote mountainous areas, which makes them preserve more types of intangible cultural heritage that have not been engulfed by mainstream culture. The traditional culture of ethnic minorities itself is a cultural heritage, and most of them are continuous intangible cultural heritage. “For the people living outside the culture of ethnic minorities, perhaps the traditional culture of ethnic minorities is the precious wealth of human culture and the cultural heritage of mankind; for the ethnic minorities living in this culture, it is the continuation and development of their own culture.” All ethnic groups have created colorful cultures, and the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities is very rich. It is particularly important to effectively strengthen the protection of the intangible cultural heritage of various ethnic minorities, especially the construction of the protection system at the legal level.

Human civilization has undergone two “transformations” from ancient times to today. The first is transforming from fishing and hunting civilization to farming civilization. In China, it was almost seven thousand years ago during the Hemudu culture period. At that time, it was impossible for humans to understand the protection of heritage, so the fishing and hunting civilization disappeared. The second time is in the last century — the transformation of agricultural civilization to modern industrial civilization. During the transformation of civilization, the change of old and new is relentless. And it’s not too soon to see the cultural and spiritual values inherent in things that are passing away. The demise of heritage is precisely at this time of “things change stars”. Therefore, whoever recognizes the value of heritage early, can keep the precious heritage. The charming and heavy Paris and Rome are preserved by a forward-looking vision. France’s first “Historic Buildings Act” is promoted by the writer Mérimier. At the beginning of the 20th century, Britain, Italy, France, Japan, South Korea and other countries successively had some heritage protection laws with different categories. The “Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policy” states: “Each culture represents a unique and irreplaceable value system, as the traditions and expressions of each people are the most effective ways of presenting their presence in the world.” Members of different groups have the right to protect their cultural heritage and traditions. Humanity cannot live without culture, and culture is the hallmark of humanity. It is precisely because of culture that human beings can truly live a human life. Cultural diversity is the main feature of human society, and different nations have different cultures. It is estimated that there are nearly 6,000 cultures in the world, of which 4,000 to 5,000 are national cultures. Cultural rights are very important rights for a nation to be a nation, and to enjoy its own cultural achievements and benefits. A nation shall enjoy the right to its own artistic, historical and cultural wealth; a nation shall not be imposed the right of a different culture; a nation

shall equally enjoy the right to the common heritage of mankind.<sup>1</sup> In the process of globalization and modernization, cultural heritage has been severely impacted by social transformation, and some are facing extinction. Many nation-states gradually lose their autonomy and identity in culture, and become “wanderers” in the spiritual world. Only by identifying and analyzing cultural heritage, and exploring its cultural information and meaning, can people of a nation continuously strengthen their identity with their own national culture, and can they renew the old and embrace the new, forge the national spirit of the new era, and support the spiritual pillar of people in modern society. Therefore, scientifically implementing cultural heritage protection is an inevitable cultural demand for modern countries to promote national spirit and carry out independent and sustainable development.

### **3 Characteristics of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Tibetan Areas**

#### **3.1 The Uniqueness of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Tibetan Areas**

Intangible cultural heritage generally exists as an expression of art or culture, embodying the unique creativity of people in a particular nation, country or region, or manifesting as material achievements, or manifesting as specific behaviors, etiquette, and customs, all of which have their own peculiarity, uniqueness and non-renewability. Moreover, the thoughts, emotions, consciousness, and values that it indirectly reflects are also unique and difficult to imitate and reproduce. Intangible cultural heritage is usually accumulated and formed in a long historical process, rather than a one-time product. Moreover, in the long-term inheritance process, the unique wisdom, skills and creativity of the inheritors in the Tibetan ethnic area have been accumulated. The intangible cultural heritage in Tibetan areas contains rich historical and cultural information, reflecting the thinking, emotion, and values of the creators and inheritors of the past dynasties.

#### **3.2 Nationality of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Tibetan Areas**

Nationality refers to being unique to a certain nation, deeply branded with the nation, and reflecting the unique way of thinking, wisdom, world outlook, values, aesthetic awareness, emotional expression and other factors of a particular nation. Sometimes, with the deepening of cultural exchanges, a certain intangible cultural heritage has been spread to other places, but different ethnic groups will still make it branded with different ethnic cultures. The characteristics of a particular nation are manifested in all aspects from form to content. From the perspective of the formal characteristics of the nation, the clothing, diet, production methods, language, customs, etc. of the nation are mostly formed naturally, greatly influenced by the natural ecology, and some have the role of heredity; from the perspective of deeper national characteristics, such as world outlook, beliefs, ways of thinking, religious outlook, values, national cultural and psychological structure, aesthetic taste, lifestyle, national identity, etc., these factors have been formed for a long time, and are reflected in daily life and all aspects of behavior, having strong stability and being not easy to change. In fact, the characteristics of the form and content

<sup>1</sup> Study on the “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”.

of the nation will be clearly manifested in the intangible cultural heritage. An important feature of the intangible cultural heritage in Tibetan areas is its nationality, which is the result of impersonal, continuous and slow creative activities carried out by a certain ethnic group through constant imitation. This kind of folklore and art originated in a certain area of the Tibetan ethnic area, and then with the frequent regional economic exchanges and cultural exchanges between ethnic groups, some folklore and art loved by the masses gradually spread to other ethnic groups or regions. [3]

### **3.3 Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Tibetan Areas**

Inheritance is shown through the method of oral imparting with physical instruction. Due to historical reasons, most of the intangible cultural heritage in Tibetan areas cannot fully express its connotation and denotation in the form of words to be taught. On the contrary, it is transmitted, interpreted and developed collectively within the members in the form of word of mouth through people's visual and auditory organs. Inheritance refers to oral legends, performing arts, social etiquette, handicraft skills related to nature and traditions that have been passed on and evolved from generation to generation in oral or other forms. Now the people in Tibetan areas still like to spread these intangible cultures, which are both precious and extremely fragile, easily mutated, and even gradually disappear due to loss. In the process of inheritance, as revealed in the "The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage": this intangible cultural heritage, passed down from generation to generation, is constantly innovated by groups and communities as their environment, their relationship with nature and historical conditions change, and at the same time gives the groups and communities a sense of identity and history, thereby promoting cultural diversity and human creativity. The intangible cultural heritage expresses the national history, social environment and the special production and life style of the nation, and it is rooted in the folk by means of a specific nation. For example, "The Legend of King Gesaer", the longest heroic epic in the world, is inherited and preserved entirely by the most primitive "word of mouth". It is very fragile and volatile and vulnerable to external shocks. Countries around the world are taking various measures for the protection of intangible cultural heritage, and China can properly learn from some Western practices to protect the splendid cultural heritage of China.

### **3.4 Regionality of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Tibetan Areas**

Regionality and nationality are closely related. Each nation has its own specific production, living and activity area, and the regional environment has a profound impact on the formation of the national cultural characteristics. Regionality not only has national characteristics, but also has national universality. A nation's understanding of intangible cultural heritage has gradually formed a regional culture that is commonly recognized within the nation. However, because the knowledge connotation of this culture can penetrate deep into the hearts of other ethnic groups, culture has a regional character under the premise that everyone needs cultural exchanges. As far as the relationship between regional culture and region is concerned, regional culture needs the region to provide a certain atmosphere and environment, and the region needs regional culture to improve

it qualitatively. Regional culture preserves people's understanding of the region and continues to supplement and develop.

The intangible cultural heritage of the Tibetan ethnic area is closely related to the regional environment where the ethnic group lives. The region's unique natural ecological environment, religious beliefs, production methods, living standards, living habits, and local customs all determine its characteristics and inheritance from various aspects. Leaving the place where it is produced, the intangible cultural heritage will lose the soil and conditions on which it depends, and it is difficult to talk about protection, inheritance and development.

## **4 Principles for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Tibetan Areas**

All products of human thought and soul are interconnected, and each ethnic minority has its own complete cultural heritage. In addition to having a correct understanding, the protection of ethnic minority cultural heritage should also follow the following substantive principles:

### **4.1 Principle of Community Protection**

Germany's Ferdinand Tönnies discussed the concept of community, which is a group of people established through blood, neighbors and friends. All intimate, emotion-based, inner-inclined relationships are the essence of community. The community-based protection of intangible cultural heritage is based on the social community that lives together for a long time to promote the inner renewal and development of culture. The community that carries the intangible cultural heritage is a geographical group and regional society, composed of the owners of the traditional culture, and the basic force for the protection and inheritance of the intangible cultural heritage. Taking the community as a unit to protect intangible cultural heritage, establishing relevant environmental culture, behavioral culture, and spiritual culture, emphasizing people as the core, and establishing the dominant position of the cultural community is the core of safeguarding the interests of cultural inheritors.

### **4.2 Principle of Active State Protection**

Intangible cultural heritage is a living culture, and it is constantly innovating with the development of society, which is the reason why intangible cultural heritage can be passed down to this day. Religious beliefs, civil law customs, lifestyles, handicrafts, etc. in the intangible cultural heritage are all presented through the living form of human activities. This is different from the fixed display form of cultural heritage in the past. When protecting intangible cultural heritage, it is necessary to deeply understand the form of folk culture corresponding to its ideological connotation, restore the traditional life scene, and combine modern marketing methods to endow it with vitality and appeal to survive in the new era, so as to enrich the tourism experience. The inheritor is the carrier of inheritance and expression of intangible cultural heritage, and the mobility and

fluidity of people pose challenges and requirements to the protection of living conditions. At present, the development of intangible cultural heritage has the disadvantages of rushing for quick success and lack of planning, and there is also a contradiction between tourism development and the protection of cultural authenticity. With the development of economy, the sustainable development of culture can be realized by means of the integration of tourism development and cultural concepts.

#### **4.3 Principle of Quality Protection**

There are many kinds of intangible cultural heritage, and there are also differences in inheritance, heritage value and geographical distribution. Under the constraints of limited financial, technical and human and material resources, equal protection cannot be carried out for all types of intangible cultural heritage at the same time. It can only be done in stages according to the value of the heritage, how it is passed on and how easy it is to protect it. It is necessary to select representative ones to focus on and protect them as cultural treasures. The protection of intangible cultural heritage is not a simple step, and careful planning can achieve the purpose of inheritance and the result of revitalization. The birthplace, living space and cultural display space of intangible cultural heritage must be planned and used effectively. In the face of the rich cultural heritage, it is necessary to apply cultural grading management to distinguish the means and methods of protection, that is, quality protection and professional protection. Specific problems should be analyzed in detail, and different means should be used to protect heritages of different natures, representations and values. [1]

#### **4.4 Principle of Free Prior and Informed Consent**

The legal basis for the principle of free, prior and informed consent is the right of ethnic minorities to self-determination and the rights of minorities to land and resources, according to which minorities have the right to own, control and manage their own cultural heritage. The application of the principle of free prior and informed consent to the protection of ethnic minorities' cultural heritage means that others can access, transmit, use, display and manage ethnic minority cultural heritage only with the free, prior and informed consent of the relevant minority or individual.

#### **4.5 Principle of Compensation and Benefit Sharing**

The protection of the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities, in addition to obtaining the prior free and informed consent of the relevant ethnic minorities in accordance with the customary law, should also reflect the need for an equal balance between the rights of people who develop, maintain and maintain components of cultural heritage and the public interest, which is the principle of compensation and benefit-sharing. In other words, in the case that others continue to use the components of ethnic minority cultural heritage that the public has been able to freely acquire, the relevant ethnic minorities or individuals should be eligible to receive fair and equitable compensation for the use of their cultural heritage. Such compensation should, as far as possible, be adapted

to the cultural and social situation of the ethnic minorities concerned and their needs and aspirations. Furthermore, equitable benefit-sharing should be ensured when using components of national cultural heritage for non-commercial purposes. [3]

#### **4.6 Principle of Prohibition of Infringement**

The protection of the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities must prevent the occurrence of illegal or immoral means infringing on the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities. The use of elements of the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities, including elements that are already freely available to the public, anything of a character that is insulting, demeaning, or otherwise culturally harmful to the creators of the components involved should be terminated.

#### **4.7 Principle of Taking Special Protective Measures**

The protection of the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities in China should be given special treatment and special measures in terms of protection period, procedures and certification documents, domestic legislation, implementation and preventive protection, and information disclosure. (“The state” in the following content refers to “China”) China should take the following special measures in domestic legislation, implementation and preventive protection:

- (1) The domestic legislation related to the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities should recognize the customary law of ethnic minorities in the management of cultural heritage. Domestic courts and responsible organs should recognize and respect customary laws related to the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities.
- (2) The state shall take necessary measures to ensure that the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities is protected. Such heritage includes not only the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities living in the relevant country, but also the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities originating from the foreign countries and regions.
- (3) The state shall consult with the relevant ethnic minorities when formulating or adopting domestic legislation and other regulations related to the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities.
- (4) The state shall ensure that minorities have access to general and administrative proceedings in a language they understand, in an expeditious, effective and affordable manner, in order to prevent the unauthorized acquisition, use or compilation of their cultural heritage, and adequate compensation for such conduct.
- (5) The rules of evidence collection in litigation proceedings concerning the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities shall be compatible with the culture of the relevant ethnic group and the customary law involved in the disputed cultural heritage component.
- (6) In order to effectively protect the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities, the state should pay special attention to the defensive protection mechanism aimed at reducing the illegal acquisition of intellectual property rights to the components of the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities.

- (7) The state shall assist ethnic minorities to maintain, control, maintain and protect their cultural heritage through capacity building activities, such as assisting in the establishment and strengthening of institutions responsible for cultural heritage management training.
- (8) The state should carry out publicity, education and awareness-raising programs for the public, especially young people, to further ensure that the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities is recognized and respected.
- (9) Researchers, academic institutions, and museums should provide minorities with a detailed list of the components of cultural heritage they may maintain, including any components leased to other institutions, and describe how each component was acquired.
- (10) Wherever possible, minorities should be eligible to regain control and tenure over movable elements of their cultural heritage, including the recovery of certain elements from other countries.

Recognition of respect for the knowledge, culture and traditional customs of ethnic minorities will contribute to the sustainable and equitable development of the environment. [2]

#### **4.8 Principle of Protective Development**

The development of intangible cultural heritage is most common in the form of commercial tourism, including the development of large-scale festivals, folk culture villages, folk performance squares, and the development of tourist souvenirs and other developments with economic and entertainment value. First, the development must follow the principle of moderation, and only focus on commercial interests is detrimental to sustainable development; second, the principle of diversification must be followed, not only a few intangible cultural heritage with strong entertainment and high reputation, but also to ensure cultural diversity. In fact, for foreign tourists, diverse cultural factors can attract them more, and they can have a deeper understanding of local culture and experience national life. Conservation development is based on market development and industrial development, and at the same time seeks the harmonious coexistence of natural environment and cultural environment, and jointly promotes industrial economy, cultural environment, and ecological protection. In the protection of intangible cultural heritage, tourism development is the most direct and effective way to attract private capital. Based on intangible cultural heritage resources, it is a must to develop tourism peripheral commodities and commercial performances, create an intangible cultural industry chain, and use the heritage and unique cultural connotation of intangible cultural heritage as the carrier of shaping the city's brand and industrial spirit, so that national culture and national spirit can be better integrated into social life. It is also necessary to promote the transformation of local production methods through development, drive local urbanization and modernization development, and improve people's lives. Combining protection is to protect the precious humanistic connotation and cultural foundation, maintain distinctive national characteristics, expand the people's cultural horizons, and enhance the strength of cultural heritage. [5]



## 5 Conclusion

Tangible cultural heritage is visible and tangible, static and solid, such as cultural relics, classic ancient books, great cultural sites, important historical buildings and so on. Intangible cultural heritage is much broader, but often invisible and intangible. This includes folk customs, folk literature, folk art, folk techniques and so on. Since most of the intangible culture is created and recognized by the common people, it has always been regarded as the bottom-level culture and has not been valued. But it is a living culture that nurtures people, and it is in this common culture that everyone grows up. Therefore, it directly expresses the individual characteristics of each nation, as well as their own sense of identity, affinity and cohesion. For example, the national temperament of the Chinese people is not reflected in the Summer Palace and the Forbidden City, but is profoundly and vividly reflected in the folk customs of the Spring Festival. Therefore, intangible cultural heritage can best reflect the essence of each nation and the diversity of human culture. [6]

**Authors' Contributions.** This paper is independently completed by Jing An.

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