



Exploration of the Inheritance of Dunhuang Intangible Cultural Heritage Through Mr. Du Yongwei's Artistic Path

Sculpture Life with Faith

Xiaoran Liang^(✉)

Chinese Language and Literature Major, Department of International Chinese Language Education, Chongqing Institute of Foreign Studies, Chengdu 610200, China

2926049306@qq.com

Abstract. Based on the life experience of Mr. Du Yongwei, the provincial inheritor of Dunhuang colored sculpture making skills, and the artistic path of inheriting intangible cultural heritage, the article points out the pain and difficulties of intangible cultural heritage inheritance from the perspective of social economy and the nature of intangible cultural heritage, and further explores the new path of Dunhuang intangible cultural heritage inheritance in the era of cultural and scientific integration with the example of colored sculpture art inheritance.

Keywords: Du Yongwei · Inheritance of intangible cultural heritage · Dunhuang colored sculptures · Mogaoli Artisan Village · cultural and creative products

1 Introduction

So far, Dunhuang has 68 Jiuquan city-level intangible cultural heritage protection list projects, 123 county-level intangible cultural heritage protection list projects, and the number of intangible cultural heritage projects in the list ranks among the forefront of the province. Dunhuang opera, Dunhuang colored sculpture, Dunhuang paper-cut, Dunhuang folk songs and other folk “intangible cultural heritage” have become magnificent cultural wonders. China’s intangible cultural heritage contains the unique spiritual value, mode of thinking and imagination of the Chinese nation, and embodies the vitality and creativity of the Chinese nation. Protecting and making good use of intangible cultural heritage is of great significance for achieving sustainable economic and cultural comprehensive and coordinated development. Mr. Du Yongwei has been unknown and rooted in Dunhuang for 40 years and he made many outstanding contributions in the protection and inheritance of Dunhuang culture. However, with the rapid development of science, technology and economy, the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage is facing the problem of lack of successors. In order to analyze the current social situation in combination with Mr. Du Yongwei’s artistic creation, this paper will seek a new path to protect and inherit the Dunhuang intangible cultural heritage.

1.1 Why Should We Inherit the Intangible Heritage Colored Plastic Art

According to literature records, Dunhuang Academy began to study the digital preservation of grottoes in 1993, and there have been many protection methods, such as two-dimensional digitalization, three-dimensional digitalization, 5D display, etc. [1], but there are very few related documents on non-material inheritance (especially the inheritance of colored sculpture art). Mr. Fan Jinshi once said that cultivating a team of interdisciplinary talents with professional spirit, high level, and familiar with modern heritage handling knowledge and protection skills is the fundamental guarantee for carrying out the cause of heritage protection. The current evolution of cultural relics into a thorough study of the aging process of cultural relics, and understanding the interwoven changes of such processes, shows that the cause of conservation encompasses and extends into many fields. This trend requires every cultural relics personnel not only to master the theoretical knowledge of their own discipline but also to further master the knowledge of other fields, to become familiar with a variety of fields, master a variety of knowledge of compound talents [2]. It is sufficient to prove that the cultivation of non-material inheritors is extremely important for the better protection of intangible cultural heritage.

Another researcher said: “The Chinese were able to carve at the beginning of their social development, so they did not need much help in the field of carving art” [3]. However, the art of line shaping in Chinese traditional carving has a long history and outstanding achievements, which is especially reflected in tomb carving, such as the stone carving of Huo Qubing’s tomb. In the Tang Dynasty, China’s carving technology developed and improved rapidly. The “Six Horses in Zhaoling” statue of Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty and the painted sculpture art of the Tang Dynasty in Dunhuang show that Chinese carving technology not only has distinctive national characteristics and epochal, but also has dazzling artistic charm and rich aesthetic connotation. Buddhism also put on a magical artistic cassock for Dunhuang carving in the Tang Dynasty. Dunhuang painted sculpture technology once again seized the opportunity to change itself into a new look with the characteristics of the Central Plains; Absorbing and internalizing foreign cultures to form a unique national style is sufficient to reflect the magnanimity of a great country in the prosperous Tang Dynasty and to prove that Dunhuang sculptures in the Tang Dynasty reached the highest peak in history.

Today’s “Chinese Dream” of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation includes the “openness and tolerance of rejuvenating the prosperous Tang Dynasty”. The colored sculpture after thousands of years is not only a proof of the strength and prosperity of the motherland, but also a match for developing current textbooks and lighting cultural confidence. Therefore, it is very necessary to inherit the colored sculpture skills.

1.2 Du Yongwei and Dunhuang Colored Sculptures

Du Yongwei, born in April 1960 in Jiuquan, Gansu Province, China, is the provincial inheritor of Dunhuang colored plastic manufacturing technique, the intangible cultural heritage of Gansu Province, and the director of Dunhuang Art Research and Development Center in Jiuquan City, Gansu Province. He put down root in Dunhuang for half his life, with a sincere, a pair of hands to protect and inherit the Dunhuang colored sculpture

making skills. Throughout the more than 40 years since Mr. Du Yongwei took root in Dunhuang, his contributions to Dunhuang mainly include the following three aspects:

(1) Study on the Technique of Colored Sculpture

Long river before the stream, wave reflection heavy pavilion. Only a little hung on the walls of caves in the Sui and Tang Dynasties of more than three hundred years, overspread the ground, there are wat rooms more than one thousand grottoes. A large number of murals and colored sculptures in Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes, which serve as the main task of cultural exchange between China and the western country in the whole land of China, have gradually completed its wonderful transformation after the intersection of the great wisdom, the wisdom of Buddhism and the extensive and profound Chinese characters civilization. Dunhuang experienced the flames of war, the depression of the destruction of Buddha, miraculously preserved, and the people in the history, no matter whether they have left a name, their melody to Dunhuang are still in the sky now. Mr. Du Yongwei has been engaged in copying painted sculptures in Mogao Grottoes for more than 40 years, and he has always devoted himself to exploring the lost Dunhuang painted sculptures in the Tang Dynasty. In the past 100 years, many painters have dedicated their works to Dunhuang painted sculptures all their lives, and he has always been trying to crack the code of colored sculpture in the prosperous Tang Dynasty. Mr. Du Yongwei said: "This should add a little glutinous rice juice, put a little egg white, add a little salt, and finally add cotton, this is like a kind of medicine, can prevent it from being eaten by bugs" [4]. At present, there are more than 3,000 colored sculptures in Dunhuang, which have remained intact for thousands of years and have gorgeous colors and fine techniques that are rare in the world. In Du Yongwei's view, his methods and ideals are closer to those of ancient times. Since ancient times, people have been using this mineral color that a integration of nature and human from nature. When making images, they should be made with a belief, a yearning and a compassionate attitude. In 1986, he successfully presided over the restoration of the broken hand of the Black Buddha Temple in the Mogao Grottoes, which was built in the Tang Dynasty (from the ninth year of Kaiyuan to the Tianbao period), which is closely related to his deep study of the colored sculpture technique of predecessors. In his article "How Dunhuang Grottoes Were Built", Mr. Du Yongwei also explained the differences in the material selection of small, medium and giant clay skeletons in detail and the three procedures of making colored sculptures: laying on large clay, shaping and collecting light. He presented the seemingly mysterious and complex Dunhuang colored sculpture techniques in a concise and interesting way [5].

(2) Repair and Remodeling of Colored Sculpture

Mr. Du Yongwei has been rooted in Dunhuang for more than 40 years, and has set the record of the four most in the history of Dunhuang art research, namely the world's largest painted sculpture art copy work – the 12.5-m reclining Buddha statue in Grottoes 158 of Mogao Grottoes; The largest painted sculpture restoration – the restoration of the seven-meter-long Bodhisattva's hands in the 96 caves of the Mogao Grottoes; The largest remaker of painted plastic – re-sculpted the Buddha statue of Maitreya in the six caves of Yulin Grottoes; The largest painted plastic replicators – the themes include Buddha,



Fig. 1. Du Yongwei works in a cave (The picture stem from the courseware of the fifth class hour of Professor Du Yongwei's "Dunhuang Intangible Cultural Heritage Art Research")

disciple, Bodhisattva, heavenly king, hand over foot Maitreya, offering Bodhisattva, etc., all kinds of plastic art works as many as hundreds of pieces.

(3) Cultivation of Dunhuang Color Sculpture Skilled Personnel and Inheritance of Dunhuang Intangible Cultural Heritage

In addition to leading his disciples to teach the technology of sculpture, Mr. Du Yongwei has also launched cooperative education service projects with many universities, using his studio as the teaching method, so that students can experience, master and love Dunhuang painting and colored sculpture art works.

In 2013, the project "Dunhuang Clay Sculpture Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Research", which he applied for in cooperation with the School of Arts and Crafts of Lanzhou Jiaotong University, was approved by the National Philosophy and Social Science Fund as an art project. In 2016, he held the teaching activity of "Intangible Cultural Heritage in Colleges", offering Dunhuang colored plastic lecture and clay sculpture technique training for students of Dunhuang Sanwei Middle School. In 2017, he opened a WeChat public account called "Contemporary Dunhuang", dedicated to inheriting, promoting and flourishing Dunhuang culture and art. In 2018, Mr. Du finally founded Mogaoli Artisans Village at the age of 58. In January 2022, Mr. Du Yongwei was successfully shortlisted for the "2021 China Intangible Cultural Heritage Person of the Year".

In the long 40 years, no matter he worked in the Mogao Grottoes in the first 20 years, or worked hard for the folk art in the last 20 years, Du Yongwei's original intention has never changed. He continues to practice his duty as a Dunhuang craftsman, and carries on the exploration and inheritance of the grottoes colored plastic craft (Figs. 1 and 2).

The above describes Mr. Du Yongwei's contribution to the intangible cultural heritage of Dunhuang, which has important enlightenment significance for the protection



Fig. 2. Du Yongwei's 18 years old copy in the Mogao Grottoes (The picture stem from the courseware of the fifth class hour of Professor Du Yongwei's "Dunhuang Intangible Cultural Heritage Art Research")

and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the future; However, at present, the inheritance and protection of Dunhuang intangible cultural heritage (especially the color sculpture art) is facing the dilemma of no successor. It is necessary to analyze the reasons in depth.

Why Are There No Inheritors of Intangible Cultural Heritage

From the perspective of social economy, China's economy has taken off continuously since the reform and opening up, and it has become a fast-paced society. The previous generation of young people do not worry about food and clothing, but worry about "housing and cars"; Nowadays, the new generation of young people are rising and falling in the "inner circle" in various fields. Many people's values have changed. However, not all of them are "money first", which means that it is not good to make more money. Instead, on the way to pursue a better material life, people's needs for spiritual life have changed. Hip-pop and other fast melody pop music, short videos and other entertainment forms can be used to kill time at any time, with its advantages of fragmentation, rapid dissemination, effectiveness and diversity, it has quickly become the first choice for young people under the shadow of haze. The traditional intangible cultural heritage, as the wealth of spiritual civilization, can't meet the needs of young people for material wealth, nor can it supplement the so-called "happiness" in a short time and at a shallow

level. Without real interest and long-term precipitation, it is difficult to be willing to fight for cultural protection and cultural inheritance from the heart.

From the basic meaning of intangible cultural heritage, it refers to all traditional art forms handed down from generation to generation by the people of all ethnic groups in China and as part of their cultural heritage, and also includes items and facilities related to traditional cultural expression. No one does not understand the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, the Sanxingdui and the Terra Cotta Warriors. Many people cannot enumerate the intangible cultural heritage that belongs to the Chinese nation. That is to say, the principle of intangible cultural heritage exists in the field of human material civilization, while intangible cultural heritage exists in people's spiritual world. However, the nine-year compulsory education, even in the high school stage, has little influence on the popularization and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage. Only through documentaries Only through TV channel advertisements, books or personal experience can we know a little, and few people can learn deeply and inherit.

1.3 New Path of Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance

In Mr. Du 's "Mogaoli craftsman village", through the sculpture scene form from three aspects of craftsman, type of work and technology, the creation scene and memory charm of ancient Dunhuang Grottoes are displayed to the society, and the creation history and memory mystery of Mogao Grottoes art are comprehensively analyzed. Mr. Du adheres to the concept of protection, inheritance and innovation of intangible cultural heritage, creates a new model of experiential tourism and research travel of Dunhuang intangible cultural heritage, and helps the sustainable development of intangible cultural heritage through productive protection, so as to inherit and spread the ancient Dunhuang art. In addition, I think there are the following paths:

1.3.1 Recruit Volunteers

Recruit volunteers from universities and the society, select competent, responsible and confident short-term apprentices through screening and review, and appropriately retain some long-term learners according to their attitude, enthusiasm, seriousness and ability in the learning process. In this way, we can not only spread intangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage skills to young people and people at all levels of society, but also find the next generation of inheritors of intangible cultural heritage skills through voluntary recruitment.

1.3.2 Cultural and Creative Products

In combination with the characteristics of Dunhuang intangible cultural heritage, cultural and creative products with high practicability or high appreciation are launched, promoted and sold through the Internet, and exquisite cultural propaganda cards are made and placed in the orders of customers. While satisfying customers' love for cultural and creative products, they are allowed to learn more about intangible cultural heritage, stimulate their interest in traveling or studying in Dunhuang or other intangible cultural heritage sources, and form a long chain of intangible cultural heritage transmission and inheritance.

1.3.3 Enhance the Confidence of Inheritors of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Strengthen the Mass Base

Support and encourage folk art, create favorable cultural conditions and development atmosphere for the inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, improve the cultural quality and professional quality of the inheritors of intangible cultural heritage in cultural education, enable them to establish a sense of national honor and self-esteem, and establish strong confidence in promoting and disseminating intangible cultural heritage. Similarly, cultural centers and cultural tourism enterprises can also create space and channels for the masses to learn, understand and study the cultural development of intangible cultural heritage projects, so that more people can participate in the understanding of intangible cultural heritage projects and intangible cultural heritage. The popularity and participation of the masses will be rapidly mobilized, and the mass foundation for intangible cultural heritage protection and dissemination will be established.

2 Conclusion

Intangible cultural heritage is the soul of a country and the spiritual treasure accumulated by the Chinese nation for thousands of years. In modern society, the Internet is full of people's narrow vision, but it also blocks people's inheritance and attention to traditional culture. The Chinese nation's cultural thinking of thousands of years emphasizes knowledge and etiquette. Generations of people follow the footsteps of their predecessors, update and iterate, and advance with the times. The development of culture is vital to the prosperity of a country, and the inheritance of culture is a continuous blessing for future generations. From a small song to a grand building, intangible cultural heritage culture shows the world the spiritual wealth left by its ancestors in various ways. Tradition is not necessarily old and modern is not necessarily new. The inevitable trend of the development of the times is to use new aesthetic ideas to examine the charm of traditional aesthetic things. This is the most effective way to develop intangible cultural heritage. The glory of the Han and Tang Dynasties will not reappear, but the history of Dunhuang must continue to be written. For the Chinese people, Dunhuang is the cultural blood of the motherland, and Dunhuang is our own. The tireless efforts of Mr. Du Yongwei and other intangible cultural workers in the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage and their belief in sculpture life are the best interpretation of this sentence. If the art treasures of the Mogao Grottoes are the business cards that Dunhuang shows to the world, then the recognition and pride of Dunhuang people towards their hometown is the most intuitive and strong experience I had when I entered Dunhuang through Professor Du Yongwei.

History influences today, and today creates the future. I believe that the vitality of this Gobi oasis will always be as grand and brilliant as her name.

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