



The Core Role of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Cementing the Consciousness of the Chinese National Community

—Multidimensional Empowerment Pathways from Economy, Culture and Political Governance

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Abstract. This article explores the significance and role of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in cementing the consciousness of the Chinese national community. It begins by defining ICH and emphasizing its importance in cultural diversity. The paper analyzes ICH's role in economic development, social construction, ethnic unity, and cultural identity, particularly its contribution to promoting economic and social development in ethnic regions and improving people's living standards. The article highlights the importance of ICH in building a shared spiritual home for the Chinese nation, underscoring its role as a carrier of national spirit and a source of cultural confidence. Measures taken by China to protect and pass on ICH, such as establishing a four-tier ICH protection system and related policies, are discussed. Finally, the article emphasizes the importance of implementing the theory of cementing the consciousness of the Chinese national community in social and grassroots governance, pointing out that this is a key aspect of constructing an independent Chinese knowledge system. The article concludes that cementing the consciousness of the Chinese national community is a long-term and arduous task requiring adherence to a people-centered development approach, advancing ethnic unity and progress, and leveraging the role of ICH in achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage, Chinese national community consciousness, social governance, social development, ethnic unity

1 Introduction

The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage[1]. It is primarily transmitted orally, embodying the historical depth and broad representation of folk cultural and artistic heritage. This

cultural wealth has been preserved through daily life practices and includes the following aspects: traditional oral literature and the languages carrying it; traditional arts such as painting, calligraphy, music, dance, drama, quyi, and acrobatics; traditional techniques, medicine, and calendars; folk customs, rituals, and festivals; traditional sports and games; and other intangible cultural heritage. ICH represents one of the most dynamic components of cultural diversity, a crystallization of human civilization, and a valuable shared legacy that embodies human wisdom and historical achievements.

ICH originates from and returns to the people, carrying a distinct characteristic of popular identity. As an art of the people, ICH significantly empowers contemporary China's rapid development. It plays a critical role in economic, political, cultural, and social construction, thus having a profound impact on cementing the consciousness of the Chinese national community. This term paper aims to analyze, from the perspective of this consciousness, the powerful enabling role of ICH in this regard.

Cementing the consciousness of the Chinese national community is the main thread of the Party's ethnic work in the new era and the core of various tasks in ethnic regions. This concept carries profound strategic significance and critical practical value. The Chinese national community is a composite formed over a long historical development, characterized by shared historical and cultural connections, stable economic activities, and psychological traits. It is both a historical concept and a present reality, reflecting the integration and development of the Chinese nation throughout history.

2 Cementing Through Economy

Central to this vision is the notion that robust economic development plays a critical role in promoting ethnic unity. To this end, policies aimed at improving employment opportunities, education, healthcare, and infrastructure are vital. These initiatives can effectively reduce regional disparities, providing people from all ethnic backgrounds with greater access to resources and opportunities. By narrowing development gaps, these policies enhance people's sense of gain, happiness, and security, creating an environment where all citizens feel that they are part of a unified and prosperous nation. In this way, economic development becomes a tool for promoting social harmony and ethnic integration, making it a key driver in achieving the vision of ethnic unity and shared prosperity.

The realization of this goal also requires a strategic focus on rural and ethnic regions, where development lags behind urban centers. Economic and social development in these areas is essential to improving living standards, increasing employment, and addressing disparities. It is through the steady improvement of infrastructure, education, and healthcare in these regions that the vision of shared prosperity can be brought to life. People in these areas must be given the same opportunities for development as their urban counterparts, and only when this equality is achieved can the broader vision of national unity be realized.

The integration of cultural heritage into modern economic development strategies is one of the most promising ways to invigorate ethnic and rural regions. The "ICH + Internet +" model exemplifies how ICH empowers industrial upgrading. By integrating

ICH elements into modern product design and cultural tourism, unique cultural products and services can be created to meet consumer demands for personalization and differentiation. As Wang Zhenyan and Li Jiarui state: "Leveraging tourism to empower rural revitalization, extending industrial chains to trigger multi-industry integration, and driving rural entrepreneurship and employment through industrial linkages, rural ICH can transform 'old culture' into 'new momentum' for rural economies." [2] This approach stimulates related industrial chains, creating more local jobs and income sources. In ethnic regions, many ICH projects are closely tied to local livelihoods. Developing ICH industries can activate rural economic vitality, promote farmers' employment and income growth, and diversify rural economies. Simultaneously, protecting and passing on ICH enhances rural cultural appeal and attracts more tourists, injecting new energy into rural revitalization.

In ethnic regions, where traditional culture is deeply embedded in local lifestyles, ICH can provide the impetus for economic transformation. By leveraging cultural assets, rural areas can create more jobs, generate new income streams, and stimulate local economies. The development of ICH industries not only enhances the economic vitality of rural communities but also helps preserve and pass on unique cultural traditions. This cultural revival attracts tourists and boosts local economies, creating a cycle of growth and cultural pride.

Moreover, as ICH becomes increasingly integrated into modern industries, it serves as a bridge between traditional cultural values and contemporary economic practices, offering new avenues for social and economic development. Ultimately, the successful implementation of this model could contribute to the realization of national unity and common prosperity by fostering a deeper connection between all ethnic groups, both culturally and economically.

3 Cementing Through Culture

Cementing the consciousness of the Chinese national community requires focusing on constructing modern Chinese civilization and continuously building a shared spiritual home for the Chinese nation. As Chen Lipeng notes: "On the one hand, the traditional values of Chinese civilization are a fundamental bond maintaining national identity; on the other hand, the excellent cultural genes of Chinese civilization provide theoretical foundations and rich cultural connotations for the study of the Chinese national community". [3] Cultural identity is the deepest level of identity. In this context, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) plays a crucial role as a living transmission of national culture, bearing historical memories and embodying national spirit. For instance, Shanxi's Baxi Kiln red and green ceramics preserve ancient ceramic techniques while incorporating modern design concepts, bringing new vitality to traditional crafts. Similarly, the guqin art of Shanxi and Xinzhou conveys the essence of ancient Chinese musical culture. Other examples include Xinjiang Uyghur Muqam, Mongolian long-tune folk songs, and throat singing. These ICH cases demonstrate the richness and diversity of ethnic cultures and underscore the importance of protecting and passing on such heritage.

China has established a four-tier ICH protection system (national, provincial, municipal, and county levels) and corresponding protection centers. Measures such as ICH surveys, creating ICH inventories, identifying and protecting representative inheritors, establishing ecological protection zones, and promoting ICH through exhibitions ensure effective preservation and transmission. ICH serves as a bridge between past and future, a carrier of national spirit, and a source of cultural confidence. Protecting and passing on ICH is a vital pathway to constructing a shared spiritual home. Through living transmission, ICH enhances cultural education, fosters cultural exchange, and drives cultural innovation, strengthening cultural confidence and identity among the Chinese nation.

Cultural confidence is a crucial aspect of national development, as it reflects the self-assurance of a nation in its cultural values and traditions. This confidence is rooted in the historical and contemporary achievements of the Chinese civilization, which has been shaped by the collective efforts of its people. The protection and transmission of ICH not only preserve the cultural heritage but also promote cultural innovation and exchange. For example, the integration of modern design concepts into traditional crafts like Baxi Kiln ceramics showcases the adaptability and vitality of Chinese cultural heritage. Similarly, the promotion of traditional music, such as the guqin art, helps to spread the essence of ancient Chinese musical culture. These practices not only enrich the cultural life of the nation but also enhance the sense of cultural identity and confidence among its people.

In addition, the establishment of a comprehensive ICH protection system in China demonstrates the country's commitment to safeguarding its cultural heritage. The four-tier system ensures that ICH is protected at different levels, from national to local, and that various stakeholders are involved in the process. This multi-level approach allows for a more effective and comprehensive preservation strategy. The creation of ICH inventories and the identification of representative inheritors are essential steps in this process. These measures help to document and protect the cultural heritage, ensuring that it is passed down to future generations. The establishment of ecological protection zones further highlights the importance of preserving the cultural context in which ICH thrives. These zones protect not only the cultural heritage but also the natural environment that supports it.

Promoting ICH through exhibitions and other cultural activities is another important aspect of the protection system. These activities help to raise awareness of the cultural heritage and foster a sense of pride and responsibility among the public. They also provide opportunities for cultural exchange and innovation. For example, exhibitions of traditional crafts and performances of traditional music can attract both domestic and international audiences. This exposure helps to spread the cultural heritage beyond its original communities and promotes cultural diversity. Through these efforts, ICH becomes a bridge between the past and the future, connecting generations and fostering a shared cultural identity.

Protecting and transmitting ICH is crucial for building a shared spiritual home for the Chinese nation. It preserves cultural heritage while enhancing education, exchange, and innovation. ICH strengthens cultural confidence and identity, contributing to a modern Chinese civilization that honors tradition and embraces innovation. China's

comprehensive, multi-level ICH protection system ensures the heritage's continued transmission and development. Through living transmission, ICH will keep shaping the nation's cultural identity and confidence.

4 Cementing Through Governance

ICH's societal functions must be organically integrated into people's daily lives. Promoting ICH inheritance through engaging historical narratives fosters "hard governance" via institutional mechanisms and "soft governance" through cultural influence, providing a solid organizational foundation for the widespread recognition and practice of the consciousness of the Chinese national community.

Cementing the consciousness of the Chinese national community must go beyond abstract theoretical discourse and transform into concrete, practical actions. To implement this vision in modern society, especially in grassroots governance, it is essential to modernize governance systems and capacities, particularly regarding ethnic affairs. This calls for a combination of rule of law and moral governance, which are fundamental for achieving socialist grassroots governance with Chinese characteristics.

On one hand, institutional mechanisms need to be further strengthened. This includes enhancing ethnic laws and regulations to ensure fairness and equality, improving the effectiveness of ethnic work institutions, and raising the professionalism and competency of ethnic work cadres. These steps are necessary to create a robust framework that supports the protection of ethnic diversity while promoting national unity.

On the other hand, the educational role of traditional culture, especially Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), in grassroots governance must be emphasized. ICH reflects the shared values, traditions, and unity of the Chinese people. Passed down through generations, it represents the collective efforts of ancestors and plays a vital role in promoting a sense of identity and community. Its vibrant transmission hinges on meaningful interaction with society, aligning with the principles of applied ethnomusicology[4], which fosters an appreciation for cultural heritage in everyday life.

The societal functions of ICH must be deeply integrated into the daily lives of people. By promoting ICH inheritance through compelling historical narratives, a dual approach can be developed: "hard governance" through institutional frameworks and "soft governance" through cultural influence. This integration provides a strong organizational foundation for fostering widespread recognition of, and active participation in, the consciousness of the Chinese national community.

5 Conclusion

The theoretical framework of the Chinese national community is a key component of constructing an independent Chinese knowledge system and a fundamental support for innovating the theoretical system of Chinese ethnic studies. Grounded in China's long history and developmental logic, it scientifically reveals the rationale, principles, and philosophy behind the formation and development of the Chinese nation. Cementing

the consciousness of the Chinese national community, as an important proposition, summarizes the objective laws of ethnic theoretical development, reflects profound considerations for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and reveals the historical logic of Chinese cultural evolution and the practical inevitability of inter-ethnic exchanges and integration[5].

Cementing the consciousness of the Chinese national community is a long-term and arduous task. Therefore, the important path to strengthen the consciousness of the Chinese national community is to further deepen the cultural, emotional, and spiritual identification with the Chinese national community. It is necessary to encourage people of all ethnic groups to protect, inherit, and develop intangible cultural heritage, promote the excellent traditional Chinese culture, respect differences, embrace diversity, and foster integration. In doing so, a spiritual bond of the community is formed where people of all ethnic groups hold hands, are of one heart, breathe together, and share the same destiny[6]. We must adhere to a people-centered development philosophy. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is the crystallization of the Chinese people's social labor practices accumulated over thousands of years. ICH belongs to the people. To continually advance the cause of national unity and progress, it is essential for ICH to play its rightful role in society, striving toward the realization of the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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