



The Inheritance Plight of Yangtze River Chant and Its Rescue and Protection Measures

YAN Tingting^{[a],*}

^[a]Ph.D., student, School of Music, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 6 October 2014; accepted 16 December 2014
 Published online 26 January 2015

Abstract

“Yangtze River chant” is one of the first group of national non-material cultural heritages. The author has conducted extensive field researches on the inheritance status of Yangtze River chant. Achievement has been made from the application for non-material cultural heritage to the post application era, but there is also a plight. Scientific and practical protection policy should be made to ensure Yangtze River chant can be effectively preserved and inherited. As for problems such as the inheritance mode tends to be single, the inheritance investment is not enough, the evaluation mechanisms is still absent, and the working mechanism needs to be specified, the author has advocated protection measures such as to establish diversified inheritance modes, to improve the evaluation mechanism and to develop a clear division system of right and responsibility, etc.. This article is based on systematic methods, interviews and field researches to explore the internal mechanism of effective inheritance and ecological protection.

Key words: Yangtze River chant; Inheritance status; Plight; Countermeasure

YAN Tingting (2015). The Inheritance Plight of Yangtze River Chant and Its Rescue and Protection Measures. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 11(1), 1-7. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/6154>
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/6154>

INTRODUCTION

Yangtze River chant is the work song sung by boatmen when they pull the boat or work on the Yangtze River. Yangtze River channel has been sailed since the era of wooden boat thousands of years ago. The boatmen sailed reversely and conquered a series of rapids, leaving the old sayings since the ancient time: “difficult roads of Shu, almost inaccessible”. Yangtze River chant as an important part of Yangtze River shipping culture, is the living fossil of our country’s waterway transport history, reflecting China’s social development and progressiveness, and witnessing the historical process of China’s social development. Yangtze River chant is the typical folk culture, because it has been directly derived from the labor of lower working people. However, based on the field research, its overall survival is not optimistic. At the time when it is going to disappear, its heritage and protection are needed without any delay. To inherit and protect this national intangible cultural heritage Yangtze River chant, is to inherit and carry forward excellent traditional culture, to promote the positive role of socialist spiritual civilization, and to retain the cherished treasure with the most preservation value in the traditional Chinese culture.

1. THE MAIN ACHIEVEMENT OF THE INHERITANCE AND PROTECTION FOR YANGTZE RIVER CHANT

1.1 Implement Measures to Assist Inheritors’ Inheritance Activities

After Yangtze River chant has been approved by the State Council to be included in the first national intangible heritage list, there are five Chongqing municipal

representative inheritors have been recognized: Chen Banggui, Wu Xiulan, Cao Guangyu, Tan Xuefa, and Li Deqing. The representative inheritors actively carry out various types of inheritance activities with the financial support and encouragement from the national government. As early as in the 1950s, the older generation inheritors such as Chen Banggui has presented “the authentic taste of the Yangtze River chant” onto the stage and shown to the world with his assiduous study, development and creation. In recent years, the inheritance activities of Yangtze River chant are mainly held by Wu Xiulan and Cao Guangyu. They usually take the form of a performance on the stage, the principle is to make proper adaptations based on the original tune and rhyming. They actively participate in various domestic and international competitions and performances. Yangtze River chant goes abroad again and shows to the world. The author has conducted interviews and researches with the main representative inheritors, including the only “female chant head (the leading singer of the boatmen)” Wu Xiulan and her husband “authentic chant head” Zhang Zhigao, and the young generation inheritor Cao Guangyu, and has investigated their inheritance status.

1.2 The Inheritors Recruit Apprentices Through Various Channels

The traditional impartment way for Yangtze River chant: by words of mouth, natural learning, and oral teaching between master and apprentice. Yangtze River chant has no strict impartment regulations. That apprentice can learn by master’s oral teaching is individual cases, and in most cases workers learn it by what they constantly see and hear during the process of sailing. Yangtze River chant has been passed from generation to generation in this way. However, since the 1970s the environment which Yangtze River chant depends on has disappeared, the traditional impartment way has also changed. The way that an inheritor learns Yangtze River chant has also undergone profound changes. To expand apprentice recruit channel is the historical responsibility and mission which the inheritor must bear. The apprentice recruit way includes:

1.2.1 Free lessons, “Yangtze River Chant Enters Campus”

Since September 2012, Chongqing Municipal Cultural Center and the local Education committee invited Cao Guangyu to open the free “intangible cultural heritage enters campus – Yangtze River chant learning hobby class” in People’s Road Primary School, which has become the first Yangtze River chant impartment base. “Yuzhong District People’s Road Primary School” is a school of migrant worker’s children. Mr. Cao comes to teach every Friday 14:00 to 3:00 for free. The teaching is divided into two classes, the first class is to teach Yangtze River chant’ history, culture and inheritance, and the second is to teach its singing skills.

Mr. Cao teaches carefully and the students study hard.

On November 10th, 2013 Cao Guangyu led the students of Yuzhong District People’s Road Primary School onto the stage of CCTV “*I will attend the Spring Festival Evening Show*” program. They took practical actions to inherit Yangtze River chant, which has won high praises from the society, school and parents.

After two years there are the first graduates. The school held a formal “master acknowledgement ceremony”. The students became the truly last apprentices. After graduation as long as they are interested in further learning Yangtze River chant, they can learn for free at any time.

1.2.2 Establish the “National Intangible Cultural Heritage Yangtze River Chant Learning Base” at Their Own Expenses

Cao Guangyu has been promoting Yangtze River chant for free. He has used his own money to establish the “Yangtze River chant learning base” in purpose of training successors. Mr. Cao has insisted that “the intangible cultural heritage should have a base to display, apprentice recruit should be normally performed, and data should be orderly put into files.” The base has provided a forum for the display of Yangtze River chant.

1.2.3 Recruit Apprentice at Any Time For Free

Wu Xiulan currently has recruited four to five apprentices for free. She once asked the media such as newspapers, television stations to recruit apprentice for free learning Yangtze River chant.

Cao Guangyu said:

“From 1987 I began to learn Yangtze River chant from my master, he taught me dedicatedly without asking for a penny of tuition fees. He told me that, except for promoting Yangtze River chant through performances, the teaching cannot ask for a penny. We should let more young people understand and love Yangtze River chant in the land of Sichuan. This is the responsibility of our generation.”

Therefore, he has promised that as long as people are interested in Yangtze River chant, they can come to learn at the base for free.

1.2.4 Organize Fellowship Activities With the Old Crew From Ferry Company

Cao Guangyu uses his rest time to organize activities with the old crew from shipping company for learning Yangtze River chant, mainly in the part of vocal accompaniment.

1.2.5 Recruit Family Successor

Cao Guangyu’s son Cao Yu is a graduate student in Sichuan Conservatory of Music, who studies Yangtze River chant from his father, and uses the chant’s prototype for creation. His creation “ship arrives the pier wine song starts to sing” has won the 15th Star Award of the Ministry of Culture.

1.3 The inheritors Seek to Change the Living Space

Soil of survival which Yangtze River chant lives with has

gradually disappeared. Motorized boats gradually replaced manpower wooden boats, and chant completely lost its function. In the ecological environment of “mountains are as flat as lakes”, the form of life has changed from natural to artistic. Without the original environment, the interpreted Yangtze River chant lost its authentically rustic charm and natural characters. However, in recent years under the strong support of government policies, based on the maintenance of the authentic taste, Yangtze River chant has established a performance style and form in line with the developmental trend of the time. Yangtze River chant inheritors strive for development and change the living space so as to continue its existence.

(a) Yangtze River chant appears in various domestic and international performances, competitive stages, programs and columns. As the government’s attention and protection to Yangtze River chant have been increasingly strengthened, today Yangtze River chant begins to emerge in the public view in an artistic way. The inheritors accept interviews from media, participate in television programs, columns, various domestic and international performances and competitions. Its existence way has changed from the original survival to enter the elegant art hall.

(b) Appear in the modern digital media. The inheritors record Yangtze River chant in the studio, and the records are expressed in all kinds of modern digital media. Its existence has changed from singing by boatmen along the river to permanent preservation of video data, which is of great significance for preservation and inheritance of Yangtze River chant.

(c) Appear in professional art colleges, organizations and folk art groups. In order to make a living, the inheritors need to perform around, and the chant is expressed as cameo performances with the purpose of make a living.

2. THE INHERITANCE PLIGHT OF YANGTZE RIVER CHANT

The core element of intangible cultural heritage protection is “people”, which is the subject of inheritance. Inheritance relies on the subject to put it into practice, and the subject is the important bearer and transmitter. (Wang, 2013, pp.270-271) The living status of inheritors directly affects the protection of the non-material cultural heritage. Yangtze River chant with 3000 years’ history has successfully declared to be the intangible cultural heritage. Although progress has been made in recent years, the situation is still severe, especially the inheritance system chain is very weak, and representative successors’ living situations are not optimistic.

2.1 The Inheritance Tends to Be Unitary, and the Inheritance Investment Is Not Enough

Firstly, the inheritors are ageing. The recognized

Chongqing municipal representative inheritors are five people, out of whom the main representative inheritor Chen Banggui passed away in February 2012 at the age of 95. Two inheritors, Tan Xuefa and Li Deqing, cannot be contacted for various reasons. Wu Xiulan is 73-year-old, even the younger generation inheritor Cao Guangyu has entered the age of 50 this year. In the interview with Wu Xiulan, she talked about that she really wanted to pass down all her skills, in case that one day “people die and art becomes extinct”. If Yangtze River chant is lost in the hands of their generation, they become the sinner. After a week of the interviews with Wu Xiulan and Zhang Zhigao, Ms. Wu called me with the bad news that Mr. Zhang just passed away. Another “chant head” was lost. The inheritors’ ageing and passing away is the largest dilemma for the protection of Yangtze River chant.

Secondly, the inheritance protection method of Yangtze River chant is unitary. First of all, the inheritance is carried out mainly by words of mouth, or from master to apprentice. Although Cao Guangyu has introduced Yangtze River chant into the classroom, the influence is limited. In order to be a qualified “chant head”, a person should not only have a good voice and vivid emotion, but also should master the difficult singing skill. The learning time is long and it’s difficult to complete the apprenticeship. Affected by modern culture and lifestyle, young people do not have much enthusiasm in learning the authentic aria of Yangtze River chant, and usually give up halfway after learning for a period of time. Secondly, after the inheritors finish their apprenticeship, they find themselves in a blind alley. An effective mechanism is absent to make systematic plans for the inheritors. This is the common phenomenon that Yangtze River chant and other intangible cultural heritages have to face. In the era which lays emphasis on the economic benefits, many young people come to learn Yangtze River chant in the purpose of creating economic benefits. After learning they feel that it have no economic value, they would voluntarily give up. Therefore, the way out problem with the inheritors after their completion of apprenticeship is an important factor for the lack of qualified successors of intangible cultural heritages.

Thirdly, the investment on inheritance is inadequate. Shortage of funds is the common problem and confusion that Yangtze River chant and other non-material cultural heritages have to face. Take the first 13 projects which have been included in the national intangible cultural heritage protection list in Chongqing City in 2006 for example, according to the five-year protection plan, each project needs an annual protection investment of 300 to 400 thousand Yuan, and a total of 13 projects require a protection fund of 3.9 to 4.2 million Yuan per year, but Chongqing City has invested a protection fund of only

1 million Yuan.¹ To calculate in this way each project is distributed with only 70 thousand Yuan per year, less than a quarter of the allocated fund annually. For example, Chongqing City national poverty county Fengdu has rich non-material cultural heritages, but due to its own economic condition, only in 2005 it appropriated 8,000 yuan for the application. In 2009 Chongqing City government increased the special fund to be 4 million yuan. Until 2014, the number of Chongqing City national non-material cultural heritages has increased to be 42, and the number of the fourth group of representative inheritors of the national non-material cultural heritage has also increased to be 8. In such an investment fund, the amount allocated onto each heritage is still as few as can be counted by blending the fingers. The inheritance of Yangtze River chant receives government subsidy of 5,000 yuan per year, and most of the remaining costs depend on the inheritors themselves to find solution. Cao Guangyu also said that they needed the supporting facilities and environment for the performance of Yangtze River chant. For example, to restore the old ecological environment of Yangtze River chant, specialized waters which can accommodate manpower boats are needed. The inheritors cannot resolve the funding gap.

The source channels of funding are narrow, which mainly rely on the subsidies from central government to implement onto the projects. With the existing rate of financial investment on the rescue and protection of intangible cultural heritages, many endangered heritages of great value will disappear before the arrival of the rescue funds. Feng Jicai, CPPCC National Committee member, Chairman of the Chinese Folk Literature and Art Association, said in an interview during the period of NPC and CPPCC: “The inheritors of the folk cultures are passing away every minute, folk cultures are dying every minute.” Based on the government comprehensive plan funding rate, it’s unable to keep up with the disappearance rate of intangible cultural heritages. Their protection is difficult to carry forward.

2.2 The Evaluation Mechanism Is Still Missing and the Working Mechanism Needs to Be Clarified

The government has issued policies successively to provide legal bases for the protection of intangible cultural heritage. Throughout the policies, there is in lack of a scientific and effective evaluation mechanism. The conversion from “focusing on the application” to “focusing on the protection” is the slogan in the post heritage application era, but the real question is how to protect. For example, how is the inheritance progress of Yangtze River chant? How is the implementation of supporting policies

for the inheritors? Have they been fully implemented? It needs to make an objective, scientific and clear identification, and then provides guidance for rectification and implementation.

Furthermore, the protection mechanism of non-material cultural heritage is not clear. The participation of the whole society is determined by the historical mission to protect non-material cultural heritages. Different departments, organizations have different rights, responsibilities, and functions in protection. They have intersections and conflicts in some aspects. Therefore, the protection mechanism of non-material cultural heritage should be further clarified, right and responsibility of the participants should be refined so as to achieve the “synergy” (Zhou & Li, 2011) of the whole society.

3. THE RESCUE PROTECTION MEASURE OF YANGTZE RIVER CHANT

“On the one hand, to protect and inherit non-material cultural heritages is to protect and develop cultural diversity, and is to promote the development of human culture; on the other hand, the diversity of human culture also contributes to the enrichment and development of non-material cultural heritages.” (Wang , 2013, p.78)

However, with the acceleration of modernization, our country’s rich intangible cultural heritages are under severe impacts. The non-material cultural heritages such as Yangtze River chant are disappearing. The world is facing a serious threat of the loss of cultural diversity, which brings about a significant loss to the inheritance of human cultures, civilizations, lives, and the spiritual world which has been accumulated for thousands of years. Therefore, we should make prompt measures to resolve the protection dilemma of Yangtze River chant so as to prevent the “poetic masterpiece” from disappearing in the world.

As the older generation of inheritors passed away, the younger generation of successors cannot yet fully undertake the mission, Yangtze River chant is going into a dilemma with the threat of survival. The protection dilemma of Yangtze River chant is not an isolated phenomenon in the protection of non-material cultural heritages of our country, but the epitome of the developmental concept and behavior of “focus on the object instead of the people”. In some senses,

“The protection of non-material cultural heritages of our country is a long-term, complex systematic project. We should not only uphold and implement the scientific concept of development, but also establish a set of mechanisms which are people-oriented and can consistently transform the protection system of intangible cultural heritages into practical productivity. (Qi & Wang, 2011)

For this reason, the author holds that we should intensify the rescue protection measures of Yangtze River

¹ Chongqing CPPCC member: *Increase the Investment on Intangible Cultural Heritages* Retrieved from <http://cppcc.people.com.cn/GB/34962/34998/5132669.htm>

chant.

3.1 Establish Diversified Inheritance Modes

3.1.1 Strengthen Cooperation With Colleges and Universities and Establish the Inheritance Base

Furthermore, the protection mechanism for non-material cultural heritage is not clear. The participation of the whole society is determined by the historical mission of protection of intangible cultural heritage. Different departments and organizations have different rights, responsibilities, and functions in the protection. There are overlaps and conflicts among them. Therefore, the protection mechanism for non-material cultural heritage should be further clarified, and rights and responsibilities of the participants should be refined in order to achieve the “synergy” brought by the participation of the whole society.²

3. The rescue protection measures of Yangtze River chant

“On the one hand, to protect and inherit non-material cultural heritage is to protect and develop the cultural diversity, and is to promote the development of human culture; on the other hand, the diversity of human culture also promotes the enrichment and development of non-material cultural heritage.”² However, with the acceleration of modernization process, the originally rich intangible cultural heritages of our country are suffering from fierce impacts. Non-material cultural heritages such as Yangtze River chant is disappearing. The world is facing the serious threat from the loss of cultural diversity, which has brought significant loss to thousands of years of accumulated human cultures, civilizations, lives, and spirits. Therefore, the protection dilemma of Yangtze River chant needs a timely protection measure so as to avoid the “poetic masterpiece” disappearing from the world.

As the older generation of inheritors passed away, the younger generation of inheritors is not yet able to fully undertake the task, the skill of Yangtze river chant goes into a dilemma which is under the threat of disappearance. The protection plight of Yangtze River chant is not an isolated phenomenon in the protection of intangible cultural heritages, but is the epitome of the developmental idea and practice of “focusing on the object instead of the people”. In a sense, “the protection of our country’s intangible cultural heritages is a long-term, complex and systematic project, which not only needs to uphold and implement the scientific concept of development, but also requires to establish a set of mechanism which is people-oriented and can consistently push forward the protection of intangible cultural heritages into practical productive forces.”² Therefore, the author holds that we should intensify the implement of rescue measures for Yangtze River chant.

(1) Establish diversified inheritance modes

1. Strengthen cooperation with universities and

establish inheritance base

Strengthen cooperation with universities. Based on colleges and universities, we should place Yangtze River chant onto a higher platform for researches and inheritance, with more and more participation of specialists and scholars, we can conduct subsequent researches and development on the scientific application and rationalization of Yangtze River chant.

Expand the mode of getting into the classroom and to establish the inheritance educational base. Up to now Yuzhong District People’s Road Primary School has made a successful trial. In addition to the promotion of Yangtze River chant in primary and secondary schools, it can also select and train vocal and theoretical talents in conservatories in Chongqing City. We should also cultivate a group of teachers whom will popularize Yangtze River chant to students. Make efforts to attract more professionals to participate into the inheritance of Yangtze River chant.

3.1.2 Establish a Database and Implement Modern Inheritance Technology

In addition to the traditional inheritance modes, we should expand derivative inheritance modes with modern technologies. Establish the “Yangtze River chant database”. Through the database to collect, organize, and preserve the precious singing type, tunes, lyrics, and tips, etc. of representative inheritors. Use all kinds of modern technology means such as texts, images, animations, and videos, etc. to conduct systematic classification and sorting. Preserve the entire contents in digital forms so as to facilitate the information transmission, search, and application for further researches. Chongqing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Non-Material Cultural Heritage Center have led to establish the network sharing platform, associated with a number of research units such as conservatories and Chongqing Academy of Arts, etc., to conduct a long-term tracking, research and data collection by stages. They have recorded the relevant information and activities of the inheritors, recorded the first-hand information of their living status, innovations and theoretical results. The establishment of the platform can make more people understand and access to the latest development of Yangtze River chant, provide more harmonious living space for inheritors in the new historical period of development, which has important practical value and practical significance for Yangtze River chant.

3.1.3 Reproduce the Ecological Environment and Establish the Exhibition and Performance Base

The inheritance function of Yangtze River chant has completely died out, to restore its original function of chanting, we should reproduce its ecological environment. The government and enterprises have jointly established an exhibition and performances base for Yangtze River chant, which can provide specialized performance place

and necessary properties such as manpower boats and the waters. The restored original ecological environment can become a cultural tourism destination, commercial performance site and filming base so as to achieve a cultural industry chain with the theme of Yangtze River chant.

3.2 Improve the Evaluation Mechanism and Accountability and Mechanism

When an intangible cultural heritage's declaration has been successfully approved, it has been included in the protection list and the declaration has already been completed. The "post declaration period" begins to launch, which is a reflection of the previous stage, whose focus shifts from declaration to protection. To re-verify whether the work has been effectively implemented or fully developed, and to reflect whether the concept of ecological protection and measure is rational or not, we need to make an objective, scientific, rational and forward-thinking assessment and identification, so the establishment of a complete evaluation mechanism is an important support to promote the sustainable development of the protection.

The evaluation mechanism is an important part of the process of protecting intangible cultural heritages, and it is the key to ensure the protection in the "post declaration period" to be effectively implemented. Its contents include continuous census evaluation, inheritor support assessment, inheritance activity evaluation, protection evaluation, and developmental utilization evaluation. The purpose of the mechanism is to focus on the inheritor and link the various parts to conduct a coordinated operation.

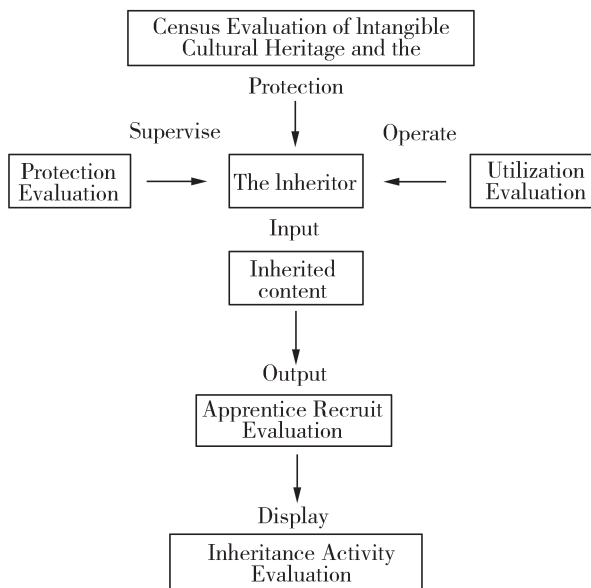


Figure 1
Evaluation Mechanism

The protection mechanism for non-material cultural

heritages of our country should divide rights and responsibilities clearly and promote the construction of management system, inheritance system, information network, and evaluation mechanism. The protection work should involve a complex system participated by various departments and the public, including the Bureau of Culture, Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center and other specialized institutions, libraries, museums, archives, radio and television bureaus and other cultural institutions, media companies, travel companies and other commercial organizations, local government of the community where the inheritors reside, various intangible cultural heritage associations, institutes, universities and other scientific research institutions.

Firstly, we should establish an inheritance system centering on "the inheritor" to safeguard the census and evaluation of the representative inheritors of intangible cultural heritages, to track the living situation of inheritors, and to record the inheritors' skills, their apprentice recruit, and activities, etc. Secondly, we should establish a government-led, market-oriented and leadership unified working mechanism to carry out a hierarchical management. The management responsibility system should be implemented hierarchically from the first level - specialized government departments, to the second level - competent authorities, and the third level - management units of the community where the inheritors reside, scientific research institutions, commercial organizations and the public. For example, when the inheritor Cao Guangyu prepares to establish an inheritance base, he should firstly apply to the government department in the first level. After the application is approved, the authority in the second level will appropriate the special fund and assess the application's value. Finally, the management unit at the community will assist his inheritance and protection. Through the hierarchical management, protection responsibility contract will be signed, and the three levels of units are encouraged to supervise and manage the protection. An inventive mechanism is also established to ensure protection policies to be fully implemented. In addition, through market development, we should make an effective plan and operation for inheritor's inheritance activities, making the inheritor's skills to be well displayed. Finally, through all parties' protection and operation, the inheritor has the responsibility and obligation to pass his skills down to the successors and to display the skills through inheritance activities. Through the commonweal performances at the communities, villages, and schools, etc., it can enhance and promote the market development of Yangtze River chant, and can press the corresponding authorities to fully implement the protection and support policies so as to achieve the integration of public service activities and market development.

CONCLUSION

This paper has analyzed the inheritance and protection of the first group of national non-material cultural heritage approved by the State Council in 2006 – Yangtze River chant, and has explored the internal mechanism of its effective inheritance and ecological protection based on systematic methods, interviews, and field researches. To effectively summarize the past achievement, to discuss the existing problem and to seek a scientific developmental countermeasure is the key to systematically inherit and protect the heritage. The author wishes that the government and all far-sighted people can recognize the diachronic and synchronic value of Yangtze River chant, and to build it as a brand of spiritual civilization of Sichuan and Chongqing Provinces. The achieved economic benefits can be used for the commonweal

inheritance and protection of Yangtze River chant so as to form a protective mechanism in a virtuous economic cycle of “from the Yangtze River chant, to the Yangtze River chant.”

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