

Current Situation, Dilemmas and Paths for the Dissemination of China's Traditional Craftsmanship-based Intangible Cultural Heritage in Africa

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ABSTRACT

China's traditional craftsmanship-based Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) serves as a vital bond for deepening exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and African civilizations, and for consolidating the humanistic foundation of the China-Africa Community with a Shared Future. At present, the dissemination of craftsmanship-based ICH in Africa is marked by a continuously expanding pool of dissemination subjects, steadily growing audience coverage, increasingly enriched dissemination content, and gradually broadened dissemination channels, with sustained positive effects. However, it also faces practical dilemmas including insufficient coordination among subjects, low audience adaptation, inadequate localized transformation of content, and weak media adaptability. These challenges can be addressed through measures such as building a cross-subject collaborative communication community, improving the precision of segmented communication, creating dissemination content adapted to the local African context, and promoting the integrated empowerment of traditional and emerging media.

Keywords: *Traditional Craftsmanship-based Intangible Cultural Heritage; Dissemination in Africa; China-Africa People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges*

1. INTRODUCTION

Under the framework of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China-Africa cultural cooperation has continued to deepen and deliver solid outcomes. A number of China's traditional craftsmanship-based ICH projects have entered Africa through foreign aid training, cultural performances and exhibitions, and non-governmental exchanges, serving as an important bridge for mutual understanding and affinity between the Chinese and African people. Promoting the effective dissemination of traditional craftsmanship-based ICH in Africa is an inherent requirement for deepening China-Africa civilizational mutual learning and consolidating the public opinion foundation for China-Africa friendship. It also carries important practical significance for expanding the overseas dissemination boundaries of Chinese culture and

enhancing the communication power and influence of Chinese civilization on the African continent.

2. CURRENT SITUATION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSEMINATION OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP-BASED ICH IN AFRICA

Since the establishment of FOCAC in 2000, the continuous improvement of China-Africa cultural cooperation mechanisms has provided solid institutional guarantees and platform support for traditional craftsmanship-based ICH to enter Africa. Over more than two decades, relevant dissemination practices have advanced steadily and achieved remarkable progress in multiple aspects.

2.1 Continuous Expansion of Dissemination Subjects

The dissemination of craftsmanship-based ICH in Africa has formed a pattern with the joint participation of multiple subjects including the government, social organizations, inheritors, enterprises, and educational institutions, with each subject focusing on different practices.

Official dissemination at the government level plays a leading role. By the end of 2024, national ministries and commissions including the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism have held hundreds of traditional craftsmanship training courses for more than 50 African countries through foreign aid training programs, covering multiple categories such as ceramic firing and silk weaving. Local governments, in light of their local ICH resources, have carried out characteristic performances, exhibitions and exchange activities in many African countries, effectively driving the overseas dissemination of local ICH.

Social organizations and industry institutions serve as important bonds for dissemination. Institutions such as the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Association and the China Arts and Crafts Association have repeatedly held ICH exhibitions, inheritor exchange workshops and other activities in conjunction with cultural authorities of various African countries, promoting regular exchanges between the Chinese and African craftsmanship industries. ICH protection centers at provincial and municipal levels have also launched paired cooperation with local cultural institutions in Africa to facilitate the landing of local characteristic projects on the continent.

ICH inheritors are the core force of dissemination. As the core bearers of ICH techniques, numerous national and provincial-level inheritors have been invited to Africa to conduct technical performances and exhibitions, teaching and training, and creative exchanges. Inheritors of projects such as Jingdezhen porcelain making, Suzhou embroidery, and bamboo weaving have repeatedly helped local African communities set up handicraft production workshops, enabling China's traditional craftsmanship to take root in Africa.

Chinese-funded enterprises and educational institutions are important emerging forces. Chinese-funded enterprises showcase Chinese handicraft ICH to local people through cultural open days, ICH-themed events, and aided workshop

construction. Confucius Institutes and Chinese language education institutions across African countries have integrated handicraft content into cultural teaching, realizing the organic integration of language teaching and cultural dissemination through experience courses, workshops and other formats.

2.2 Sustained Growth in Audience Scale and Engagement Depth

Official cultural exchange activities have driven large-scale audience participation. Official events such as the "Happy Spring Festival" series and the China-Africa Culture and Arts Festival held in many African countries attract millions of on-site participants from African people every year, with a cumulative total of over one million guests and members of the public received, serving as the core channel for expanding audience coverage.

Regular training and non-governmental exchanges have promoted in-depth audience participation. China's handicraft foreign aid training programs in Africa have cumulatively trained thousands of local African practitioners. Long-term workshops and regular courses opened by ICH inheritors have trained more than 10,000 local people, realizing the transformation of the audience from experiencers to learners and inheritors.

2.3 Gradual Enrichment of Dissemination Content and Categories

The dissemination categories have achieved full coverage across all major types. The projects that have entered Africa now cover eight core categories and nearly 100 national-level ICH items. Among them, projects with strong adaptability to local production and daily life, such as paper-cutting, ceramic firing, rattan and bamboo weaving, and embroidery, have formed a regular and systematic dissemination pattern.

Dissemination content has begun to extend to in-depth cultural interpretation. Early dissemination mostly focused on finished product exhibitions and technical demonstrations, with an emphasis on visual presentation. Current dissemination activities, through themed lectures, exchange seminars and other formats, have started to interpret the cultural connotation, craftsmanship spirit and ecological concepts behind ICH for African audiences, realizing the deepening from technical dissemination to cultural communication.

2.4 Expansion and Innovation of Dissemination Channels and Media

Offline dissemination scenarios are continuously enriched. Offline channels remain the core of dissemination, and the scenarios have expanded from single exhibition hall displays to multiple venues including ICH workshops, community cultural centers, Confucius Institutes, and Chinese-funded enterprise parks. New formats such as immersive experience workshops and ICH markets have realized the regularization and localization of offline dissemination.

Online emerging media have become an important growth driver. With the rising internet and smartphone penetration in Africa, social media and short video platforms have become vital dissemination carriers. Short videos of relevant ICH projects have accumulated more than 100 million views on major African platforms. Inheritors have broken geographical and time constraints through online teaching, greatly improving the efficiency of dissemination reach.

3. PRACTICAL DILEMMAS IN THE DISSEMINATION OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP-BASED ICH IN AFRICA

Despite the remarkable achievements of China's craftsmanship-based ICH dissemination in Africa, factors such as China-Africa cultural differences, an imperfect dissemination system, and insufficient local adaptation have restricted the depth, breadth and long-term effectiveness of the dissemination.

3.1 Insufficient Coordination Among Dissemination Subjects

At present, the practices of various dissemination subjects are mostly in a decentralized and fragmented state, with inadequate cross-subject and cross-sector coordination and linkage, failing to form a joint force for dissemination. Horizontally, the linkage mechanism between various government departments, and between the government, social organizations, enterprises and inheritors is not yet sound. There is a lack of effective connection between official dissemination, non-governmental practices and market-oriented operations, often resulting in siloed operations. Some events fail to form long-term dissemination and also lead to the dispersion of resources.

Vertically, there is a lack of resource integration among different dissemination subjects of the same type of ICH projects. Multiple local sub-items under categories such as embroidery and ceramic firing are mostly promoted for dissemination independently by local entities, making it difficult to form a large-scale brand effect.

3.2 Low Audience Adaptation of Dissemination

Current dissemination mostly adopts a one-size-fits-all model, with insufficient segmentation of African audiences and a serious lack of segmented and differentiated strategies. From the regional and national dimension, more than 50 African countries have significant differences in history, culture, economic level and media environment, as well as varying acceptance and demand for ICH. However, most dissemination activities have not developed differentiated plans, and unified content and formats are difficult to adapt to the local context of different countries. From the audience group dimension, insufficient attention is paid to the different needs of groups such as government officials, handicraft practitioners, young students, and the general public. Targeted dissemination content and formats have not been designed, making it difficult to meet differentiated needs and effectively tap potential audiences.

3.3 Inadequate Localized Transformation of Dissemination Content

At present, most dissemination content is dominated by China's local perspective, with a lack of localized transformation for Africa, making it difficult to trigger emotional resonance and cultural identity among African audiences. On the one hand, there is insufficient cultural adaptability. Most activities focus on one-way cultural export, emphasizing the technical sophistication and cultural connotation, while ignoring the commonalities and differences between Chinese and African cultures, and lacking respect for and adaptation to the local African culture and aesthetic habits. As a result, it is difficult for African audiences to understand the in-depth cultural connotation, and only a superficial visual impression can be formed. On the other hand, there is a lack of practicality and interactivity. Part of the dissemination still stays at superficial demonstrations, lacking integration with local production and daily life, and failing to fully respond to the practical needs of African countries

for skill improvement and industrial development, making it difficult to realize the transformation from cultural appreciation to in-depth identity.

3.4 Weak Adaptability of Dissemination Media

In terms of media selection, there is a widespread problem of prioritizing emerging media over traditional media, and valuing online dissemination over in-depth offline cultivation, which is poorly adapted to the actual local conditions in Africa. The level of internet infrastructure varies significantly across African countries: internet penetration is relatively high in North Africa and Southern Africa, while network coverage is insufficient in most countries in West Africa, East Africa and Central Africa, where local people rely more on traditional media such as television and offline channels including community activities. However, current dissemination mostly concentrates resources on online emerging media, with insufficient utilization of traditional media, failing to effectively reach a wider grassroots audience. At the same time, there is a lack of effective linkage between online and offline dissemination: online content lacks the support of in-depth offline experience, and offline activities fail to achieve secondary dissemination and long-term continuation through online channels, unable to form a collaborative dissemination pattern.

4. OPTIMIZATION PATHS FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP-BASED ICH IN AFRICA

Based on the overall goal of China-Africa civilizational exchanges and mutual learning, and in light of the actual situation of the African continent, this paper constructs a systematic mitigation strategy from the four dimensions of subject, audience, content and media, to promote the quality and efficiency improvement and steady long-term development of relevant dissemination.

4.1 Building a Cross-Subject Collaborative Communication Community

It is necessary to build a China-Africa communication community for handicraft ICH with government guidance, multi-stakeholder participation and coordinated linkage, integrate

various resources, and form a joint dissemination force. First, it is to establish and improve a coordinated linkage mechanism for multiple subjects. Guided by the cultural cooperation mechanism of FOCAC, we will build a national-level coordination platform to promote horizontal collaboration among government departments, clarify the positioning and advantages of the government, social organizations, inheritors, enterprises and educational institutions, and realize complementary strengths and coordinated efforts of all subjects. Second, it is to promote resource integration and brand-oriented dissemination of similar ICH projects, establish cross-regional dissemination alliances, build a unified dissemination brand, and enhance the recognition and scale effect of dissemination. Finally, it is to promote two-way cooperation between Chinese and African subjects, incorporate government departments, industry organizations, local inheritors and enterprises of African countries into the communication community, and enable African subjects to deeply participate in dissemination practices through joint planning and promotion. This will not only adapt to the local context, but also realize two-way mutual learning between Chinese and African civilizations.

4.2 Improving the Precision of Segmented Communication

The core of improving dissemination efficiency is to abandon the one-size-fits-all model, refine audience segmentation, and formulate differentiated and precise dissemination strategies. On the one hand, segment audiences based on regional and national dimensions, and develop differentiated dissemination plans according to the cultural characteristics and industrial needs of different regions and countries in Africa. On the other hand, segment audiences based on group dimensions, and design targeted dissemination content and formats for different groups including government and industry institutions, local handicraft practitioners, young people, academic and cultural circles, and the general public, to meet differentiated needs. At the same time, we will focus on the tapping and transformation of potential audiences, converting African audiences from passive viewers to active participants and local disseminators, laying an audience foundation for long-term dissemination.

4.3 Promoting Localized Transformation of Content

The core of enhancing content effectiveness is to promote the localized transformation of dissemination content based on the commonalities between Chinese and African civilizations. The first is to adhere to the core of Chinese culture, explore the common values of Chinese and African civilizations, extract the craftsmanship spirit, ecological concepts and life wisdom contained in China's traditional craftsmanship, and build a bridge for cultural communication with common values, enabling African audiences to understand the cultural connotation through resonance. The second is to promote the localized adaptation and innovation of dissemination content, and make adaptive adjustments to techniques, content and formats in combination with local raw materials, production conditions, cultural traditions and folk custom scenarios in Africa, to achieve localized implementation. The third is to strengthen the interactivity and practicality of the content, abandon one-way preaching-style dissemination, increase the design of in-depth participation such as technical teaching and joint creation, and combine handicraft dissemination with skill training and employment assistance in light of local livelihood and industrial needs, to realize the deepening from cultural identity to value identity.

4.4 Promoting Media Convergence Empowerment and Building a Locally Adapted Omnichannel Dissemination System

The core of improving reach efficiency is to promote the integrated development of traditional and emerging media based on the media environment of various African countries, and build an omnichannel dissemination system with online and offline coordination adapted to the local context. First, it is to select dissemination media in light of local conditions. For countries with high internet penetration, we will focus on online emerging media, while for areas with insufficient network coverage, we will mainly rely on traditional media and offline channels, to achieve precise matching between channels and audiences. Second, it is to promote in-depth integration and collaborative empowerment of online and offline channels, build a closed loop of dissemination with in-depth offline experience as the core and extensive online reach as the extension, realize multiple dissemination from a single event, and

promote the transformation from short-term activities to long-term dissemination. Finally, it is to carry out dissemination relying on local African media and platforms, strengthen cooperation with local mainstream media and social platforms, fit the acceptance habits of local audiences, and improve the acceptance and reach efficiency of dissemination.

5. CONCLUSION

Traditional craftsmanship-based Intangible Cultural Heritage is a living carrier for the living transmission of China's fine traditional culture, as well as a key humanistic bond for promoting exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and African civilizations and realizing cross-cultural people-to-people connectivity. Through technical empowerment and industrial linkage, it can enhance the competitiveness of Africa's local handicraft industry, broaden local employment channels, and contribute to the improvement of regional people's livelihood and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This dissemination practice can also effectively enhance the communication power and influence of Chinese civilization on the African continent, deepen equal dialogue and two-way mutual learning between the two major civilizations of China and Africa, and consolidate the in-depth humanistic foundation and public opinion identity for the construction of the China-Africa Community with a Shared Future in the new era.

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