

Hainan Ledong Xili Village Li Ethnic Cultural Heritage Conservation Practice and Innovative Development Pathways

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Abstract: The cultural heritage of the Li ethnic group represents a treasure of Hainan's minority cultures, embodying the historical memory, ancestral wisdom, and collective identity of the Li people. Xili Village in Ledong, as a quintessential Li settlement, possesses diverse intangible cultural heritage (ICH) resources encompassing traditional crafts, folk rituals, and tangible cultural manifestations. This study adopts the village as a case study to identify critical challenges in contemporary conservation practice through field investigation. Grounded in local rural development contexts, it proposes actionable strategies to safeguard the spiritual essence of ethnic culture while facilitating effective transmission and sustainable utilization of cultural heritage. The findings aim to provide actionable insights for heritage conservation in comparable Li communities.

Keywords: Xili Village; Li Ethnic Cultural Heritage; Conservation Practice; Innovative Development; Rural Revitalization

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1. Introduction

Ledong Li Village is located in Da'an Town, Ledong Autonomous County, Hainan Province. It is a quintessential Li settlement with rich Li ethnic cultural resources. It has a complete transmission system in Li brocade weaving, traditional dwellings, and folk rituals, serving as an important sample for studying the living heritage transmission of Li ethnic culture [1]. However, under the influence of urbanization acceleration and modern lifestyle, the Li ethnic cultural heritage of Xili Village is facing problems of generational discontinuity in heritage transmission and insufficient conservation. How to carry out creative transformation and development while maintaining its authenticity is a key issue that needs to be urgently addressed. This paper takes Xili Village as the starting point to analyze the specific measures currently taken by the village to conserve the Li ethnic cultural heritage and address the existing problems, and proposes new conceptual frameworks that align with the indigenous realities and meet the needs of the masses, so that this precious cultural heritage can better adapt to social development and be effectively utilized.

2. Overview and Conservation Practice of the Li Ethnic Cultural Heritage in Hainan Ledong Xili Village

2.1 Core Essence of the Li Ethnic Cultural Heritage in Xili Village

In the face of the increasingly severe global environmental challenges, promoting ecological civilization construction has gradually become an important part of the development strategies of various countries. Meanwhile, as the crystallization of human civilization, traditional cultural heritage conservation also faces new opportunities and challenges. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China further emphasizes: "Strengthening the conservation of cultural relics and cultural heritage, and enhancing the conservation and transmission of historical culture in urban and rural construction." In the journey of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, the conservation of traditional cultural heritage and the construction of ecological civilization, as important components of the national strategies, undertake a significant mission of achieving harmonious coexistence between human and nature and promoting sustainable development of society. Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, and the conservation of traditional cultural heritage has also entered a new era.

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The Li ethnic cultural heritage of Xili Village is deeply integrated into the daily life of the villagers, possessing both material and non-material characteristics. It is close to life and full of emotions, representing the life experience accumulated by the Li people during their long struggle against nature. The intangible cultural heritage is mainly manifested in the various old items displayed in the Xili Ethnic Culture Exhibition Hall, such as the silver jewelry and clothes worn by the Li ethnic women, the ox carts and granaries used for farming, the spinning wheels and dyeing tools used for weaving, etc. Each item records the mark of a certain era. Among all the exhibits, the Li brocade Dragon Quilt and the ancient fishing nets represent the superb craftsmanship of the Li ethnic group ^[2]. In addition, the boathouse structural style preserved in the villages—the yellowish-brown walls paired with the steeples—not only conforms to the humid and hot climate of Hainan but also embodies the strong ethnic style characteristics, becoming a unique scenic line of the village.

2.2 Current Practice on Xili Village Li Ethnic Cultural Heritage Conservation

In recent years, Xili Village has, relying on its autochthonous unique cultural resources, carried out a series of culturally-grounded cultural heritage conservation projects under the guidance of the government and with the cooperation of the villagers, eliminating the phenomenon of “emphasizing form over efficacy”. On the one hand, cultural exhibition venues have been constructed. The Xili Ethnic Culture Exhibition Hall has been established to display about 2,000 old items of the Li ethnic group collected by villager Wang Xiuqin over the past 30 years. This not only effectively preserves the material cultural heritage but also enables people to experience the charm of Li ethnic culture up close. The exhibition hall manager, Wang Xiuqin, tells the audience the historical background of each exhibit every day, bringing the cultural relics to life. On the other hand, efforts were made to promote the living heritage transmission of traditional craftsmanship. The Li Brocade Craft Cooperative initiated by Wang Xiuqin has been established to offer Li Brocade training courses, invite Local Li ethnic women to participate in the training, and teach them the techniques of spinning, dyeing, weaving, and embroidery step by step, enabling the Li brocade craftsmanship to be passed down among the villagers and providing them with opportunities to increase their income by mastering traditional craftsmanship ^[3]. Thirdly, cultural elements are conserved in the construction of new rural areas. In the construction of beautiful villages, attention has been paid to maintaining the unique characteristics of Li ethnic traditional dwellings, renovating old houses, paving roads, installing lighting facilities, etc., to improve the living conditions of the village, conserve the cultural essence of the villages and prevent the erosion of culture by excessive commercialization. Fourthly, culture-tourism integrated development has been advanced. The Li ethnic cultural resources have been leveraged to develop four-level coconut-level rural tourism attractions, build characteristic guesthouses, tourist service centers and other supporting facilities to attract tourists who are interested in folk culture to visit and tour, while experiencing the climate of Li ethnic culture, achieving the transmission and development of traditional culture, increasing the income of local residents, and igniting community participation impetus in the conservation of traditional excellent culture.

3. Practical Challenges in Xili Village Li Ethnic Cultural Heritage Conservation and Development

3.1 Pronounced Generational Discontinuity in Heritage Transmission with Insufficient Youth Engagement

At present, the transmission of Li ethnic cultural heritage in Xili Village mainly relies on the elderly in the village. Most of the young people have gone to work or gone to school, and their understanding is gradually decreasing for the traditional culture of their own ethnic group. The acquisition of skills such as Li brocade weaving and folk rituals requires spending a significant amount of time and efforts, and it will take a long time to see the results. This is contrary to the fast-paced lifestyle and work demands of young people. As a result, many young people are reluctant to learn these skills. Furthermore, as the Li ethnic culture is mainly passed down orally and lacks written records, after the passing away of the older generation of successors, some folk legends and specific operational methods of handicraft techniques might be forgotten, resulting in a generation gap that becomes the

greatest obstacle hindering the preservation of cultural heritage [4].

3.2 Limited Conservation Funding and Underdeveloped Infrastructure

The conservation of cultural heritage in Xili Village mainly relies on the limited financial support from the government and the efforts of the villagers themselves, but there is a lack of robust support. Although a national cultural exhibition hall has been established, the preservation facilities inside are relatively simple. The precious cultural relics lack a dedicated storage environment. Over time, they may suffer from damage. The traditional houses in the village have undergone simple restoration, but there are still many dilapidated buildings with potential collapse risk. There is a lack of professional maintenance skills and financial investment. Moreover, the infrastructure is undeveloped for culture propaganda and display, lacking modern expression modalities, failing to effectively showcase the essence of the Li ethnic culture to the outside world, and equally has certain impact on the tourism industry.

3.3 Inadequate Cultural Innovation and Disjointed Industry Integration

The conservation of cultural heritage in Xili Village mostly remains at the level of “preservation”, lacking innovative transformation capabilities. The commercialization of traditional craftsmanship, such as Li brocade, is relatively low. They mainly include traditional clothing and ornaments, lacking novel designs that meet the demands of contemporary society. As a result, they fail to capture the attention of young people and have low commodity value, failing to develop into a large-scale cultural industry [5]. Culture-tourism integration remains rather superficial too. It mainly involves “visiting exhibitions”, lacking interactive and highly participatory tourism programs. Tourists have short stays and cannot achieve simultaneous improvement in both cultural and economic benefits. Moreover, the exploration of the Li ethnic culture is not vigorous enough. There are still many folk cultures and folk arts in the daily life of the villagers that have not been fully exploited and utilized. Cultural heritage needs further exploration.

3.4 Uneven Distribution of Conservation Awareness among Villagers and Suboptimal Participation Initiatives

Although a group of enthusiastic villagers such as Wang Xiucui actively participated in the conservation of cultural heritage in the village, there were still some villagers who lack the corresponding conservation awareness. They believe that the conservation of cultural heritage is the business of the government and a very few people, and has nothing to do with them. Some villagers are more concerned about immediate benefits, and pay less attention to traditional dwellings and old items. Some even discard or damage these old items at will. Moreover, the villagers have limited channels to participate in the conservation of cultural heritage, and there are no corresponding incentive measures. This fails to ignite the participation impetus of all the villagers.

4. Pathways for the Innovative Development of Li Ethnic Cultural Heritage in Xili Village

4.1 Enhancing Living Heritage Transmission to Resolve Generational Discontinuity

Based on the specific circumstances of Xili Village, it is necessary to build a transmission model featuring “the elderly transmission, the middle-aged participation, and the young development”, integrating cultural heritage into daily life. On the one hand, it is necessary to honor the leading role of the older generation of successors, establish an acknowledgment system for successors, enabling them to impart traditional craftsmanship and folk knowledge without reservation, and invite them to conduct art transmission and cultural explanations in training classes and exhibition halls, enabling young people to experience the charm of the Li ethnic culture. On the other hand, it is necessary to cater to the needs of young people, explore new transmission methods, integrating the Li brocade weaving techniques with modern designs to develop cultural and creative products that are favored by young people, and make the traditional craftsmanship become a new way for young people to obtain employment and make a living. Short-form videos, live streaming, and other forms can be leveraged. Shooting videos about the weaving process of Li brocade and folk activities can spread Chinese culture on a larger scale and attract more young people to pay attention to and participate in transmission.

At the same time, it is essential to build a cultural exhibition hall, and a youth cultural education base in the village, enabling the children of this village to participate in cultural experience activities, so that they can learn about traditional cultures such as Li brocade weaving and folk etiquette from an early age, and enhance their cultural identity and transmission consciousness, fundamentally solving the generational discontinuity of cultural transmission.

4.2 Broadening Funding Channels While Upgrading Infrastructure Systems

It is necessary to abandon the sole reliance on government funds, establishing a diversified funding model featuring “government support, social donations, villager self-financing, and industrial revenue generation”, actively strive to obtain the government’s support from the special funds for the conservation of ethnic minority cultural heritage, which will mainly be used for equipment renewal of cultural exhibition halls, restoration of traditional dwellings, and construction of cultural infrastructure projects, proactively seek the assistance and support of all sectors of society, including enterprises and social organizations, leveraging donations or cooperative development to increase the sources of funds for cultural heritage conservation, mobilize the extensive participation of the masses, enabling the masses to realize that they are also the owners of cultural heritage, and thus voluntarily contribute funds and efforts to the conservation of cultural heritage, and utilize industries, such as tourism, cultural and creative product trading, to realize the value transformation of cultural heritage, allocating a portion of the profits to cultural heritage conservation, achieving the cycle of “conservation → development → re-conservation”.

At the same time, efforts should be made to enhance infrastructure construction, renovate the preservation and display facilities of cultural exhibition halls to properly store important cultural relics, repair traditional dwellings in the village, improving their comfort while maintaining the original structure, making villagers willing to live in their own villages and safeguard their cultural roots, improve the construction of tourism-related facilities, and build and repair roads, hotels and other environment to enhance tourists’ immersive experience, laying a solid foundation for the development of the tourism industry.

4.3 Accelerating Innovative Transformation for Deeper Cultural-Tourism Integration

It is imperative to promote the transformation of cultural heritage from “preservation” to “innovation” based on the cultural connotations of the Li ethnic group, so as to achieve a double harvest of cultural value and economic benefits. On the one hand, it is necessary to develop traditional craft industries, hire professional designers to collaborate with local successors, apply traditional cultural codes such as Li brocade patterns and Li ethnic totems to the designs of daily items and cultural creative products, produce goods like backpack accessories, scarves, and jewelry with both real-world utility and cultural significance, increase the product value, sell them through both online and offline channels, and expand the sales reach, making traditional craftsmanship like Li brocade a new way for villagers to increase their income.

On the other hand, it is necessary to enhance culture-tourism integration, break away from the “visiting” type of tourism model, and develop immersive and experiential tourism products. leverage the natural and cultural resources of the village to carry out activities such as Li brocade weaving experience, Li folk-custom experience, rural walking, etc., enabling tourists to personally engage in Li brocade weaving, perform bamboo pole dance, and participate in a long-table banquet to experience the rich Li ethnic customs, and rely on the agricultural resource advantages of the village to build a picking and sightseeing park, achieve “agriculture-tourism-culture” integrated development, and lengthen the tourism industry chain, enabling tourists to taste the culture and experience rural life while enhancing the attractiveness and popularity of the scenic areas. In addition, efforts should be made to uncover the historical legends behind the village to create a distinctive IP, and enhance the propaganda dynamics of the Li ethnic culture in Xili Village, making it more deeply rooted in people’s hearts.

4.4 Intensifying Awareness Campaigns to Ignite Community Participation Impetus

It is essential to intensify awareness campaigns through various methods to enhance the cultural confidence and

conservation awareness, making the conservation of cultural heritage a conscious action for all the villagers, leverage platforms such as the village's publicity boards, rural grand stages, and WeChat chat groups to propagandize the value and significance of Li ethnic cultural heritage, telling the stories of the village's successors, enabling villagers to recognize the relevance between cultural heritage and their daily life as well as the development of the village, thereby enhancing their initiative and sense of responsibility, establish a villager engagement system, building cultural heritage conservation volunteer teams in each village, and mobilizing villagers to participate in the management of exhibition halls, the transmission of skills, and the organization of folk activities, etc., and make reward and punishment measures, commending and rewarding villagers who actively engage in the conservation of cultural heritage and have achieved certain results to ignite community participation impetus and create a strong climate where "everyone pays attention to conservation and everyone participates in conservation".

At the same time, it is necessary to enhance exchanges and mutual learning with the surrounding Li ethnic villages, learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses, and in the process of communication, acquire the experience of conservation, together, striving to ensure the better transmission and development of the Li ethnic cultural heritage, and enable Li ethnic culture to gain new vitality through communication.

5. Conclusion

The Li ethnic cultural heritage in Ledong Li Village is a living fossil of the Li ethnic culture. While conserving and transmitting this heritage, it also influences the development of the Li ethnic culture and the quality of rural revitalization. At present, Xili Village has carried out some culturally-grounded work in conserving cultural heritage and has achieved certain results. However, there are still problems such as lack of successors, shortage of funds, and lack of innovation. To solve these problems, it is necessary to do a good job in living heritage transmission based on the actual situation of the village, broaden funding channels, strengthen innovative development, promote culture-tourism integration, and culture and tourism, so that the Li ethnic cultural heritage can be innovated in conservation and developed in innovation. Only in this way can the Li ethnic cultural heritage of Xili Village be rejuvenated, not only preserving the roots and essence of the ethnic culture, but also achieving comprehensive rural revitalization, providing actionable insights for heritage conservation in comparable Li communities.

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