

On the Evolution and Inheritance of Farming Culture in Southwest Ethnic Minority Areas

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Abstract

Farming culture in southwest ethnic minority area is an important part of the whole Chinese farming culture. The unique natural conditions, ethnic structure and production features in southwest ethnic minority area have bred a special value of farming culture, making it play a significant role in protecting the environment and promoting ethnic harmony and regional development. Modernization has dramatically changed the environment for the evolution of farming culture. We must concise and develop the core concept and based on protection and inheritance to reasonably develop and utilize it to realize its value and promote its development.

Key words: Southwest ethnic minority areas; Farming culture; Evolution; Inheritance

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INTRODUCTION

Farming culture refers to the sum of agriculture-related material culture and immaterial culture created on the basis of agricultural production practices. Its contents include agricultural technology, agricultural

tools, agricultural thinking, farming festival customs, food culture and vernacular architecture, etc. China, as a large agricultural country, has a long agricultural tradition and it also has accumulated a profound farming culture. Southwest ethnic minority area is an important agricultural area in Chinas, where there are rich natural resources and many ethnicities. It has formed a rich variety of local farming culture with ethnic characteristics. Farming culture in southwest ethnic minority areas has a special value for its uniqueness in the entire region to maintain ecological systems and socio-cultural systems. Just like the farming culture in other areas, the farming culture in southwest ethnic minority areas is undergoing unprecedented changes and needs further protection and inheritance.

1. THE VALUE OF THE FARMING CULTURE IN SOUTHWEST ETHNIC MINORITY AREAS

Farming culture has a long history in the southwest ethnic minority areas, where a special heaven-earth system gave birth to rich and diverse types of farming culture. Farming culture in the southwest ethnic minority areas, as the fundamental part of the whole cultural configuration sequence system, supports the development of the population, production, consumption and intangible culture of an ethnicity and has a unique historical and practical value.

Firstly, farming culture is the source of production and life of the population in the southwest ethnic minority areas. The production function and the spiritual qualities of farming culture in the southwest ethnic minority areas nourish people of various ethnicities living here and it is an important guarantee for them to get food, stay healthy and live a happy life. In the farming culture in southwest ethnic minority areas, the content of phenology, farming,

food and drink, heaven-human relation and social relations has a long history and has experienced major natural and social changes but still maintained strong vitality. The process of globalization has put the farming culture into the position to change. Farming culture in the southwest ethnic minority areas is also faced with the historical responsibility of how to support the agricultural development in ethnic areas. To achieve the sustainable development of all ethnic groups in the southwestern area and to ensure their adequate and secure production and means of subsistence, we must tap agricultural production ideas and technology that all ethnic groups have long accumulated and learn from farming culture on the attitude regarding the use of resources and environmental protection. While promoting the means of production and means of subsistence for the survival of various ethnicities, farming culture also retains and inherits the cultural genes of this ethnicity and enriches people's spiritual world and cultural life. Therefore, farming culture provides important support for agricultural production in the southwestern region of all ethnic groups, but also provides a guarantee for the development of culture and civilization of this region. It is the source of people's production and life.

Secondly, the farming culture is the key to protecting the ecological environment and biodiversity in the southwestern area. The farming culture in southwest ethnic minority areas has experienced a long history and it has been proved to fit the special resources and environmental features of the area, and has formed a positive interaction with them. The farming culture in the southwest ethnic minority areas emphasizes that while getting the food supply from nature, we should also pay attention to the degree of getting, notice that the agricultural production is a link for the natural environment to maintain their balance and update, and pay attention to the overall, coordinated and sustainable perspective to get engaged in agricultural production. With such a cultural influence, people of all ethnicities in southwest while developing themselves properly protect the ecological environment and biodiversity. Ethnic minorities in Southwest China in the development and use of natural resources take the concept of rational management of local ecosystems. Their access to wildlife has a special taboo, and they use ethnic group relations and religious forms to control overuse and overkill. Farming culture in the southwest ethnic minority areas has taken the attitude of respect and gratitude to forests, plants and endangered creatures. They access them without destroying their sustainable development to protect the ecological environment and biological diversity of the region (Mc Donald, 1977).

Thirdly, the farming culture is the protection for southwest ethnic minorities to live in harmony. Great mountains and rivers densely distribute in the southwestern region in China, where there are many ethnic groups of varying scales and uneven development

and it has formed a community of diverse and complex ethnic culture. These ethnic cultural communities have formed a harmonious relationship. They appreciate each other and learn from each other. In a relatively independent geographical unit, various ethnic groups have their own material basis and stable group and family relations for farming activities. There is no contradiction between them or the possibility of mutual swallow; therefore, they also form an inter-ethnic harmonious benign situation. This is inseparable from the nature of the farming culture in this area. Farming culture of various ethnic groups in southwest China also forms a pluralistic integration feature since they learn from each other. The existing physical and non-physical forms of carriers of farming culture, such as farming species, farming tools, agricultural activities and customs, etc. have preserved a large number of traces of ethnic cultural exchange and communication. In addition, southwest ethnic minority areas are also an important region in the communication between China and Southeast Asian countries and peoples. Farming culture also plays an important role in cultural exchanges between the neighbor countries. In the farming culture in southwest ethnic minority areas, the exchange of crop varieties, farming techniques and the instruments of production also promotes the harmonious coexistence of different countries and different ethnic groups and the formation of a stable and harmonious border relations.

2. THE TIMES SITUATION OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE FARMING CULTURE IN SOUTHWEST ETHNIC MINORITY AREAS

In today's accelerated pace of globalization, the external environment and internal conditions of regional development in southwest ethnic minority areas are facing major changes and farming culture has also been unprecedentedly involved in the process. China is in the overall social and economic structural transformation, marketization and commercialization are penetrating the southwest ethnic minority areas of a wide range. The production and life of the population in ethnic areas are undergoing significant changes. Ethnic traditional culture including the farming culture has also ushered changes in such a wave.

Firstly, changes in agricultural production tools and techniques have reconstructed the foundation of farming culture. Farming tools and techniques are endogenous variables in the development of farming culture and they have a profound impact on the evolution and development of farming culture. Although the pace of modern agriculture has not yet entered the southwest ethnic minority areas, there are already some mechanized farming tools and modern technology entering the

agricultural production of this area and farming production tools and technology of ethnic minority populations are quietly changing. Many unique farming tools in southwest ethnic minority areas are disappearing and the associated techniques of getting tool material, making the tool and using the tool are also disappearing. Farming tools and technology-based forms of farming culture are increasingly departing from its practical basis. Farming season, farming program, farming techniques and harvest festivals and other activities are slowly losing practical significance, resulting in the increasing dilution of the concept of farming culture in agricultural population, which to some extent is a crisis for the evolution of farming culture.

Secondly, changes in livelihood patterns have the farming culture ties formed from blood, kinship and geopolitical relations cut down. Livelihood is the way of making a living formed on the basis of the combination of people and resources in certain circumstances (Chambers & Conway, 1992). Transformation of livelihood is a change of living model caused by environmental changes. Southwest ethnic population is undergoing livelihood pattern changes. The development of market economy makes the new generation of ethnic population begin to go out of the mountains, combined with the involvement of urbanization and industrialized production way, the livelihood model of southwest ethnic population is transforming from small family practice into migrant working or the co-production model of “company plus farmer”. This breaks the various cooperation of traditional rural society based on kinship and geopolitical relations. A variety of carriers of farming culture has become increasingly vulnerable and marginalized. In the background of livelihood pattern transformation, the emphasis of blood, kinship and geographical relationship in farming culture is gradually diluted and especially the social relations centered by the farming activities are gradually disintegrating. The fragmentation of the cultural tie has also become a huge obstacle for the protection and inheritance of the current farming culture.

Thirdly, cultural consumption has had an impact on the evolution of farming culture. The Prosperity and development of ethnic culture can provide a variety of styles and forms of fresh cultural consumption contents and manners for people. Healthy cultural consumption behavior and strong cultural consumption groups and their spending power also provide a demonstration platform and a solid guarantee for the inheritance and the development of ethnic culture. On the other hand, some of the negative cultural consumption may produce damaging effects on cultural development. Poor consumption culture might resolve the agreeable concept of minority farming culture, resulting in aesthetic distortion of farming culture. What is more worrying is that some cultural consumption is conducting a predatory development to the traditional farming culture under the cover of “creating economic

benefits” and “improving people’s lives”. Negative cultural consumption is actually lack of in-depth understanding and grasp of the characteristics of farming culture and it is a kind of destruction of traditional farming culture from superficial consumer behavior. Under the unified format and pace, economic benefits as a yardstick have guided the development direction of farming culture. In such development activities, the production and life of various ethnic populations in Southwest China are being incorporated into a unified format of modern production and consumption. The original agricultural production, living and communication methods are overwhelmed by economy-oriented benefits and only retain some formal shells. Such predatory development will only make farming culture increasingly hollow and commercialized and it is in fact contrary to the inherent logic of the development of the farming culture and is away to dry the pond to get all the fish.

3. EXPLORATION OF THE APPROACH TO THE INHERITANCE OF FARMING CULTURE IN SOUTHWEST ETHNIC MINORITY AREAS

The inheritance of the farming culture in southwest ethnic minority areas is to maintain traditional farming cultural forms of the cultural subjects born there according to their value judgments and at the same time to select a new form of farming culture and can be accepted by society, making it a stable element to pass along generations and promote the development of ethnic groups as well as social development. The protection and inheritance of farming culture is mainly divided into three sections: cultural core elements, intangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. If we divide it in a finer way, it would include protection and inheritance of concepts, technologies, tools, architecture and festivals and rituals, etc.. For the ethnic minorities in the southwestern region, the excellent farming culture is an indispensable factor reflecting their ethnic characteristics. It is close to the production and life, reflecting the deep psychological characteristics of ethnic members and connecting the past, present and future of groups and individuals. It is the foundation of ethnic existence. To inherit the excellent farming culture in southwest ethnic minority areas, we also need to choose the right approach to protect, maintain and develop its core content and manifestations.

Firstly, to condense and develop the traditional core concept of farming culture. The foundation of the generation and development of farming culture lies in its reasonable concepts. These concepts have passed the tests of thousands of years of natural history and social practice, have been proven highly reasonable and valuable, and are the fundamental basis to inherit

farming culture. Regardless of changes in the external environment, farming culture in the southwest minority ethnic areas has formed a number of core views in phenology, farming seasons, resource use and social relations and has strongly supported the agricultural production and social development. For example, the belief concept in the farming culture in southwestern ethnic areas is very helpful to increase the biological capacity of nature, and has a distinct role in the control of the resource consumption level (Bodley, 2010). Therefore, when protecting and inheriting the farming culture, we should first pay attention to the concision and development of the concept of historic significance and practical value. The concepts of harmony between human and nature, drawing on the advantages and avoiding disadvantages, doing farm work in the right time, recycling and taking things moderately in farming culture in southwest minority ethnic areas still have a significant meaning for modern agriculture and social development. The premise to inherit farming culture is to condense the concept recognized by the public to form a cultural self-consciousness. On the basis of the cultural consciousness, we can build the connection between these ideas and the reality, develop their realistic value and give their real vitality.

Secondly, to protect the tangible heritage of farming culture. Tangible heritage is an important carrier of farming culture and is the external manifestation of farming cultural concepts in southwest ethnic minority areas. Each farming technique, agricultural crop and production tool has its own special development process which also reflects the history of the understanding and practice of farming activities of the ethnic minority population in the southwest and condenses the wisdom of an ethnicity or an ethnic group. Through the precipitation of understanding and the accumulation of practices, the development history of farming cultural tangible heritage has formed a farming function suitable for the geographical and climatic characteristics of the southwestern region and became the group's collective memory. This collective memory is formed from the practice manifests in external physical form. The existence of physical form can be more likely to cause public emotion of the group members and to promote the recognition and inclusion. There is many symbolic tangible heritage related to farming activities. They are the accumulation of thousands of years of farming culture in the southwest minority ethnic areas and the most profound and deep contents in the farming culture. However, with the strong involvement of modern agricultural civilization, agricultural production activities in southwest ethnic minority areas are greatly changing. In addition to a large number of agricultural tools disappearing from the historical stage, many residential and farming buildings with unique cultural values have been damaged,

making the farming culture appear the hollow crisis. The traditional farming cultural tangible heritage is not a burden or baggage and it is what is the most in need of conservation and heritage. Currently in tangible cultural heritage protection, we also need innovative systems and forms of protection. It now appears that to move these things into museums and tourist malls is not really a good way to promote the preservation of the vitality of the tangible heritage. The real vitality of the tangible heritage is a close relationship with the production and life of population in the southwest minority ethnic areas. When the farming cultural tangible heritage is separated from the production and living, it really would be the end of vitality.

Thirdly, to protect intangible cultural heritage related to farming culture. A lot of dance, festivals, rituals and symbolic events in southwest minority ethnic areas are derived from agricultural production. They reflect the concepts of these ethnicities to treat farming activities, the heaven-human relation and social relation and are the core elements which constitute the intangible cultural heritage in southwest ethnic minority areas. The intangible cultural elements condensing ethnic wisdom are interrelated and complement each other, forming a rational, stable farming cultural structure. Under the influence of these inherent cultural elements and cultural structures, agricultural activities in southwest ethnic minority areas are able to reflect the production, living and ecological functions, provide the basis for the production and life of people and cultivate and nourish the ethnic spirit. Various ethnic groups in southwest China have a rich cultural heritage. Dance and songs, festivals, ceremonies and other symbolic activities are incorporated into the heavy boring agricultural activities. Whether busy or slack, either harvest or crop failure, these forms of intangible culture regard the concepts and feelings into it, which regulates the frequency of people's production and life, soothes hard labor and expresses the joy of harvest. The essence of the protection and heritage of intangible cultural heritage is to grasp the traditional core of its humanistic spirit and meanwhile conduct a modernized transformation of the form of its spiritual core to maintain internal unity with the economic and social development in southwest ethnic minority areas. In the process of inheritance and protection, we must fully recognize the value inherent in the rich farming culture resources in southwest ethnic minority areas and recognize the healthy, active and essential attribute of the traditional farming culture in minority ethnicities. Only from this understanding is it possible for us to have real respect for the traditional intangible cultural forms in farming culture and can exert its modern meaning and value in the protection and inheritance. Of particular note is that while the development of modern cultural forms and

communication technologies speed up the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the southwest ethnic minority areas, it may result in the commercialization and entertainment of the culture. Commercialization and entertainment tendency will lead to adverse consequences of cultural consumption, easily leading the intangible culture of minority ethnicities with deep cultural history become a superficial, novelty, entertaining consumer product. This approach no doubt will undermine the value foundation of farming culture and is unfavorable to its protection and heritage.

CONCLUSION

Southwest ethnic region is both an important ecological reserve and the inhabiting area of Zhuang, Miao and Yi and other minority ethnicities, and at the same time it is the bordering region of China and Southeast Asian countries. It bred diverse minority cultures, in which farming culture is definitely of strong local ethnic characteristics. Driven by the tide of globalization, farming culture of a protective and heritage value has entered the critical transmutation stage. To protect and pass on excellent farming culture

requires innovative institutional mechanisms, needs to fully explore the meeting point of farming culture and the development of modern society, takes full advantage of the reasonable concepts about ecological protection and social relations in the farming culture in the southwest ethnic region and applies them into the practice of modern agriculture and economic and social development. In the protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, we need to play the leading role of the government to give financial and policy support. At the same time, research on the farming culture in southwest ethnic minority areas should also be deepened and extended to promote cultural development on the basis of the protection and inheritance of the cultural heritage.

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