
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Study on the Protection and Transmission of Oral Folk Literature of Oroqen People

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| ABSTRACT

Oral folk literature is an indispensable part of the intangible cultural heritage of the Oroqen people. In recent years, the protection and inheritance of Oroqen folk oral literature have achieved some results, but they are still facing challenges due to the extremely small population of this ethnic group and the dying of the ethnic language. This article focuses on the intangible cultural heritage of Oroqen folk oral literature and puts forward sustainable and specific suggestions on its protection and inheritance by summarizing useful experience and analyzing practical difficulties found in previous research on national mythology, folk songs and national rap.

| KEYWORDS

Oroqen; intangible cultural heritage; oral literature; protection; transmission

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Oroqen, one of the least populated ethnic groups in China at present, is an ethnic group which has its own language without written forms. For a long time, Oroqen literature, as a precious intangible cultural heritage, can only be passed on by oral transmission (Zou, 2014). Therefore, Oroqen folk oral literature is the main body of Oroqen literature, including myths, legends, folk tales, folk songs and rap literature that rely on the national language to express and transmit.

At present, due to the appeal of the world organization and the high attention of the country and people, oral literature with a distinctive national style in Oroqen literature is vigorously protected. Both official organizations and folk groups make joint efforts. From the art form of people's songs to the comprehensive protection of national social history, a large number of historic folk songs and stories which reflect national force are preserved, and certain outcomes have been achieved in the process of protection.

However, the usage rate of the national language is decreasing for the culture of modern economic society, the spirit of Oroqen's ancient hunting fails to coexist, and the interaction and communication with other ethnic are increasing.

In this paper, we adopt the literature analysis method in the early stage. Through collecting and analyzing relevant data, we understand the situation of protection and inheritance of Oroqen folk oral literature and further divide the overall problem of protection and inheritance of oral literature into four parts: national language, myths, legends and folk tales, folk songs and rap, and analyze the characteristics of each part, the difficulties and key points of protection and inheritance. To conclude, we need to follow the principles of "protection-oriented, salvage first, rational utilization, and heritage development" and propose practical countermeasures from multiple perspectives with both long-term and current perspectives.

Thus, to deal with multiple challenges, it is necessary to follow the principle of “protection first, rescue first, reasonable use, inheritance and development”, not only following the principles of “protection-oriented, salvage first, rational utilization, and heritage development”, but also carrying out practical countermeasures from multiple perspectives with a long-term vision and a current perspective.

2. Existing Achievements in the Preservation and Transmission of Oral Literature

2.1 Language

Experts related to anthropology, history, sociology, ethnology, folklore, literature and art in both China and other countries have a preference for this national language which has great research value. A case in this point is Hu Gain wrote *Oroqen Language Conversation Collection*, *Oroqen Language Research*, *Oroqen Language Basic Vocabulary Collection* and other works. Another example is that on August 30, 2011, *Oroqen Language Interpretation and Translation*, which has been compiled and recorded by the efforts of two generations for more than 20 years, was first released in the Oroqen Autonomous Banner of China, collecting nearly 30,000 Oroqen words and phrases, which facilitates the popularization and application of the ancient Tungus vocabulary in an easy-to-understand way. Besides, in recent years, the national and local governments have supported and introduced relevant policies, which also provide a strong guarantee for the survival of the Oroqen language.

2.2 Myths, Legends and Folk Tales

The myths, legends and folk tales that were first passed down among the ethnic groups were gradually inherited and recorded in written forms during the continuous integration and development of the ethnic groups. For example, in the book *Chinese Minority Literature* edited by Mao Xing, there are myths, legends and folk tales of Oroqen which are full of romanticism and rich imagination; and the research result of scholar Wang Bingzhen, *The Inheritance and Variation of Oroqen Shaman Myth*, explores the development inheritance and new changes of Shaman myth in primitive society, etc.

2.3 Folk Songs

Due to the characteristic of “language without written forms”, folk songs have become an important expression of the ideals and aspirations of the Oroqen people and their historical stories (Lu, 2003). Meanwhile, the oral transmission of folk songs from generation to generation has compensated for the lack of written history of the Oroqen people so that social life, production conditions and customs of Oroqen people can be preserved in an artistic way. Nowadays, Oroqen folk songs are performed on CCTV music channels from time to time, and the rapid development of new media also gives this colorful song art a broader stage for dissemination. In 2008, the folk song of Oroqen, Zandaren, was listed in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage. There are a group of national and provincial inheritors who are skillful in this intangible cultural heritage skill represented by Guan Jinfang. In the areas where Oroqen people live, folk groups such as “Oroqen Folk Art Troupe” have been established to teach folk songs to more people, promote folk song culture and cultivate inheritors. At the same time, more and more Oroqen folk songs without lyrics and scores are recorded and preserved in modern notation, and there are many versions, such as the Chinese translation version and annotated version.

2.4 To the Oral Literature of Ballad Stanza

“Mosukun” in the Oroqen language means storytelling, a kind of oral literature of ballad stanzas, which were passed down from mouth to ear in folklore (Liu & Guan, 2019). Folklorist Ma Mingchao pointed out that the ancient language art of Oroqen Mosukun “is a vivid and simple language art ‘fossil’ that still remains today”, and it is a “national folklore art form with great multidisciplinary research value”. In 2006, Oroqen Mosukun was included in the first batch of the national intangible cultural heritage list, and in 2007, it was included in the first batch of the Heilongjiang intangible cultural heritage list. There are national and provincial inheritors who have mastered the skills of this intangible cultural heritage.

3. The Dilemma in the Protection of Oroqen Folk Literature and Its Reasons

Since there was no written form for Oroqen's language, oral folk literature plays an essential role in passing down the long history of this nation. That is to say, protecting the national language is to protect the traditional culture of this nation and also to lineage the cultural genes and soul on which the Oroqen people live (Liu & Guan, 2019).

3.1 Dilemma in Reality

3.1.1 Nowadays, Oroqen Language is in Such a Critically Endangered State that the Use Group is Restricted, and it is Difficult to Study and Spread

The number of people who are proficient in the language of Oroqen is limited to the senior people, and younger generations are relatively poor in mastering it, which is a situation that has not changed for more than ten years. Moreover, the mastery of the Oroqen language is so significantly and positively correlated with the literacy of the ethnic group that the higher the literacy, the better the mastery of the Oroqen language (Wang et al., 2019).

In addition, in the process of social development, the Oroqen language has been largely replaced by Chinese because they intermingle Oroqen folk literature with other ethnic groups and generally communicate in Chinese. The language environment of this ethnic group is very scarce.

Overall, the population of Oroqen is very small, and there is a lack of available talents to study, disseminate and promote the Oroqen language, not to mention a systematic and scientific way of teaching. In this way, although the school and the government have carried out courses teaching special national languages, teachers are incapable, and education quality is unsatisfactory, which has greatly increased the difficulty of studying and disseminating the Oroqen language (Zou, 2015).

3.1.2 Oral literature relying on the Oroqen language as a medium of communication is endangered under the current situation of the decline of the national language, and the "fault line" phenomenon of the audience is serious

Take the oral literature "Mosukun", which mainly relies on oral transmission, as an example; its survival space is getting slower and slower due to the fierce impact of modern development quality; the younger generation knows little about it and lacks interest in it, while those who know "Mosukun" are some old ones. The younger generation has little understanding of it and lacks interest in it. Even the national language in which it is sung is also in a situation of endangerment. At any time, people may die out, and the language carrier is on the verge of disappearing, so the inheritance of "Mosukun" is difficult (Zou, 2015).

3.1.3 The conflict between the preservation and transmission of traditional folk songs and myths and modern cultural development

Although some of the advanced concepts contained in folk songs and myths, such as "harmony between human beings and nature", are still the essence of today's thoughts, it is undeniable that most of the traditional culture of the hunting period embodied in the folk songs is not needed by the society or even by the Oroqen people from the perspective of the realistic application. The new era provides new choices for modern youths. Nowadays, the young generation among various ethnic groups basically grows up with the same educational and life patterns, and few of them delve deeply into traditional folk songs (Xiang, 2011). Cultural heritage transmission necessarily uses a lot of resources, but they are limited. Although there is a general popular consensus to preserve traditional culture, in reality, it has to give way to the productive development of the economy and society. Most of the social resources are allocated to boosting modern economic development, so cultural heritage preservation fails to attain enough supply save the endangered culture.

3.2 Reasons Behind

3.2.1 Oroqen's own characteristics and the natural environment of this ethnic group's settlement area restrict the work of heritage protection to carry out a big obstacle

As early as the end of the 1970s, China carried out the work of rescuing minority folk literature on a large scale. The population of the Oroqen people itself is too small, which makes the folk literature of the Oroqen people show the trend of declining long ago. Oroqen people live in the northeast of China, which is far away from the cultural center, so information dissemination is comparatively impeded, and the excavation work is generally later than in other ethnic regions. Individual regions, such as Shengli Village, Ulaga Township, and Xiyin County, have not been censored before 2000, and many oral cultures were lost before being excavated.

3.2.2 The population applying the Oroqen language is insufficient, and the living form of folk oral literature is weak

The protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage should appear in living form, and folk oral literature is a living culture based on people (He, 2005).

In a human-centered inheritance and protection activity, Oroqen people have been attached to considerable importance.

In the sixth census of China in 2010, the population of Oroqen people was 8659, and according to China Statistical Yearbook 2021, the population of Oroqen people was 9168. During the same period, the total population of China increased from 1.34 billion in 2010 to 1.41 billion in 2021, and the number of Oroqen people is less than 0.0007% of the total population of China in ten years, which is one of the smallest minorities in China. The biggest characteristic of Oroqen folk literature inheritance is "oral transmission", which exists because of people, and if no one succeeds, the art will be extinct, and the cultural inheritance is not strong enough. Nowadays, the exchange and integration with other nationalities and the promotion of school education with Chinese education as the core has promoted the spread of culture, but this trend also leads to the shrinkage of the population actually using the Oroqen language and the decline of the application rate of Oroqen literature. The lack of liveliness makes it difficult to maintain the transmission of this intangible cultural heritage.

3.2.3 Insufficient development and utilization of Oroqen folk literature resources and the enthusiasm of this ethnic group people to pass on their culture needs to be improved

The oral folk literature of Oroqen is well worth researching, appreciating and educating, which is its existence value. In terms of practical consideration, we also need to pay attention to its economic value, that is, its value of transforming into actual economic benefits. At present, the government encourages the use of the Oroqen language, attaches importance to the propagation of Oroqen literature and art, and offers special teaching courses in schools and other educational institutions. However, due to the imperfect development of tourism and creative industries, the inheritance of this culture cannot actually improve Oroqen people's life, and the confidence in "cultural empowerment" to improve the living standard is not strong, so the motivation to learn traditional language and art is not unsatisfactory.

4. Suggestions for Heritage and Protection

4.1 Official and Private Joint Efforts

Strengthen the official protection force and specify the responsibilities of each government department. Carry out the in-depth census, collection, arrangement and protection of Oroqen folk literature. For the protection of Oroqen cultural heritage, we should also pay attention to both legal and educational protection. When establishing a comprehensive system and releasing universal regulations, we are also supposed to prioritize the initiative of the Oroqen people and provide local regulations provisions by strengthening legislation, strictly enforcing the law, emphasizing the operability of the law, and enhancing punishment. What's more, strengthening education and propaganda to cultivate qualified inheritors is another crucial measure. Under the official leadership, encourage the participation of all people and play the role of folk conservation. Set up folk groups to cultivate the public's awareness of cultural heritage protection and eliminate illegal exploitation by unscrupulous businessmen.

4.2 Achieve the Balance between Conservation and Utilization

In the process of protection, folk literature should be given the opportunity to adjust itself voluntarily and further reveal its value. Establishing a folk song museum, folk mythology exhibition hall, etc. Offers an accessible approach to keeping the characteristics of oral literature intact, enhancing its visibility, ramping up investment in tourism and other related cultural industries, and promoting the development of the local economy, which contributes to presenting the unique charm of Oroqen folk literature. Reasonable use should boost protection and avoid damage. Protection and utilization go hand in hand to promote the protection of folk literature while bringing into play social and economic benefits.

5. Conclusion

This paper collects and analyzes information on four major forms of oral folk literature, namely, Oroqen national language, folk myths, legends and folk stories, traditional folk songs and national rap. From them, we know that Oroqen folk oral literature is of great research value and has long received attention from many parties and concerted efforts to protect it. However, the current situation is still not optimistic. The first reason is that the Oroqen language is on the verge of disappearing due to its characteristics of "oral form only, no written record", which is the biggest problem in the inheritance and protection of oral folk literature. Secondly, it also faces the difficulties such as insufficient population, a small audience, conflict between traditional literature and modern social values, as well as common problems in the protection of cultural heritage in terms of policy and management.

In response to this current situation, our proposal is to utilize and develop innovations while preserving and transmitting. We will strengthen the rationalization of the existing management of conservation and inheritance, ensure the implementation of relevant policies, and raise social attention and public participation. At the same time, on the basis of conservation, we will strengthen the development and utilization of this cultural heritage so that it will have lasting vitality.

In this process, the government, private organizations and individuals should each do their best, combining the advantages of official authority and guiding ability with the flexibility and creative characteristics of the private sector to achieve the long-term development of intangible cultural heritage.

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