

Cultural Treasure of Traditional Architecture-Collaborative Innovation of Inheritance of Plaster Carving of Guangzhou

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Abstract: Plaster carving of Guangzhou is a national intangible cultural heritage and both folk plaster carving inheritors and plaster carving design research institute in Huadu, Guangzhou are making great efforts for the sake of inheritance and development. Though they seem superficially booming, they encounter the bottleneck of shortage of plaster carving talents. Hereby, a talent cultivation pattern of collaborative cultivation and innovation by school-enterprise cooperation is put forward in this paper to build student internship geared to major, plaster carving work innovation and development and other mechanism by off-campus practice base and offer thought and way out for collaborative innovation in inheritance of plaster carving.

1. Introduction

Earlier in 2017, General Office of the Communist Party of China and General Office of the State Council issued Opinion on Implementation of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture Inheritance Development Project, indicating that culture is blood of the nation and spiritual home of the people. Cultural confidence is a more fundamental, in-depth and durable power. In order to protect and inherit cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage inheritance development project must be implemented.

2. Plaster Carving of Guangzhou Listed as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage

What is intangible cultural heritage? Intangible cultural heritage, also known as ICH, including traditional arts, calligraphy, traditional skills, medicine, etc. And ICH is passed on from one generation to another. Plaster carving of Guangzhou was listed as a national ICH in 2008 due to its traditional and long-standing materials and crafts.

2.1 Introduction of Plaster Carving:

As early as in the fourth year under rule of Emperor Xizong of Tang (A.D. 884), plaster carving existed, formerly known as plaster puttying and plaster sculpture. It was particularly popular in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, which was a treasure of traditional architecture decoration arts in Lingnan. Plaster carving is mainly found in ancestral temples, temples and residences of wealthy and influential families. Mainly made from lime, it can be made in normal temperature environment without being fired in the kiln. And as soon as it is molded, it will maintain unchanged for hundreds of years. It generally has high relief, low relief, stereoscopic carving, round carving and other patterns of manifestation. Many plaster carving works of the Qing Dynasty are reserved in Guangzhou Chen Clan Ancestral Hall and Foshan Ancestral Temple.

2.2 Function and Distribution of Plaster Carving

Plaster carving is mainly used for beautifying and decorating and frequently applied to head jambs, window frames, tops of gables, eaves, patterned ridges, etc. in architecture. It has a variety of topics in contents, mostly showing fairy tales, folk tales, opera characters, folk customs, auspicious birds and beasts, flowers, fruits and trees, auspicious texts and patterns, etc. and expressing pursuit of people for beautiful life. Due to cheap and highly available raw materials, simple manufacturing skills, low weight, moisture and high temperature resistance and other characteristics, plaster carving technology of Ming and Qing Dynasties is reserved in Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Sichuan and elsewhere.

2.3 Development of Plaster Carving of Guangzhou

Flourishing in Ming and Qing Dynasties, plaster carving of Guangzhou was the favorite pattern of decoration of old-styled dwellings in Guangdong. Distributed in temples, ancestral temples, and buildings of wealthy and influential families in downtown Guangzhou, Huadu, Conghua and Zengcheng or Pearl River Delta as cultural core and geographic center of Guangzhou, it has significant regional feature. Plaster carving of Guangzhou has delicate and fine workmanship, rich contents, and bright colors. It is made from lime which is appropriate for hot and moist climate of Guangzhou together with pulpy grass or fibrous matter evenly mixed in plastering mortar by proportion and plant ash. As a result, plaster carving has characteristics of acid resistance, alkali resistance, and high temperature resistance. In the manufacturing process, ventilating holes are skillfully designed by gaps between patterns to better prevent typhoon from damaging plaster carving.

In 2008, plaster carving of Huadu, Guangzhou was incorporated into national intangible cultural heritage list. Shao Chengcun--a craftsman from Huadu was announced as a representative inheritor of provincial ICH plaster carving project and protected together with plaster carving project. Huadu was hence known as "home of plaster carving in Lingnan". In 2011, Party Committee and Government of Huadu District founded a plaster carving research institute to officially initiate industrialized operation of plaster carving culture and enable plaster carving of Guangzhou to be quickly inherited and developed and constantly innovated plaster carving geared to development of times to transform plaster carving from a decorative structure found in shrines and ancestral temples to an artwork for appreciation.

3. From Generation to Generation--Family Inheritance

Shao Chengcun--a representative inheritor of national intangible cultural heritage project of plaster carving of Guangzhou--is craftsman of second generation in Huadu District, Guangzhou City. Shao Chengcun has frequently participated in plaster carving fabrication, repair and protection of national and provincial historical and cultural relics and architectures for over 30 years since he started learning skills from his father Shao Yaobo to succeed skills of plaster carving from Shao Yaobo in 1980. His repaired works have been awarded with many national honors and created plaster carving works have been found around Pearl River Delta and as far as South Korea, Hong Kong, Macao, and elsewhere.

In accordance with long-standing maxim of family, Shao Chengcun passes on his skills to his son instead of daughter. So his son inherits his skills and accompanies him to learn plaster carving. Whereas, his daughter deals with some back affairs. Family inheritance is encountering numerous difficulties nowadays. Impact of modern culture, old maxim of passing on skills to male descendants instead of female descendants, and outdoor working characteristics of high strength and hazard give rise to loss of plaster carving craftsmen and many craftsmen outside Guangzhou have no inheritor and fail to pass on their skills, which is regretful indeed. Though family inheritance keeps inheritance of generations, its drawbacks are obvious. As the times develop, such a situation must be changed.

4. Market-oriented Innovative Exploration in Plaster Carving Inheritance

Supported by Government of Huadu District, Huadu Plaster Carving Research Institute has been founded. After conducting many thorough studies, Liu Juan--President of the Research Institute--has established a plaster carving industry chain in which those traditional are parallel to those modern and developed modern plaster carving decorative handwork market by plaster carving crafts and materials, showing a market-oriented and modernized way out for plaster carving inheritance.

If traditional family inheritance aims to stick to plaster carving in which all regard maintenance of temples and palaces in traditional culture as their own responsibility, the Research Institute is combining plaster carving with current life to seek more opportunities of development, breaking original steps and applying a variety of painting styles to surface rendering, research and development of large indoor and outdoor sculptures (relief and round relief) and decoration of artworks, gifts and souvenirs on the basis of traditional crafts and materials. After completing fabrication of original edition, it accepts market orders, prints duplicates in batches, colors in assembly line work and makes production in batches. It enables plaster carving to transform from a decorative art to an applied art and become a handicraft toyed at hand.

Plaster carving is invigorated by indoor decorative painting and decorative oil painting artworks. Products developed by the Research Institute have been conferred with award of "best product which must be bought" at China Tourism Industries Exposition and many of its products have been rated "top ten souvenirs in Guangzhou". It has been conferred with product creativity award by Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China and many other awards.

However, the Research Institute is short-handed. It has high defective percentage, low efficiency and high cost. It is highly demanding on eligibility of design team, thus painters have to spend years before finishing their apprenticeship. Students from some universities and colleges in cooperation who are not professionally trained and not aware of the right way have high defective percentage. As a result, they lose their interest in plaster carving.

5. Collaborative Innovation and School-Enterprise Cooperative Cultivation Required by Plaster Carving Inheritance

Due to characteristics of craftsmanship of plaster carving materials, communication of plaster carving culture, arts and crafts is lack of talents, thus it is in urgent demand for increasing channels of talent cultivation. Therefore, penetration of folk arts of plaster carving and cooperative cultivation with universities and colleges is the way to solving shortage of talents.

For years, Shao Chengcun has been invited to by many domestic universities and colleges to give lectures regarding architectural culture of plaster carving and all attending his lecturers have exclaimed over culture and technology of plaster carving. Research findings of Shao Chengcun concerning lime materials in traditional architectural culture have become an important inheritable technology in architectural materials and decorative crafts. It is advised to overcome defects of plaster carving inheritance, build modules in the major of plaster carving in universities and colleges and increase plaster carving teaching and practice in the major of sculpture in art academies in the way of school-enterprise cooperation to organically combine plaster carving culture inheritance and talent education.

The history, materials and craft characteristics of plaster carving decoration offer orientations and contents for plaster-carving-oriented professional talent cultivation scheme design and course design in the major of sculpture in universities and colleges; specifically regarding ways of cooperation, enterprises and inheritors supply plaster carving materials while teachers and students of universities and colleges supply novel ideas. Schools and enterprises work together to develop projects in which enterprises provide off-campus practical teaching base where students can do internship and teachers can lead students to do everyday project practice, create and develop plaster carving works. After cultivation for some time, universities and colleges may output batches of plaster carving designers.

So far, our college has applied for provincial philosophy and social science project and college student innovation and entrepreneurship project for the plaster carving project to further study and practice the plaster carving on campus.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, plaster carving as a national intangible cultural heritage has long-standing and attractive charm of decorative arts. Elements of the new times must be added to the technical craft on the verge of being lost. By virtue of national support, it is advised to incorporate plaster carving decoration craft into teaching classroom in the way of school-enterprise cooperation by social forces, cultivate capacity of students in the major of artistic design and develop plaster carving works. By integration of plaster carving teaching, talent cultivation and product research and development, plaster carving talents are cultivated for society and the traditional cultural treasure is developed.

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