

Transmission and Preservation of Musical Intangible Cultural Heritage in Chinese Buddhism

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Following its introduction into China, Buddhism became sinicized over the years. Buddhist music developed in two directions – ritual music and folk music. The intended audience for the former is metaphysical beings such as Buddha, Bodhisattva and spirits, while the latter is for living beings. The former maintains a solemn and reverent tone due to its sanctity. In contrast, Buddhist folk music has absorbed music from different regions and thus possesses different local flavors.

Before the founding of PRC, there was little research on Buddhist music in China with the exception of musicologist Liu Tianhua's recording of Buddhist music in the thirties. More extensive research on the subject had begun in the 1950s, notably with Yang Yinliu's publications entitled "*Zhihua Temple Music*" and "*Hunan Music Census Report Appendix · Religion Music*". These have become the models for field work on China's folk music. Another influential work "*Temple Music*" published by the China Musicians Association, Chengdu Branch in 1955. This was the largest collection of Buddhist music during that time.

Since the 1980s, to preserve the heritage of folk culture, the Ministry of culture together with and other units launched the Compilation Project of China's Top Ten Literature and Art Collection Recordings. The first three publications were: "*Collection of Chinese Folk Songs*", "*Collection of Chinese Folk Instrumental Music*", and "*Collection of Chinese Opera Music*". Since then, collection and research on Buddhist music has resulted in many additional publications. One notably Buddhist music scholar is Yang Yinliu's student Tian Qing who visited about 200 temples in several provinces and was the first to record much Buddhist music. Tian has published one million words on Buddhist music. His "*A Canonical Text of Chinese Buddhist Music*" is a classic for Chinese Buddhist monks to learn about Buddhist chanting.

Since 2005, the Chinese government has initiated the protection of intangible cultural heritage (hereinafter referred to as ICH). Buddhist music was included in the protection system of ICH under the category of traditional music. However, Cultural Heritage is still being lost because of such problems as lack of successors, disruption of ecological and cultural space, and also the difficulty of maintaining preservation in the face of modernization. Other dilemmas include the issues of performing religious rituals on stage instead of its original temple setting and conflict between tourism development and temple life, etc.

The following are my observations regarding the current situation of the transmission and protection of Buddhist music in recent years:

I. Predicament

At this time 16 Buddhist music projects have been selected for inclusion on China's ICH list, including 9 on Chinese Buddhist music, 6 on Tibetan Buddhist music, and Wutai Mountain Buddhist music. There are 17 national ICH representatives of Buddhist music, among them 10 are Chinese and 7 are Tibetan. Among the ICH projects at provincial, municipal and county level, Buddhist music makes up a large proportion. In addition, some folk music projects also include Buddhist music. For example, the Nanxiangkou Buddhist Chant in Central Hebei Music still exists, but its temple and monks are gone, so it is transmitted as folk music.

Since the agrarian era, the social and cultural environment of Chinese Buddhist music has undergone major changes during which its transmission and preservation have also encountered new challenges. The most urgent issue is the lack of successors for the present generation of monks, thus the saying "the monks come and go, the temple stays". Since ancient times, only a few monks would stay in one temple for life, rather they would travel from one temple to another to deepen their practices and this had created problems. For example, the Wutai Mountain Novice Monk's Ensemble which performed abroad with Tian Qing in the 1990s. Among the 10 original members, only a few remain in Wutai Mountain. The rest went to other temples to further their studies.

Buddhist temple music in different regions is different in style. Those monks who have left Wutai Mountain rarely have the chance to play their music again, as occurs with monks in other temples all over the country, especially in Northern China. As a result, transmission of Buddhist music suffers because only a few monks can maintain Buddhist music.

II. The influence of stage performance on the transmission of Buddhist music

In the 1980s and 1990s, Buddhist musicologist Tian Qing had brought Buddhist music ensembles from mainland China to other countries. Since then, stage performances of Buddhist music have increased. After the implementation of ICH protection in 2005, stage performance has become an important means of promoting Buddhist instrumental music and chanting. A good example is Zhihua Temple Beijing Music, for which performing on stage has become its major activity.

In 2019, Daxiangguo Temple's Buddhist music ensemble performed a "Peace and Well-Being" concert of blessing at David Geffen Hall in New York. Besides overseas performances, the main function of Labuleng Temple's "Dau-der" ceremonial ensemble has been accompanying rituals, including ascending the Hall, sutra expounding, banquets, greeting -- of the living Buddha Vjam.

The main function of Buddhist music is to accompany Buddhist rituals in order to spread the Dharma. Because stage performance is a secondary means to promote Buddhism, it is promoted with caution. Buddhist scholars and musicians prefer to organize academic

conferences, cultural gatherings, and charities than stage performances. However, the latter is much loved by lay people, who believe that listening to Buddhist music could purify their heart and mind.

Some types of Buddhist music are not suitable for stage performance, such as music for place of enlightenment. This is the reason why Tianning Temple Buddhist Chanting and Jinshan Temple's Water and Land ceremony are rarely seen on stage.

III. Preserving Tradition or Modernizing?

Because most of China's ICHs exist since the agrarian age, they are vulnerable in modern civilization. Therefore, in the initial stage of protecting ICH, experts prefer to preserve its "primordial" status rather than modernize it. In the relatively closed setting of temples, Buddhist music is regarded as the "living fossil" of traditional Chinese music. However, in modern society, this "living fossil" is faced with the challenge of inheritance disruption. Temple music from Mount Wutai, Northern Wudang Temple, Lengyan Temple, Qianshan Temple, cannot maintain all of their music because of the difficulties of transmission. Most of their music has not been played for decades. In this case, it is extremely difficult to keep their inheritance in its original form, a common problem faced by many ICH projects.

UNESCO's Ethical Principles for The Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2016) has pointed out that "the vibrant and innovative nature of ICH should continue to be respected." Some laws and regulations on ICH protection issued by the Chinese government also emphasize this point. In 2017, the *Opinions on the Implementation of the Project of Inheritance and Development of Chinese Distinctive Traditional Culture* clearly states that excellent traditional culture should be "blended into production and life", meaning it acknowledges the constant changes of ICH.

Moreover, Ethical Principles for The Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2016) also suggests that "related communities, groups and individuals should play a primary role in the protection of their own ICH", and "All communities, groups or individuals should recognize the value of their own ICH, which should not be subject to external judgment". That means that only practitioners could decide the direction of ICH in its development, not experts or scholars.

At the recent Symposium on the development of Buddhist music in Daxiangguo Temple, some scholars suggested that to promote Buddhist music and to gain more followers, we should pay more attention to the current trends in popularity. Daxiangguo Temple has been working in this direction for many years including hiring professional musicians, re-editing original scores, and adding instruments not previously played in temples such as chime, dulcimer, lute, guqin, electronic organ, drums. Although these changes have been criticized by some Buddhist scholars and ICH experts, it has been welcomed lay audiences. Temples have been willing to reform their music in order to attract larger audiences. Of course, there are also temples which insist in keeping traditional way because they consider that traditional orthodox Buddhist ritual music should not be changed. This is the reason why they refuse the use of new melodies.

IV. How Temples and Monks Have Helped Preserve Buddhist Music

In the beginning, the importance of preserving of ICH was not recognized by Buddhists, who were pessimistic and passive. For monks, Buddhist music is only a practice for religious rituals. In the early stage of the implementation of China's ICH protection, temples and monks did not understand this project, since it has little to do with their daily practices and the temples. Therefore, the religious ICH projects were often led by experts and scholars. For example, the declaration of Qianshan Temple music was completed by Anshan Art Creation Research Institute under the guidance of the famous folklorist Wu Bing'an; the declaration of Tianning Temple Buddhist Chanting was written by Qin Dexiang, a middle school teacher; and Tian Qing, a Buddhist musicologist, who has guided Buddhist associations and temples to declare Buddhist ICH.

With the development of ICH preservation in China, the Buddhist community has gradually realized the importance of protecting Buddhist cultural heritage. Some temples began to apply for ICH projects on their own initiative. For example, Jinshan Temple applied for the national ICH project of its Water and Land Ceremony music for three times, and got the final approval in 2014. These temples had taken measures to publicize and protect their ICH resources, such as holding seminars and courses, publishing books and audio-visual materials, and establishing Buddhist music ensembles. Old monks would demonstrate their temple's traditional chanting style as well as widely circulated popular Buddhist songs to young monks. For example, every winter when the mountain is closed to the public, Shuxiang Temple's monks would use the time to learn notation and singing. As an example, in order to better preserve the Yushan Buddhist Chanting in Shandong Province, its abbot, Master Yongwu, went to Japan to study "Yushan Buddhist Chanting" and perfect its five ways. Yushan Buddhist Temple has hosting cultural heritage forums, cultural festivals, academic seminars, training courses, and publication of books.

In a word, the ICH projects on Buddhist music in China have encountered various problems in terms of inheritance, but they are making progress and gaining more attention from both music and religious circles.