

Protection and Innovation of Intangible Cultural Heritage - Buluotuo Festival

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Abstract

Buluotuo is a fairy tale figure in Zhuang (ethnic minority in south China) aboriginal oral culture. The Buluotuo Culture, the core of which is the Buluotuo Scriptures, was among the first batch to be added to the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List. It originated in the Tianyang County, Bose, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, a remote and impoverished area. The Buluotuo Folk Cultural Festival has been held there annually for the last five years. The organizer holds the festival to help protect the Zhuang ethnic culture and create a regional tourist attraction. The major activities at the festival are a traditional ritual, an original folk dance show, ethnic folk songs and unique sports competitions from the original Zhuang culture. However, considering the needs of modern people, the commercialized operation of the festival may cause some contradictions with the protection and transmission of the folk culture. To enable this distinct Buluotuo culture to benefit the economy in this less developed region, the value of the culture heritage must be preserved. If protection is properly combined with innovation, the aboriginal folk culture can prosper in the modern world and be passed from generation to generation.

Keywords: Buluotuo Festival; intangible cultural heritage; protection; innovation

1. Brief Introduction of Buluotuo culture.

Guangxi, a province next to the border in south China, is an autonomous region in which many nationalities live. They are Zhuang, Han, Yao, Miao, Dong, Mulao, Maonan, Hui, Jin, Yi, Sui, Kelao indigenous ethnic people. Among them, Zhuang is the most populous nationality in China. Most of them inhabit in Guangxi. They have a long and glorious history.

Buluotuo is a fairy tale figure passed down by the Zhuang aboriginal tribes. He could be a chief of a tribe. As he had made great contribution to the history of Zhuang, he was endowed with more cultural character and was taken as a saint. He was honored as the creator, the first ancestor and the moral model by Zhang and others with the same ethnic origin. Zhuang aboriginal, who were good at telling story by singing, created a five-word song of Buluotuo on the basis of some folklore and mythology. It is a unique Zhuang oral epic which eulogizes Buluotuo for his creation of world and human. In Tang and Song dynasty, Ancient Zhuang characters (also known as aboriginal Zhuang characters) appeared in the form and sound similar to the Chinese official characters. It is estimated that it has been kept and passed down not only orally but also literally since Ming dynasty. Part of the song has become the Scripture of Zhuang Meijism (a kind of religion of Zhuang).

The unique Zhuang Buluotuo oral epic covers a wide area of culture and creates a system of its own. It contains six parts: the creation of heaven and earth, human, all things on earth, local king, ethnic characters and literature and moral principles. Besides, people would sing a song to praise

Buluotuo in sacrificial rituals. There are also special Folk Song Fairs in honor of Buluotuo. Before the fair starts, people would sing an old song of Buluotuo on their way up to the mountain to worship ancestors. The song contains ritual and creation part. The epic, which is as long as ten thousand lines, has been inherited orally from generation to generation in Tian Yang County, Guangxi.

Today, caused by historic and other reasons, the oral history nearly fails to be handed down from past generation. It is confronting the crisis of survival. It is in urgent need of rescue and protection. For this reason, the Buluotuo culture, which covers the Scripture and other related activities, was among the first to be included in the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2006. The Zhuang Folk Song Fairs, which have close relation with Buluotuo, is another intangible cultural heritage in Guangxi.

The Fairs are the gathering of Zhuang people to celebrate a holiday at a specific time and location. Almost all the major Zhuang communities hold the Fair each year. It originated from tribal life in ancient times when people used to pay tribute to god by ritual singing and dancing. As society developed, the original group singing and dancing gradually transformed from entertaining god to entertaining humans. The dancing was gradually taken over by singing. Finally, the Folk Song Fair was held to satisfy the group's need of singing. Young men and women would choose their partners by cross-singing their love songs. Others would either compete in singing or appreciate the singing. They form the major part of the Fair. Sometimes there are other activities such as dramas, Chinese folk art and sports meetings held at the Fair. The Fair has played a unique and important role in creating, inheriting and developing of traditional folk song. It is also a natural vehicle of Zhuang folk song and treasure-house of Zhuang literature. It is valuable for those who want to understand and study the lives of the ancient ethnic group. In addition, the Fair is also a stage for those who want to show their ability of singing and a place for the youth to learn the traditional culture. It can meet their psychological needs of upholding folk song and inspiring poetic thought.

However, due to the modernization of the society, ethnic traditional cultural has suffered a severe impact. Fewer and fewer Folk Song Fairs were held by ethnic groups each year. Some of the Fairs have to be closed due to the retirement of elder singers and lacking of young successors. It is necessary to take efforts to save this important traditional Zhuang ethnic culture – the Folk Song Fairs

2. The raising and development of Buluotuo Folk and culture festival

Tianyang county, Bose, a remote and impoverished area in Guangxi, once paid little attention to the value of its intangible heritage even though there were scholars kept on investigating Buluotuo culture. Since 1958, the editorial office of Zhuang literature history had started collecting the information about Buluotuo. Buluotuo Scripture was proved to be the Scripture of Zhuang Meijism in 1986. Then *The Annotation of Buluotuo Scripture* was published in 1991. The publication of *Annotation of Photo printed the Buluotuo Scripture* in 2004, marked that the study of the folk culture had come to a systematic and integrated result. However, all the academic research was unable to provide the job of protection. It was not until 2000, that the destroying of the related documents and things during the Movement of Wiping out Superstitions stopped. Then Buluotuo folk culture survived in an awkward situation.

Gudi, a notable Zhuang scholar in Guangxi, came to Ganzhuang Mountain (situated in Tianyang) in June 2002. He identified that Ganzhuang Mountain is the birthplace of Zhuang ethnic group. The identification was accepted by the local government. At the same time the curiosity about the unique culture was stirred up. The scholars from Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Minzu University of China etc. visited Ganzhuang Mountain one after another. Through on-the-spot investigation, they firmly believed that it is the origin of Buluotuo culture and the holy mountain of Zhuang ethnic group. In other words, it is the spiritual home of Zhuang people. Not only in Pearl River Valley, but also in Thailand, Burma, Laos, Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries, many aboriginal tribes are deeply influenced by Buluotuo culture. Other Chinese nationalities such as Dong, Bouyei, Dai, Li and Kelao etc. are also affected. There are six good reasons to support their points: (1) The relic of temple for people to worship Buluotuo, known as Zhugong (first ancestor) Temple, is on the mountain. (2) Ganzhuang means the cave of Zhuang in Zhuang dialect. (3) Ganzhuang Folk Song Fair, the largest song fair in Guangxi, is held in memory of Buluotuo. (4) The Laikui Site, one of the three ancient human sites found in Bose basin, is in Tianyang. (5) Tianyang county was built in 140 B.C. It is the eldest county in Bose. It has abundant social resource of Zhuang. (6) Among 28 versions of the Buluotuo Scripture, epic and encyclopedia of Zhuang, 14 were found in Tianyang. The other 14 were found in the counties near Tianyang. When *Site of the First Ancestor of Zhuang Found in Tianyang* was reported in People's Daily (an important news media in China), a lot of scholars joined the discussion of whether the conclusion was true or not. No matter what position they held, they all agreed that the ancient human site on the Ganzhuang Mountain is an important discovery for the study of Buluotuo culture. Due to the attention paid by the government and people from all works of life, Buluotuo Folk Culture Festival was first held in Tianyang, Bose, in 2004.

Since then, the festival has been held each year. Three major activities held during the festival: religion rituals, folk song fair and the folk sports meeting. Usually one or two days before March 8 lunar calendar, there is a folk song fair. People gather spontaneously at the spot where the Festival is to be held. They sing folk songs to each other day and night. The sponsor of the Festival would organize a folk song competition. The preliminary folk sports contests are a little different each year. But the traditional activities, such as the Fire Cracker Ball, Lion Dancing Competition, Bullfight and Wrestling in Tomatoes etc., are indispensable. Following one-thousand-year-old tradition, the fair would last two or three days. On March 8, the festival reaches the climax. The grand ritual, final competition of the folk song and sports contest are held in that day. There were nearly two hundred thousand participants during the festival in 2009. A seminar on Buluotuo culture was held in the festival. The festival becomes an important attraction which helps improve the local tourism development.

3. The role of Buluotuo Folk Culture Festival in the preservation of the intangible culture heritage

An investigation on the perception of Buluotuo culture shows: Before the Ganzhuang Mountain was identified as the home of Buluotuo in 2002, people's knowledge about it is quiet rare, even in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. In April 2010, the project team conducted a survey among 100 people of all ages from different regions and with different professions. The result shows: 8.7% (7) of respondents from outside Bose (80) had heard of Buluotuo while only 2.5% (2) had heard of Buluotuo Scripture. Among those who know about

Buluotuo, 85.7% (6) people's knowledge came from the festival. Among the respondents from Bose (20), 80% know Buluotuo through the festival. The result shows that Buluotuo culture is in urgent need of protection. The Festival has played an important role in the protection and passing down of the culture.

The influence of the festival on the protection and passing down of the intangible heritage can be seen in following areas:

1). The festival enhances people's awareness and makes them pay more attention to the culture

People's awareness is a very important factor in measuring the existential state of a culture. The ability of publication and transmission of an event makes it a good way of blending old tradition into modern society and people's life. The festival has made a great contribution in enhancing people's awareness of Buluotuo culture. The news coverage about the festival by all kinds of medias, such as *A Legendary Festival in China* by central television, *Looking for Buluotuo* by column Discovery, had done a great job in publicizing the culture.

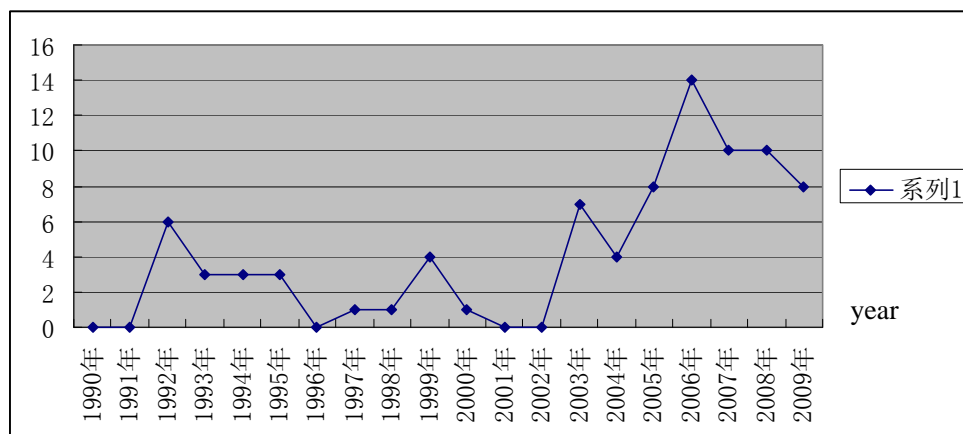
The popularity of the event also plays an important role in enhancing people's awareness. Before the first festival, the number of the people who spontaneously participated in the song fair was about fifty thousand. After the festival, the number rose to at most two hundred thousand. Being well organized by government and sponsored by local enterprises, the attendances are rising year by year. They came to enjoy the diversifying and entertaining activities held during the festival,

2). The festival attracts more attention of scholars on Buluotuo culture

The activeness of academic research means a lot in protecting the culture. Academic power enables the sustainable protection of the culture. The culture also needs to be further researched.

The festival has drawn the attention of scholars from different academic fields. After searching for the articles in name of Buluotuo from periodicals issued from 1994 to 2010, on the site of China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database, a comparison of the number of the papers published before and after 2004 was made. From the chart bellow, we can see the number of the papers concerning Buluotuo culture has increased since the first festival was held.

Fig 1 Number of papers published in year 1990 to 2009



The academic research focus on the following issues:

Buluotuo folk literature.

Existing value, historic value and economic value of Buluotuo culture.

Buluotuo folk culture festival

Development of Buluotuo Folk Culture Tourism

Protection and innovation of Buluotuo intangible heritage

As Chinese and other country's culture are deeply affected by Zhuang culture, Buluotuo history and culture attracted scholars from abroad. Many Southeast Asian nationalities, who belong to Zhuang-Tai language family, believe that their ancestors migrated from south China. Scholars from Thailand have visited Guangxi many times seeking their roots. As the Ganzhuang Mountain is recognized as the spiritual home of Zhuang and where Buluotuo Folk Festival is held every year, there will be even more scholars coming to Guangxi. They would do field surveys and participate in the activities. This would help to raise international attention to the Buluotuo culture to a certain extent.

3). The festival publicizes the knowledge of the protection of the intangible culture heritage (ICH).

The protection of the ICH becomes standardized gradually. The State Council requires local governments to implement procedures for protection and give priority to preservation over further development. The protection is not merely the job of the small number of scholars and officials. But before Buluotuo culture was accepted as intangible heritage, few local people knew the value of their culture, let alone protected it consciously. This situation did not change until the first festival was held. The publicizing of the knowledge of ICH and the determination of the cultural representatives make the public know more about the methods of protection. Huang Dagui, a local singer, is known as a living fossil of the culture. He can sing the whole Buluotuo Scripture without missing a word. He was determined as one of the cultural representatives and is well known to the public. This has a positive effect on local people. Meanwhile, the people in other areas in Bose were enlightened by the change, they started to cherish their own culture. In 2009, they applied for a patent for a Zhuang ornament *Momie* and determination of its representative. They provided a story about Buluotuo to prove the value of the ornament. It shows how the festival function spreading knowledge of ICH. It will also push young people to inherit the culture.

4). The festival turns the cultural value of the ICH to economic value

Through years of hard work, the goal of turning the cultural value of ICH into economic value has almost realized.

First, Buluotuo culture has become a unique tourist resource. It is national, regional, holy and massive. Take grand ritual for example, it has become a spectacular activity to tourists. The festival, which is well planned and organized, has attracted tens of thousands of tourists from home and abroad, far more than before. A lot has been invested into the construction of scenic spots on Ganzhuang Mountain, the site of the festival. Great efforts have been made for building it into the spiritual home of Zhuang. Zhuang ethnic groups go there seeking roots and honoring their ancestors. Tianyang is also admitted as a one of the stations of a folk

culture-oriented tourism. It is well integrated with other tourist sites such as Laikui Site (an ancient human site), the graveyard of Mrs. Wa (a heroine in combating the invasion of old Japanese), Karst funnel in Leye (another county in Bose), and “Red Tourism” in Bose. The tourism industry has been greatly improved.

Secondly, it affects the adjustment of local economic structure. When conducting a field investigation about the festival, we were told a story by local farmer. When the first festival was held in 2004, a farmer decidedly pulled up the seedling of sugar-cane planted next to the site. He flattened the field into a parking lot. After the festival, which lasted three days, the total amount he had earned is twice the yearly income he planted sugar-cane. This is a typical example that the festival affects the adjustment of local economic structure. The traditional industry is agriculture and manufacture in Tianyang. The service industry is backward. Since the first festival, tourist industry gradually grows up. The emphasis of economy is moving from traditional industry to service industry. The move optimizes the local industrial structure and stimulates the economy.

Thirdly, the cultural events set up a stage for trade activities to flourish local economy. The hosts of the festival are Bose government and Guangxi Zhuang Society. The undertaker is the government of Tianyang county. The co-hosts are three Cultural enterprises. As the host of the event, the government took the opportunity of the festival to turn the value of Buluotuo culture into the value of economy. It aims to stimulate economy and increase local people’s income. Recently, a large amount of Virgin Fruit (small tomato), a cash crop, is planted in Tianyang, so the activities in name of tomato were held each year. For example, a competition of carrying the tomato by couples was held in 2009. Shipping the tomato by motorcycle was held in 2010. Not to mention the wrestling in a pool of tomato in each festival. All those activities aim to promote the brand spreading and marketing of the tomato. Tianyang is abundant of various products. It is known as Base of Vegetables, Township of Mango. One of bases of fruit and vegetable for CHINA—ASEAN EXPO is only several miles from the site of the festival. As the success of the festival, the influence of the culture expands both in and outside of China. Ganzhuang Mountain has become the holy mountain of about ten billion people who belong to Zhuang-Thai language family. Through turning the superiority of the cultural into tourist resource, the festival has played an important role in the forming of economic superiority, and in inviting investments. A mango garden in name of Buluotuo obtained 50 billion yuan for rebuilt in 2008. It is to be built into an ecological garden and a multifunctional ethnic park through integrating mango, cultivation, catering, sightseeing, relaxation, recreation and vacation. It will be a new tourist attraction in Bose or even in Guangxi. Investment like that has increased year by year. It shows direct and indirect economic value of Buluotuo culture.

4. The festival has rebuilt and reformed the ICT

From the first festival, the organizer started to find a way to rebuild and reform the ICT on the base of protection. The jobs they have done are presented below:

1). Restore Buluotuo religion and determine the spiritual home of Zhuang

In thousand-year-old Buluotuo literature, Buluotuo is the first ancestor of Zhuang ethnic groups.

His god ship is presented as the Creator, the Starter and the religion God. He exists in Zhuang folk tale, epic, words for ritual, song and proverb, and customs etc. People praise him for his power and contribution [2]. However, people from different groups and areas not really agree to each other. First, the name Buluotuo is not accepted by all. Some call him simply Top Ancestor. In some other folk tale, Mulejia is the real Creator. While in Buluotuo Scripture, she is only an assistant god, the wife of Buluotuo. In considering the position of Buluotuo in the heart of Zhuang, and the religion ritual held by people spontaneously for one thousand years, Buluotuo is finally confirmed as the creator of Zhuang. The confirmation is base on the research of scholars and fully consideration of people from all works of life. In the wide discussion about homeland of Buluotuo from 2002 till the first festival held in 2004, Buluotuo was accepted as the cultural ancestor and Ganzhuang Moutain as the spiritual home of Zhuang. Zhuang Mejism, an imortant religion in Buluotuo culture, was also accepted. The festival reminded people of their unique history. All these had made a great contribution to the culture to be listed in national ICT book.

The site of the festival, Ganzhuang Mountain, has also experienced reform from its name to looks. First, its old name Chunxiao (spring down) Mountain was changed to Ganzhuang Mountain, which is more like Zhuang dialect. The rocky mountain with only some caves and old temples was renewed. By building a grand road for ritual, and the sculpture of Buluotuo, Mulejia and twelve gods with animal head and human body, the mountain has become a famous attraction. It cannot be denied that there were people who doubt of the work. Such as people in a nearby county –Yufeng, insist that there is the only home of Buluotuo. But there are more proofs for Ganzhuang Mountain than any other place. Finally, the difference has been put away and Ganzhuang Mountain was accepted.

Following the guidance of the festival, more and more people come to Ganzhuang Mountain to worship Buluotuo. The Buluotuo culture has been widely spreaded and injected with new vitality. The song for ritual and toast song on the grand ritual are out of Buluotuo Scripture. It is as long as 340 lines and has been translated into Chinese official language. Now people from other nationalities can appreciate the beauty of the culture.

2). Save and protect many other cultural treasure of Zhuang

Beside Buluotuo culture, the festival had done a lot in saving and protecting the song fairs, some folk sports and folk art, which has been put in the Guanxi ICH list.

The song fairs have a long history. It is well known in China. Due to the change of life style and some other political reason, they were once in severe danger. Since 1920s, the song fairs were banned for the dissolute songs. The government was afraid that may corrupt public morals. After new China was founded in 1949, the fair come to thrive for a while. It was banned again in the mid of 1950s. During the ten-year Great Culture Revolution, it totally disappeared. Until 1980s, the government started to pay some attention to folk culture. Some fairs restarted. As the modernized of the society, folk culture was seriously impacted. The number of song fair reduced from around 600 to 200. The scale of the fair is also smaller. In the old days, the singers were mostly young people. Now in a society with fast speed life and commodity economy, young people are not interested in the song fair. As some of them work away from home, almost no people aged from 20 to 30 join the singing. Singers aged from 30 to 40 can rarely be seen. Most singers are over 40. Some fairs had to be closed because most singers retired and there is no young successor. The song fair at Guangzhuang Mountain had the same problem. It was the festival that attracted a lot of young or old to join the

song fair and the competition of folk song. People become passionate on learning folk songs. For tourists, people from near and far come day and night to sing at Ganzhuang Mountain. is spectacular.

Moreover, Fire Cracker Ball, known as Zhuang Rugby, and the lion dancing competition among teams from different areas and countries, draw a lot of attention of local people and tourists during the festival. The activities not only keep the original style of the culture, but also have some improvement to adapt to modern people. That is how the festival helps to protect the folk sports and art.

5. The common goal and contradictions between the festival and the protection of ICT

It is no doubt that the festival has done a great deal in protecting Buluotuo culture. But it still faces some questioning. Analyzing its achievements and negative sides objectively can help us explore a better way of protecting and reforming of ICH.

Question 1: Is the spiritual home of Zhuang - Guanzhuang Mountain, a product made by romantic scholars and businessmen?

It never stops being questioned that Guanzhuang Mountain is the spiritual home of Zhuang by either learned people or civilian. But the questioning from civilian is weak and transient. They are easily being ignored as time pass by. The crowds coming to worship their ancestor each year can prove that there are plenty of such people who like to take Buluotuo as first ancestor. They hope he can get rid of calamities and bring happiness. Yet the questioning from learned people lasts longer and is thought-provoking. Some said the rebuilt of Buluotuo culture is “a business of the ICT” [3]. On the one side, they admit that traditional culture is never unchangeable. On the other side, they criticize government and some elites for they inflicting their so call Buluotuo culture to general public. They believe buluotuo culture is sorted out in the view of material gain. To be honest, the seeking root of poets and the involving of businessmen do influence the rebuilt of the culture. The investigation of scholars and reporting by media push government take some actions. We still cannot ignore the power of the storage of the history and knowledge of the public. In this point of view, constantly questioning on how Guanzhuang Mountain becomes the holy land is no good to the protection of the culture. What we should keep in mind in future is not to rush to take the advantages of the culture heritage to serve for the economy and not to exaggerate its function.

Question 2: Did the festival turn the inartificial religion ritual into a demonstration?

Some said that development and protection are natural enemies. Others said tourism is a modern pattern of living of ICH [4]. Both perorations are taken from different point of view on the value of national tradition.

It is true that the religion ritual in Guanzhuang Mountain used to be a primitive activity that people voluntarily join in. It had its own procedure. It was not as splendid as it is today. Nowadays, we can see the crowd in colorful folk costume. They come from all sides and bring all kinds of oblations. There is also ritual dance performed by local arts organization. The lion dance teams, with their well decorated lion, somersault on stakes which is higher than a man. The festival does become a tourist attraction. We all know that primitive and natural ritual cannot attract so many modern people, while the splendid one may drift away from tradition. To make some choice for this folk

event is inevitable. Can we accuse the decision made for satisfying out comers as ignoring tradition? In answering this question, we can image such a scene: In a newly built square, there are modern young women in color hair and high heel, as well as rural women with towel wrapping their head. They burn incense in the same burner peacefully. So it is certain that tradition can be refreshed. Critical scholars should not too worry about the tradition.

As a matter of fact, the contribution of Buluotuo Folk Culture Festival to the protection and transmission of Buluotuo culture is undeniable. No matter what arguments and differences there have been. The meaning of the Buluotuo folk literature to common people is not to read the Scripture, but to understand and accept it. It is the festival which can do the job well. As for innovation and protection, contradiction is inevitable. A pattern of protecting and transmitting the culture adopted by many countries in the world is to take the advantage of ICT to serve for the protection.

The government of Bose has made a great effort in tuning the festival into a tourism project, and building Ganzhuang Mountain into the holy mountain of Zhuang. It means there is a base for the culture to exist. It is an active and positive move to the protection of the culture. In the meanwhile, the government should try to be less material-oriented. He should respect the seriousness and scientificity of the ICH and avoid maximizing local benefit, so that the ICH will not be tortured and vulgarized. At present, the festival is of some commonweal character. As it becoming well accepted tourism, its ability of self-support will grow. Finally it will be an event guided by government, sponsored by enterprises and operated by market. It can fully assume the task of protecting the ICH.

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