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The Dilemma and Ways Out of Qiang Ethnic Minority’s Traditional Physical Education Under the Background of Informationization in P.R.China

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Abstract

In the process of reconstruction after the Wenchuan earthquake disaster in P.R.China, the traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority is experiencing the informationized “reform” under the powerful influence from the protection of cultural heritage and the development of tourism. Therefore, it is of vital importance to protect the traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority by properly utilizing information technology and maintaining its natural elements, characteristics and values with the concept of “dynamic transmission”. Meanwhile, it is more essential to integrate protection and transmission into the post-disaster educational reconstruction.

Keywords: Informationization, Qiang Ethnic Minority, Traditional Physical Education, Cultural Heritage, Development Path

1. Introduction

Informatization has improved Qiang people’s lifestyle, leading them to walk out of their hometown, and communicating with other people in wider spectrum. However, what is called the mainstream civilization loaded by the informatization is spreaded excessively, causing the inheritance crisis of Qiang’s traditional culture growing fierce. Under the “double edges” of informatization, Qiang’s traditional physical education not only is known by other people, but also shows its “homogeneity” which gets increasingly.

2. The traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority: the civilized verve in the attack and play

The traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority is rooted in the Qiang people’s traditional custom of life and production, which is not only the reflection of their harmonious lifestyle, but also the record of the process in which Qiang’s culture mingles with the one of other nationalities.

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2.1. External representation: showing Qiang people’s intelligence of living

Qiang people “move from place to place in search of water and grass”, and often live in the valleys and canyons. When going outside, they need to climb the mountains or take boats in the river, avoid the rocks in the mountains which may fall down, or avoid the attack from beasts. Therefore, the traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority is extremely characterized of “geo-relation”. For example, “Ziptreck”, called “liukezi” by Qiang people, is a significant tool for crossing over the Minjiang River, Bailong River, and Qingzhu River, which is also used to go and come among valleys and canyons. The place where Qiang people live is famous for the experts of “Ziptreck”, who are skillfully agile (can slide and fall down as fast as they can) and good at loading things (can transport livestock, grain etc).

In the past, because of the traffic inconvenience and information block, it has been difficult for Qiang people to go outside of their hometown. However, the activities and entertainment of culture mingling in Qiang people’s daily life are colorful and rich, so the “prayerfulness” is a typical feature of Qiang’s traditional physical education. For instance, “Salang” which is similar to sport is not only a performance, but also the description of Qiang people’s living situation. Qiang people “move their bodies” to “one side”, which results from the lack of oxygen or the instability of the center of gravity when they walk on the path of the mountains. For Qiang people it seems an easy job to move their bodies and lip, which needs to study hard and laboriously for others.

“Militarism” is originally the tradition of Qiang ethnic minority, but with the increased peaceful coexistence of Qiang with other nationalities day by day, this kind of military-style training project gradually evolved into an entertaining activity celebrated after Qiang people finish farming and harvest. The activities such as “embracing eggs”, “pushing rod”, wrestling, “jumping arch”, “board strength of the hand” and javelin throwing emphasize technique and pay more attention to the actual combat and efficiency. Take “embracing eggs” as an example. This kind of activity is called “Ezhuo” by Qiang people. The number of people intending to take part in this activity is random and changeable. It involves fierce competition and boisterous scenes, which usually attract more and more people to join in: the person “embracing eggs” and the one “protecting eggs” should move around each other skillfully, and pay more attention to the harmony of their action. Their feet have to move “strongly” and “stretch to a certain extent”. Their hands ought to wave “quickly, accurately and powerfully”. The aim of these activities is to train participants’ ability of observation and their nimble mind.

2.2. Internal representation: Qiang people’s cultural identity

In the long-term migration and settlement, Qiang people need to adapt themselves to the natural environment, expecting the nature to bestow “a good harvest” on them, bravely facing with the severe changes of the weather. On the other hand, they have to learn how to cooperate with other nationalities while forming a set of living philosophy of their own. They worship nature, thinking that everything in the nature has a soul. Qiang people take “Pushing Rod”, “Embracing Eggs”, “Shivering Grains”, “Salang” and “Sheepskin Drum Dance” as the “signs” of “dialog between the human beings and the gods” in the boisterous and pleasant atmosphere, expressing their admiration to the nature and the pursuit of happy lives. During the process of competition, cooperation and blessing, the traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority also evolved into their “facial makeup” -- the long-term play and adaptable physical education training present Qiang people’s spirit of identity and their quality, bringing out Qiang’s unique characteristics of culture.

3. Encountering the informatization: the variation of Qiang’s traditional physical education

In recent years, informatization brings convenience to Qiang people’s lives, which makes Qiang’s traditional culture widely transmitted. However, under the impact of the informatization, the existence and development of Qiang’s traditional physical education fall into the predicament.
3.1. The “transformation” of informatization in the traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority

Informatization is a process coexisting two uniqueness—“consciousness” and “unconsciousness”. Firstly, during the process that informatization has become an opportunity of social development, people are easily subdued by the displayed informatization of “high intelligence, a large amount of storage, the automation of production and service, networking of management and life”. They pleasantly accept the benefits brought by it, improving consciously their capabilities on the information technology to use informationizing facilities. Secondly, informatization is actually understood as a tool to promote the popularization of culture through popularizing technique, which is “a kind of hegemony of culture determined by hegemony of technique”. (Zhang, 2005:15) What’s more, the “tradition” of ethnic culture was impacted by informatization. Faced with this sort of impact, we are unable to resist, just accept it “unconsciously”.

The popularization and application of the Internet make the young generation appreciate, scan, research and discuss the physical education conveniently, causing them to accept modern physical education as a part of their daily lives and “forgetting” Qiang’s traditional physical education consciously or unconsciously. The new Qiang generation is called “net generation”, (Don, 1999:6-7) for they are growing up with the development of Internet. They are good at using various informatization tools and more willing to transform Qiang’s traditional physical education.

For example, the traditional physical education event “pushing rod” was a strong characteristic of athletics. In this sporting event, one person who belongs to one side needs to half squat to “push rod”, trying his best to defend, and the persons of the other side “clamp bar” with the gesture of bow step, making efforts to offend (they can increase the number of people at any time). The bar must be kept balanced during the process of defend and offend. The offensive side needs to push ahead the bar to two feet outside the boundaries; the judge claps five times, which is the basis of one-round time; the winners drink wine to celebrate their victory. In the video of opening ceremony of 2008 Beijing Olympic Games put on the Internet, “pushing rod of Qiang ethnic minority” “blends” the traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority with music and dance, from which we can find that the “push rod” places more emphasis on the “performativity”. In this video, the Qiang’s traditional “push rod” is shown by combining Qiang’s “sheepskin drum dance” with “Salang” and inputting modern elements, which shapes a new form of performance. Therefore, we can see that more and more young people of Qiang ethnic minority perform the reformed “push rod” with music and dance.

On the other hand, informatization leads the traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority to develop from the “multi-element” to “coessentiality”. There are some discrepancies existing in the natural and human environment of Qiang’s regional life, their life and custom are of multi-element. It is difficult to find two subjects which have the same “set pattern” in the numerous subjects of traditional physical education. For instance, the activity of “Salang dancing” (the young people now prefer to name it as “Guozhuang”) can be divided into the “Salang” of “Erma” and the “Salang” of “Chibu”. As a matter of fact, every tribe of Qiang ethnic minority has “Salang” of their own. However, “Salang” standard was popularized, which is imitated by many people who have absorbed it from Internet or TV. This kind of condition also appears in “Pushing Rod”, “Embracing Eggs”, “shivering bran” and “Sheepskin Drum Dance”, which leads to the disappearance of uniqueness and internal individuation that existed in the traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority.

3.2. “Digital performance” of attracting the “eyeballs”

After the Wenchuan earthquake happened in 2008, “how to protect Qiang’s traditional culture and to promote the reconstruction of disaster areas” efficiently has become a major issue in China, and the issue “how to display the cultural heritage of Qiang ethnic minority by applying informational technology and to promote the tourism industry” is a significant part of the post-disaster programming. In the documents mainly formulated by the government such as Preliminary Reconstruction Scheme of Qiang’s Cultural and Ecological Reserve and Planning Programs of Qiang’s Cultural and Ecological Protection Area, the traditional physical education of Qiang’s minority is involved in the whole program of protection. Consequently, the comprehensive collection of documents, audios and videos on Qiang’s traditional physical education has launched, and batches of online display platforms have been opened in succession. “The digital museum of Qiang’s culture” has been constructed, which is a platform to display Qiang’s culture by relying on the informational technology. Meanwhile, the cultural heritage of Qiang’s traditional physical education is widely reprinted by network media. Some volunteers went further into the Qiang people village and filmed a lot of videos. Such excellent teams as “Yingjiu erma” and “the first blog of XiQiang” appeared.
Today, this kind of network propagandizing has evolved into the positive “tourism marketing” from the negative “external pushing”. After the earthquake, the gathered area of Qiang ethnic minority which is located in the Longmen mountain fault zone takes the tourism industry as the top in their economical development. Qiang’s culture is integrated with its tourism and informatization, which is regarded as the “historic upgrade” comprehensively. To create “the tourism destination of culture core”, Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture invested one billion RMB to build the project “Mao county and Qiang city”, which integrates the protection of cultural heritance, the education of popular science and leisure tourism as an entity on the basis of informational technology, forming a unique “concentrated display of Qiang culture” and digital humanistic spot. In Beichuan county, the government has invested about one billion RMB to build the project “tourist area of Qiang tribe in the clouds”, which designs and plans “cultural repair and tourism development project” and “city-brand marketing project”. The main part of these two projects consists of “the broadcast exhibition of Qiang culture, culture experience of Dayu, outdoor sightseeing, leisure and see seismic memorial”, the goal of which is to “finally become the typical example of the post-disaster reconstruction China contributes to the world.

The development of informational technology makes it possible for information to be integrated and virtually presented. Skills and routines which require many years of exercise now can be displayed by virtual “network masters” through dynamic 3D scanning and capture. However, on the tourism platforms of informatization, accomplished or near by, the “exhibition performance” which aims at the tourist advertisement dissolve the cultural verve of Qiang’s traditional physical education.

The virtual “Ziptreck”, “javelin throwing” and “pushing rods” are performed by young men of Qiang ethnic minority by means of digitalization, which destroy the “original nature” of Qiang’s traditional physical education and exhibit the incomplete and artificial cultural information. This kind of action “easily capitalizes” Qiang’s traditional physical education, transmitting the feature of “getting and enjoying timely” “in fast-food culture", which not only loses the cultural connotation of Qiang’s traditional physical education, but also cannot influence the next generation of Qiang ethnic minority on the level of value.

4. Where shall the traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority go?

The traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority is the product made by Qiang people who gradually adapt to nature and society in the process of long-term production and living. In the informational time, the existential and transmitting condition of this kind of traditional physical education has changed greatly. Therefore, it is necessary for us to think carefully and seriously about how to effectively protect and inherit the traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority in the information era.

4.1. “Database” constructs the protection of “authenticity”

“Authenticity” means “original, real and literal”, which emphasizes that protecting cultural legacy is to maintain the real information of the legacy.(Liang, Qiu & Zhang, 2009) However, it emphasizes the “authenticity” and informational technology plays key role in culture legacy protection.

The cultural legacy of Qiang ethnic minority was extremely damaged from the Wenchuan earthquake, but it brings the opportunity of protection and transmission. In 2009, 3D action database of intangible cultural heritage for Qiang ethnic minority, Dynamic image database of intangible cultural heritage for Qiang ethnic minority, and Static database of intangible cultural heritage for Qiang ethnic minority have been built, collecting video materials of more than 130 holders owning Qiang culture and 6 people inheriting the Qiang culture, and having hundreds of thousands of precious pictures and dynamic videos of 500GB. It is the first set of database in our country which takes advantage of informational technology to deeply record the “intangible cultural heritage” of Qiang ethnic minority. (Yang, 2009)

However, the settlement of “database” specifying in traditional physical education of the Qiang ethnic minority has not been launched. It is obvious that there is huge benefit in making use of the “database” to construct the protection of “authenticity” of Qiang’s traditional physical education: firstly, the traditional physical education of Qiang ethnic minority can be generally censused by means of informational technology such as recording, storing, transmitting, presenting, virtualizing, restoring, etc, which can also realize multidimensional record and display of “authenticity” of the information; secondly, as for the inheritance of the subjects of Qiang’s traditional physical education, a large number of them are “…taught by mouths, understood by hearts and inherited by people”. Most of the inheritors are old men, leading to the appearance of “faultage”. The existing materials and documents are inadequate, which makes the related video materials more and more precious. We can construct the retrieval system of texts and video materials of Qiang’s traditional physical education in the form of “database”, which is the best way of protecting Qiang’s traditional physical education under the current circumstances. In this way, the precious legacy can be well preserved, and our study and analysis can be further developed.
4.2. The key of development: informatization enhances the “dynamic inheritance”

Similar with numerous folk culture of Qiang ethnic minority, the culture of its traditional physical education is “a dynamic and mutualistic integration, which surrounds the cultural identity kept by the group’s living belief to integrate different sorts of art forms of culture. …Consequently, we cannot recognize it on the basis of the integrated principles and rules that cut apart, displace or contradict to the folk culture.”(Qiao, 2004:137) What is advocated is to “inherit it dynamically” and think carefully about the question on how we can put our ancient cultural tradition into a wider and deeper human cultural frame and what we should do to realize, discover and understand those excellent tradition of dynamic cultural gene”.

“Dynamic inheritance” firstly lays emphasis on the human beings. Inheritors are the critical factor for the intergenerational inheritance of Qiang’s culture of traditional physical education. The key point of protecting the culture of Qiang’s traditional physical education is to protect its inheritors. Informatization helps widen and expand inheritors’ influence of transmission.

The second aim of “dynamic inheritance” is to “liven” resources of the “database”. Database creation for culture legacy aims at “static protection” and to provide a larger space and more convenience for the display and performance of the culture of Qiang’s traditional physical education. In order to realize the “dynamic inheritance” of the cultural heritage of Qiang’s traditional physical education, we should not only totally record and protect the information about the cultural heritage of Qiang’s traditional physical education by the “database”, but also deeply dig its educational value, making use of the shared platform of informatization, combining schools and communities, to develop its significant function in education: (1) The management of the database used for the cultural heritage of Qiang’s traditional physical education breaks the space limitation for teenage and children to receive education. The information on the cultural heritage of physical education in the database can explain and expand the knowledge system of the courses; (2) We can combine the virtual teaching situation with the actual life practice, making teenage and children of Qiang ethnic minority “get close to the life” in the process of “experiencing tradition” while receiving the education, which helps promote the next generation to understand the concept of value and cultural tradition of Qiang’s traditional physical education deposited for hundreds of years.

References


