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Representation of Craftspeople in Traditional Craft Documentaries: A People-Centered Approach

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Abstract: With the development of digital technologies, documentaries have become an important way to present traditional craftsmanship and cultural values. More traditional craft documentaries focus on works and techniques rather than on the craftspeople. This study adopts qualitative research methods. It is found that craftspeople are not only skilled practitioners, but also important contributors to the inheritance and development of traditional crafts. Their long-term practice, personal experience, and the multiple roles given to them by society will have an impact on their creation of handicraft works. Documentary creation can present a more realistic image of craftspeople through interviews, observations, and various visual expressions. This method helps to reveal the "people-centered" knowledge and creativity behind traditional crafts and provides a new perspective for their future development.

Keywords: Traditional crafts; Documentary; Craftspeople

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1. Introduction

The development of new technologies and formats has brought new challenges to traditional culture. As an important carrier of traditional culture, the inheritance of traditional crafts has long depended on the continuation of "oral transmission" and "practical guidance" [1]. People are the main body of skills, experience, and cultural heritage. Therefore, the record of traditional crafts should not stop at unique works, but also pay attention to the "people" who create and inherit these works.

The development of digital media provides new possibilities for the recording and dissemination of traditional crafts. Documentaries can record the process of skill practice through images, sounds, and character narratives, and place craftspeople in specific living environments and social relations. However, being able to be recorded by images does not mean that the characters have been fully presented. The existing research on the discussion of handicraft documentaries is still more focused on the display of works, and the

attention to craftspeople is relatively limited. There is still room for further discussion on how to avoid the shadow of identity on characters and how to present the real relationship between characters, skills, and life through documentaries.

Relevant research shows that documentaries can not only record skills and cultural practices, but also present the cultural experience and identity relationship of craftspeople through corresponding audio-visual language [2]. At the same time, research on the audio-visual strategies of documentaries further points out that image languages such as lens, composition, long lens, sound, and editing can participate in the construction of character images and cultural meanings [3]. However, the existing discussions pay more attention to the presentation of handicraft works or how characters participate in cultural communication, and there is still a lack of further discussion on how craftspeople are recorded as independent individuals. Craft heritage is sustained through the practices of craft-makers, who not only produce cultural objects but also reproduce cultural meanings [4]. Intangible heritage documentaries should move beyond the simple recording of cultural objects and technical processes, and pay greater attention to the lived experiences, perspectives, and identities of heritage practitioners [5]. In particular, how to avoid the problem of being labeled after the binding of characters and works is still worthy of further study.

Based on the above problems, this paper focuses on using fieldwork interviews to interview traditional craftspeople and practitioners in related industries. On this basis, the character-centered documentary image expression strategy is further discussed to provide a reference for the character recording and cultural expression of traditional handicraft documentaries.

2. Methods

2.1. Research design and participants

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the role of traditional craft practitioners in cultural transmission and explore how their personal experiences, identities, and everyday practices can be represented through documentary narratives. The participants included traditional craft practitioners and related industry participants, including Ou Yufeng, a traditional woodcarver from Xianyou, Fujian Province; Shi Shunhua, a woodcarving practitioner from Jianchuan, Yunnan Province; and practitioners and representatives associated with Zhangjiajie Guaiyaomei Tujia Brocade Company.

2.2. Data collection

The data were collected through visits and face-to-face interviews. The main locations for on-site investigation include handicraft studios, living places, and other areas of regular activity.

The interviews focus on participants' professional experiences, learning and inheritance processes, daily craft practices, changes in craft production, and their perceptions of documentaries. Through interviews and field observations, this study obtained first-hand materials concerning how craft practitioners understand their identities, relationships with traditional crafts, and roles in cultural transmission.

2.3. Data analysis

Based on the materials collected through fieldwork, this study summarizes three interrelated research directions: (1) the role of the personal experience of craftspeople in the protection of traditional crafts. (2) the multiple identities and social networks carried by craft practitioners. (3) when traditional craftspeople

face the changes of time and space, how to deal with the impact of these changes on the inheritance and development of traditional crafts.

These three aspects together constitute the cut-in path to understanding the deep connection between people and traditional crafts.

3. Results

3.1. Craft practitioners' practical experience as the foundation of traditional craft transmission

For the traditional process that relies on practical inheritance, recording the physical form of the process product can retain its external appearance. The cultural value behind the work comes from multiple factors such as the inheritance of skills, the ability of craftspeople, and the understanding of beauty. Craftspeople play an irreplaceable role in cultural inheritance [6].

Ou Yufeng's experience proves this process. Ou stated that he "likes wood." This interest in materials has become an important motivation for his continuous creative practice. Through long-term creative practice, Ou gradually developed his own understanding of materials, techniques, and creative approaches. When selecting materials, he considers the texture and expressive possibilities of different types of wood. This type of experiential knowledge cannot be fully transferred through written records or visual documentation. It develops through long-term observation, reflection, and practical experience [7].

Similar forms of experiential knowledge can also be found in Shi Shunhua's woodcarving practice. Shi learned woodcarving from his elder brother through a family-based apprenticeship. He believes that traditional woodcarving involves not only production procedures but also aesthetic judgments and personal expressions developed through long-term practice. His works reflect his life experiences, emotional memories, and creative concepts. For example, he created a large rhinoceros wood carving for his daughter's 2nd birthday. He also produced rabbit-shaped wood carvings inspired by his childhood imagination. concepts.

Combined with the narrative of the two craftspeople, it can be seen that the life experiences an individual has gone through have a profound impact on his creative choices. Craft heritage vitality resides in the inheritors' skills, practices, and memories [4]. When documentary creators pay attention to the personal experiences of craftspeople while showing the craft, they are in fact presenting the life logic behind the craft choices, and this kind of narrative method makes the documentary no longer just a record of the process, but an important way to understand the cultural value of traditional crafts.

3.2. Craft practitioners as individuals with multiple identities beyond heritage labels

Traditional craft documentaries often present craftspeople through cultural identities such as "intangible cultural heritage inheritors". This identity shows their important role in preserving and transmitting traditional culture. But this way of presenting them may also make craftspeople become symbols of traditional culture. It may overlook their personal experiences, their social relationships, and their everyday lives. Craftspeople are also real individuals, and they have multiple social identities.

The case of Zhangjiajie Guaiyaomei Tujia Brocade Company in this field study shows the connection between traditional crafts and contemporary social life. Through the "Mothers' Workshop" model, the company encourages local women to take part in Tujia brocade production. This model links traditional craft practices with family life and local employment systems.

Many women involved in the company's craft production have multiple identities. They are not only craftspeople, but also mothers, family members, workers, and participants in local cultural development. Their participation shows the close relationship between traditional crafts and everyday life. In this model, craftspeople's craftsmanship becomes a source of income, and their craft products gain recognition in the market. The Tujia brocade products created through the "Mothers' Workshop" are not only cultural products for display or consumption. They also serve as a medium connecting craftsmanship practice, family life, and women's employment. Through this process, traditional crafts provide economic opportunities and strengthen participants' sense of cultural belonging and social participation.

The identity of craftspeople is gradually formed in multiple social relations and life experiences. Recording the process of craftspeople can also show how traditional crafts are integrated into personal life and local communities [2]. From the perspective of documentary creation, people-centered presentation can focus on the daily state, emotional experience, and social relations of craftspeople, rather than just labeling them as "non-genetic inheritors." In this way, the traditional craft documentary can reveal the dynamic relationship between traditional crafts, personal life, and contemporary society, and also allow the audience to re-understand the significance of crafts from the multiple identities of these characters.

3.3. Traditional craft transmission as an adaptive practice in changing temporal and communication spaces

Traditional crafts are not fixed cultural forms. They are practical processes, and they continuously adapt to changes in social environments, consumer demands, and communication methods.

Jianchuan woodcarving shows this process of change. In the past, people mainly used Jianchuan woodcarving for practical purposes in architectural spaces. Today, it has gradually developed into an artistic expression, and people present it in exhibition and collection spaces. As a result, the application contexts and market demands of woodcarving have also changed. Facing these changes, Shi Shunhua has explored new creative approaches based on traditional craftsmanship. He has reconsidered the value of materials from the perspective of contemporary environmental awareness. Shi found that some old wood had weathered surfaces, but its textures and patterns contained unique aesthetic value. Based on these material characteristics, he developed new forms of creative expression.

At the same time, the communication environment of traditional crafts has also changed. Shi Shunhua uses new media platforms to present the production process of woodcarving. Through these platforms, traditional woodcarving has moved from the traditional studio environment into a wider communication space.

The inheritance of traditional crafts is not only the continuation of skills, but also the response of craftspeople to the changes in creative methods and communication environments. When documentary focuses on these changes, it does more than just record how the craft changes. It presents how craftspeople actively redefine tradition and how to make tradition relate to the contemporary social environment. In this way, the documentary itself has also become a part of the continuous inheritance of traditional handicrafts.

4. Implications for people-centered representation in traditional craft documentaries

4.1. Establishing the foundation for the representation of craft practitioners through in-depth interviews and observation

The characterization of traditional craft documentaries first needs to establish a comprehensive

understanding of the subject. After determining the subject of the shooting, the creator can establish a continuous communication relationship with the craftspeople through interviews, follow-up shooting, etc. By understanding their learning experience, employment process, creative concept, and daily state, the documentary can break through the surface display of craftspeople and make the characters based on real-life experience. At the same time, observation can help creators discover the status of characters in different life scenes, so that the craftspeople in the documentary are no longer just "producers" who complete the skill display, but become complete individuals with personal experience, emotional expression, and realistic choices. Through the combination of interviews and observations, the documentary can more truly present the relationship between craftspeople and their works, families, and the social environment, and provide a rich foundation for the shaping of characters.

4.2. Enriching the representation of craft practitioners through multiple perspectives

Traditional handicraft documentaries should not only rely on the self-narration of craftspeople. The creator can also use the evaluation of relevant people, the environmental details of the workplace, and other activities of the craftspeople. In this way, the creator can observe the shooting objects from different angles. The creator can also explore the inspiration and motivation behind the creation of excellent crafts. Expanding the perspective of observation is not simply to increase the number of interviewees. It is to build a richer narrative space through the relationship between the characters. In this way, craftspeople can be presented in the documentary as real individuals. Through the presentation of multiple perspectives, the documentary can break through the single identity of craftspeople. This is so that craftspeople are not only practitioners of traditional skills, but also realistic individuals. They have personal experience, emotional relationships, and social roles.

4.3. Strengthening representation through visual expression

Visual language is the decisive content of documentary to realize character image shaping. Traditional handicrafts have strong practicality and process. Therefore, lens expression needs to pay attention to the relationship between craftspeople and skills, works, and living environment, so that the characters can be further enriched at the visual level.

During the shooting process, the close-up lens can highlight the details of handicraft practice, such as hand movements, material textures, and tool use, so that the audience can feel the specific process of craftsmanship practice. At the same time, the presentation of details is not only a record of the production steps, but also a reflection of the empirical judgment formed by the craftspeople in long-term practice. The use of a long lens can retain the continuity of the handicraft production process and reduce the fragmentation of the practice. Through a long period of observation, the audience can see the working state of the craftspeople, the rhythm of the creation, and the interaction between the people and the works, thus enhancing the authenticity of the characters. In addition, the environmental lens is also an important way of characterization. The workspace, living environment, and local cultural space of the craftspeople are not only the background of the characters' activities, but also closely related to their creative experience and identity. By showing the specific environment of the characters, the documentary can further present the relationship between craftspeople and local culture and social life.

Therefore, the use of visual language is not simply the pursuit of visual effects but serves the in-depth expression of the characters. Through detailed presentation, process recording, and environmental display, documentaries can transform the experiences, emotions, and living conditions of craftspeople into perceptible image content.

5. Conclusion

Based on qualitative research on three traditional craft cases, this study examines the representation of craftspeople in traditional craft documentaries. The findings show that craftspeople are not only practitioners of traditional crafts but also important participants in their inheritance and development. Their accumulated practical experience, multiple social identities, and responses to social changes together provide a foundation for the continuity and development of traditional crafts. This study argues that traditional craft documentaries can strengthen the representation of craftspeople through in-depth interviews and observations, multiple perspectives, and visual expressions.

With the continuous development of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, documentary creation has gained new possibilities. However, the experiences, knowledge, and emotions of real individuals still have irreplaceable value. Traditional craft documentaries should not only document craftsmanship itself but also present the relationships between people and materials, people and everyday life, and people and society. Through these representations, documentaries can reveal and transmit the humanistic values behind traditional crafts.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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