



Losing Intangible Heritage under the Preservation Projects of Tangible Heritage

- A Case Study on a Reputed Lunar New Year Paintings Town Yangliuqing, China

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On the basis of fully understanding the connotation and characteristics of intangible cultural heritage, this paper combed the preservation work of the Yangliuqing Town which is the National Historical Cultural Town in Tianjin, China. The author finds that preservation work had always focused on the tangible culture. And under these preservation planning, some historical sites are restored properly. And some construction improves the people's living condition. But during this process, some construction destroys the human environment inadvertently, and the development of the Lunar New Year Paintings industry also hits a bottleneck, leading to the decline of the characteristic of the "New Year pictures Town". Based on this problem, this paper puts forward the suggestions such as enriching the theme of Lunar New Year Paintings and enacting preferential tax policies.

Keywords: intangible heritage, Yangliuqing Town, cultural space

Introduction

The historical and cultural preservation of Chinese urban system is made up of the National Historical Cultural City, National Historical Cultural Town and National Historical Cultural Village. Compared with the city, the economy in towns is not as much as developed, and there is not much more urban construction in towns. So the environment in towns is more close to the nature. However, the preservations of the town has always copied the conservation paradigm of Historical and Cultural Cities, and those just focused on the tangible heritage while ignoring the intangible heritage, leading to the towns lacking spiritual culture.

With the development of regional economic integration, the richness and diversity of world culture have been greatly challenged, and the uniqueness and differences of traditional culture have disappeared or weakened rapidly. In this circumstances, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization put the protection and development of the diversity of the human cultural into an important situation, and it declares that the preservation of the intangible culture is the main work to develop the diversity of the human cultural. In contemporary, many countries such as Japan, Italy, Germany, France and so on begin to start the traditional colour research, the traditional clothes to set up good country images. The Japan is the earliest country that establish laws to preserve the intangible culture¹. The South Korea takes advantages of the intangible culture to attract foreigners to experience the traditional festivals or life. In Italy, there are many ecological country tourism and delicious food culture tourism to show the characteristic traditional art. From this, we can see that the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage plays a vital role to sustain the diversity human culture².

Since China resumes the situation in the UNESCO, and signed the International Convention for the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the preservation of the intangible cultural has become the main work to the preservation of the historical and cultural. During the long evolution process, the ancient town formed a relatively



complete traditional custom, life style, etc. Intangible culture is the sole of the ancient towns, together with the material life, they reflect the value of the social life under the special historical and cultural environment.

This paper takes Yangliuqing, which is the National Historical Cultural Town as the specific case to analyse this phenomenon. There are plenty of outstanding historical sites which were built in Ming or Qing dynasty. And there are also lots of intangible cultural heritage such as Lunar New Year Paintings, Kites and Paper-cutting³. These intangible cultural heritage reached its peak in the Ming and Qing dynasties, by now, much folk-custom is still exist. Among them, the Yangliuqing Lunar New Year Paintings is one of the four most famous "Chinese New Year Paintings"⁴. Based on these problems, the paper intends to make an effective evaluation on the tangible preservation plan implementation, and analyse the effect on the intangible culture space and the inheritance which made by the implementation.

1. The introduction of Yangliuqing

Yangliuqing (Figure 1), a famous town in northern China with a long history, located in the southwest of Tianjin. And it is one of the towns of Xiqing which is an administrative unit of Tianjin. As the Grand Canal flows from the south of the township, Yangliuqing became an important wharf during the Ming and Qing dynasties. So the cultural exchange was frequent and developed unique folk culture. Therefore, there are lots of historical relics and historic sites in this town, including two National Officially Protected Sites, five City Officially Protected Sites and ten Unmovable Cultural Relics⁵. The residential compounds in the township are the outstanding representative architecture in the local area. They are very aesthetic with the exquisite brick carving and unique architectural structure. The Peiping-Tianjin Campaign Memorial Hall is another significant historical relic, and it is the Tianjin Patriotism Education Base now. In addition, there are also many other Ming and Qing dynasties relics like the Puliang Tower and the Wenchang Pavilion. Therefore, Yangliuqing was selected as the fourth batch of National Historical and Cultural in 2008, and the Liujié village in the town was selected as the fourth batch of Traditional Village.



Figure 1 The view of the Yangliuqing downtown , the Grand Canal and the residential building



Yangliuqing formed rich characteristic intangible heritage because of frequent culture exchanging. They has typical historical, literary, art and scientific value (Figure 2, 3, 4). Yangliuqing has one National Intangible Cultural Heritage- Yangliuqing Lunar New Year Paintings. Now, 50 workshops and 700 staffs are engaged in this industry⁶. Besides, there are two City Intangible Cultural Heritage of Tianjin, which are Yangliuqing fly kites and paper-cutting. And other intangible culture such as Folk Hua-hui, brick carving and Gandaying are also attractive.



Figure 2 The Yangliuqing Lunar New Year Painting made in Qing dynamic



Figure 3 The Yangliuqing Lunar New Year Painting made in the Republic of China



Figure 4 The Yangliuqing Lunar New Year Painting made in contemporary

With the rapid development of urbanization, the government put forward a series of plans to preserve the historical culture of the town. Lacking the specific preservation norms for the National Historical Cultural Town, the government copied the conservation paradigm of National Historical Cultural City, which made different impact on the tangible heritage and intangible heritage.



2. The preservation planning of Yangliuqing

Most of the historical and cultural relics of Yangliuqing located in the township, and most of them were built in Ming or Qing dynasty. These relics suffered from nature or man-made destruction during the long history. Therefore, every plan try to put forward terms to preserve them.

The earliest planning was put forward in 1996, *The Master Planning of Yangliuqing (1996-2010)*. In this planning, Yangliuqing would be constructed as a tourist town based on its historical cultural heritage, but there were no specific preservation measures.

In *The Master Planning of Xiqing (2005-2020)*, the government would like to build Yangliuqing as the “Lunar New Year Paintings Town in China” and the “Ancient town in the west of Tianjin”. To enrich the tourism projects, the government try to show all historical culture of Xiqing in Yangliuqing township. Moreover, the planning emphasizes it would preserve the traditional streets and lanes, the spatial and the landscape of the Grand Canal, and promote the economic develop by the tourism construction. Then the government put forward detailed preservation and development measures on the tangible culture in the township, including making a regulatory detailed plan. Particularly, there are no detailed preservation measures on the intangible culture but only a programmatic goal to inherit the culture.

The Preservation Planning of Yangliuqing Historical Cultural Town was put forward in 2011. Under this plan, the township was divided into the core zone, the development control zone and the buffer zone (Figure 5). And emphasis to keep the traditional scale of the street and lanes, use the traditional brick to pave the way. Moreover, different measures such as regulation and demolition to different historical architecture and monument was put forward. According to this plan, the situation of the traditional architecture, public space, and the texture of the street improved, but there also exists some deficiencies.

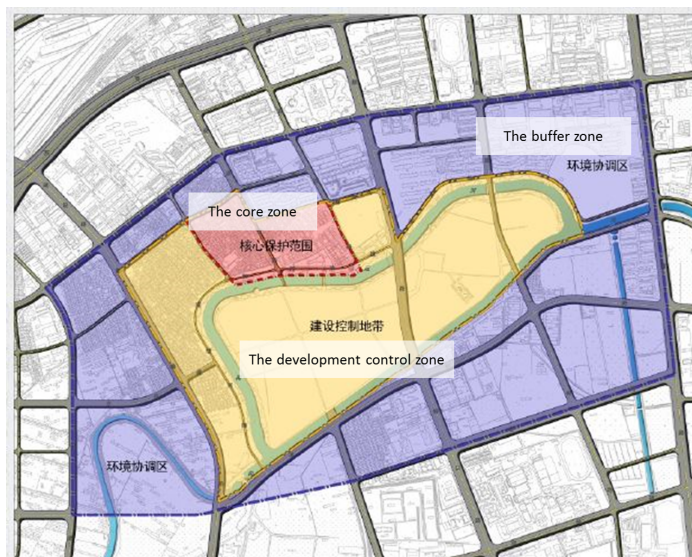


Figure 5 The different preservation scope

3. The preservation of the tangible heritage in Yangliuqing

Since every plan pays more attention on the preservation of the historical cultural heritage during the past twenty years, especially the tangible heritage. This paper will give an evaluation of the implementation on the tangible heritage.



Figure 6 The preservation consequences of the architectures and the texture in township

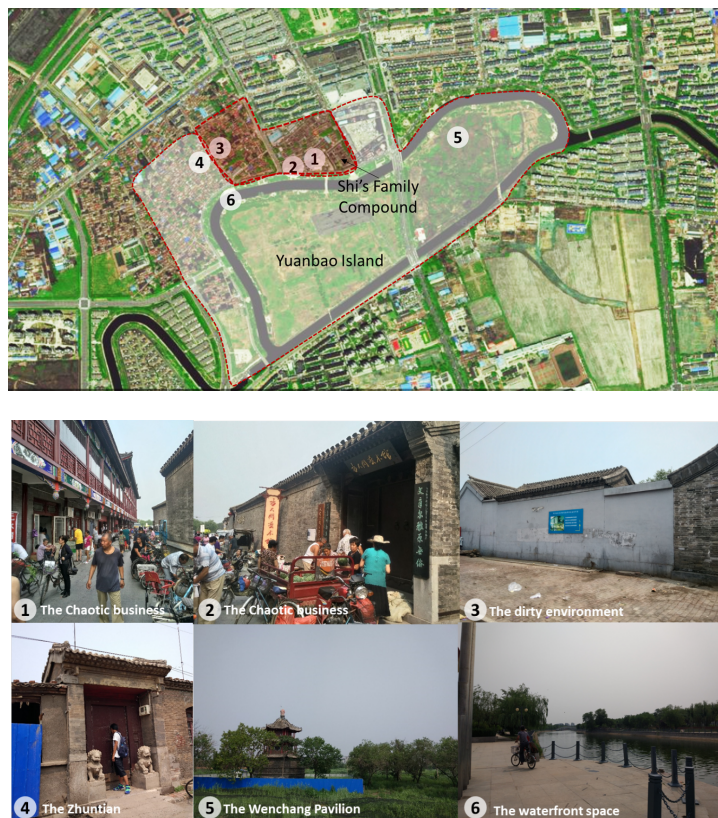


Figure 7 The deficiencies of the preservation

3.1 Positive preservation in architecture, negative coordination in surroundings

The core preservation zone is about 14.5 hectares, and there are lots of compounds in this zone, especially the outstanding Shi's Family Compound. The preservation planning stipulates that these officially protected sites must



be preserved and used according with *the Cultural Relics Protection Law of the People's Republic of China*, and maintain the integrity of the architecture and show the connotation of the culture. Now, the Shi's Family Compound is used as the Yangliuqing Museum, which has been a great scenic spot in the local area. The other compounds are transformed as the art gallery or study center, which improves the vitality of the historic architecture (Figure 6-1, 6-3).

The preservation planning emphasizes that the architectures surrounding the compounds should be coordinate with the compounds. In the investigation, we find that the architecture in the north of the Shi's Family Compound are mainly built with cyan brick and gray tiles, and these architecture are used as art museum or Lunar New Year Paintings workshops, etc. The architectural style and the business format are coordinate with the compounds. While along the Ruyi Street (Figure 6-2), which is an important street in the core zone, there are lots of street vendors selling low-end antique. Another important street, the snack street (Figure 6-5), there is still no merchants. In the west of the Shi's Family Compound, there are lots of business architecture copied those in Ming and Qing dynasties. Although the style of the architecture is coordinate with the surrounding historical, the business formats are clutter. There are lots of shops selling hardware, appliances, etc. And the formats reduced the quality of the historical space (Figure 7-1, 7-2).

According to the consequence of the PPGIS⁷, we can also find that most people think that the core zone is deserved to visit (Figure 8), and 70% think the streets and lanes have historical cultural value. And 75% interviewees think the Yangliuqing Lunar New Year Paintings has historical cultural value, and most of them are the local people.



Figure 8 The overall cognition of the interviewees on historical and cultural value

In the west of the core preservation zone, there are lots of common residential buildings. The Peiping-Tianjin Campaign Memorial Hall is located in this area, but because of lacking the obvious guides, it is hard to find this museum hall. Besides, the environment around the memorial hall is so dreadful that little tourists come to visit it. From the investigation, we find that only 46% interviewees realize the historical value of the memorial hall, which is far from the plan's primary target.

The development control zone is about 95.4 hectares. On the nearest east of the Shi's Family Compounds, there are lots of business buildings copied the style of Ming and Qing dynasties. In the process of the urbanization, to improve the efficiency of the land usage, the government merged lots of rural settlements located in the east of the town into different huge neighbourhoods. And many workshops engaged in Lunar New Year Paintings, fly kites and paper-cutting were demolished. To avoid the fading of historical cultural, the government plans a business street specially to provide place for the folklore artists to sell Lunar New Year Paintings and fly kites (Figure 6-6). In the west of the development control zone, it has not been developed because of the lack of capital. Neither does the Yuanbao Island on the south of the Shi's Family Compound (Figure 7).



There are many historical monuments and structures in the core zone and development control zone. But according to the investigation, most of these heritages are in the abandoned situation (Figure 9), though the time node is close to the deadline of the plan⁸. With little guide symbols, it is hard to find these heritage spots, so few tourists would like to visit them (Figure 7-4, 7-5).

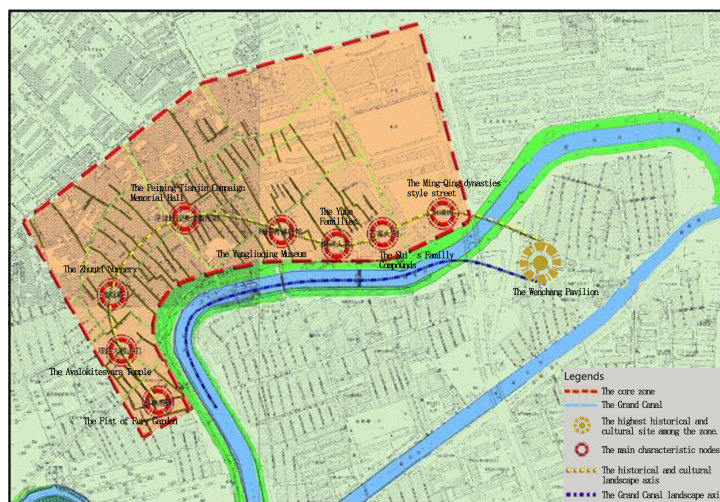


Figure 9 The tourism line and the distribution of the spots

3.2 The public space is lacking of vitality

The preservation planning of Yangliuqing put a systematically plan on the public space in the core area. According to the planning, the construction should build abundant public space, especially the folklore tourism area and the landscape space along the Grand Canal. Besides, it should improve the significant space which could show the characteristic of the town, such as the people square.

While according to the investigation, there are little public space for tourists to rest, so few tourists would like to take their spare time on the street or lanes. Moreover, the government planted plenty of willow trees along the canal to improve the walking environment and reappear the historical scene, however, it is lack of recreation facilities so there is few person staying at this place. In addition, the style of the portal space in Yangliuqing town is chaotic. Ming and Qing dynasties commercial buildings, modern residential buildings, western style pillar buildings and so on, weakened the historical and cultural characteristics of the town.

3.3 The great difference of the texture

In the preservation planning text, it is proposed to control the style in the two sides of the historic streets, and the architecture along the street should be coordinate with the northern traditional residential buildings. Moreover, it should maintain the history scale and keep the integrity of the interface. And in fact, most of the ancient texture are preserved, and they are attractive to the tourists. According to the planning, the government widen the Ruyi Street to make the space more abundant.

But the texture in the development control zone is great different from that in the core zone. It is inconceivable that there exists a 1.2 hectares park-lot next to the Shi's Family Compounds (Figure 10), which is extremely uncoordinated with the ancient texture, and the environment is unattractive because of lacking landscape design. The zone in the west of the development control zone has not been developed, there are still many common residential houses. And the interface of the street and the public space is not attractive, either.



Figure 10 The incorporate texture

3.4 The weakness of the plan

According to the consequences of the PPGIS, we find that the residents think the old train station has great historical value (Figure 11, 12). Because the old train station took great convenience to the local people, and this two floors Germany building made by brick was a great grand architecture at past. This old train station occupied part of their memory, so they think this station has historical value. However, there is no preservation measures to preserve it. Moreover, another heritage the Zhunti Nunnery, which was built in Qing Dynasty, has collapsed due to the weak preservation consciousness and lacking capital, although it is one of the nodes at the tourism line planned.

According to the PPGIS interview, many interviewees put the historical and cultural signs on the Shi' Family Compound, the Peiping-Tianjin Campaign Memorial Hall, and the Yangliuqing Museum, etc. From the nuclear density analysis, we can find that the colour in this area is the deepest. This reflects that the interviewees are satisfied with the architectural relics which are repaired and took advantages of properly. But the preservation to the monuments such as the Zhunti Nunnery and the Wenchang Pavilion is need to improve. In addition, the planning should pay more attention on the local residents' memory, especially the old train station.



Figure 11 The local residents' cognition on the landscape value



Figure 12 The tourists' cognition on the landscape value

4. The preservation of the intangible culture in Yangliuqing

Except for the tangible heritage, Yangliuqing has rich intangible heritage because of the convenient transportation. Yangliuqing is rich in the birch-leaf pear, which is the necessary material to make the wood model of the Lunar New Year Paintings. So Yangliuqing was famous for its Lunar New Year Paintings in history. And the Yangliuqing Lunar New Year Paintings was listed in the first batch of intangible cultural heritage list in 2006.



In history, some families produced Lunar New Year Paintings by themselves as their avocation, they produced and sold their own products. The others are the workshops which have abundant capital. And lots of painters, wood model carvers could create new paintings together at past. The paintings are usually printed or sold in the workshops or printshops. And the whole industry chain including the production of the pigment and drawing paper, it is also including the subbranch distributing all over the country⁹.

Yangliuqing had become an important production place of Lunar New Year Paintings in Ming and Qing dynasties, and the development of the paintings got to its peak at this time. In addition, one of the Four Great Classical Novels in China- the Story of the Stone, its illustrations adopted the drawing mode of the Yangliuqing Lunar New Year Paintings. However, as the inflow of western paintings and the interruption of the Japanese Aggressive War, lots of Lunar New Year Paintings and wood painting models were destroyed, leading the decline of Lunar New Year Pictures industry. While, after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the culture administration paid great attention on the Lunar New Year Paintings and Paper-cutting industries, and many precious masterpieces were saved. However, the "Culture Revolution" caused 60% wood painting models being fired, and the Lunar New Year Pictures industry was hit seriously. After the Reform and Opening in 1978, this bad situation was improved, and more and more people collected and research the folklore art. At this time, the century-store Yuchenghao began to produce paintings again, and after 13 years' collecting and sorting out the wood painting models as well as the paintings, this store opened for business in 1993. But because of the urban construction around 2002, this old store had to be demolished. The entire village where it was located was also be demolished. The urban construction which was to promote the urbanization broke up the industrial chain of the Lunar New Year Pictures unintentionally¹⁰.

To make up for this damage and enhance the characteristic of the town to attract more tourists, the government plans an area to develop the folklore culture. There are lots of workshops selling paper-cutting, fly kites and clay figurine, especially the Lunar New Year Paintings. However, except for the well-known workshops such as the Yuchenghao and Nianhua Zhang, there are a little tourists visiting the town which caused the dull business. The reasons are from many aspects:

4.1 The Lunar New Year Paintings' theme is lacking of innovation

After having an investigation with the shop-owners, the author got that it need to carve the wood into different patterns, then print and paint it. Therefore, it will take a long time to create a new theme, and due to being shortage of staffs and creative ideas, most of the shopkeepers are not willing to create a new one. So the themes of the Lunar New Year Paintings aren't attractive to the consumers, especially the young consumers¹¹. In fact, the young man are the main consumer group, so the number of the paintings fall down due to few people would like to buy them.

4.2 The staffs do not understand the connotation of the Lunar New Year Paintings.

Most of the staffs in the workshops are from other places. These groups cannot understand the connotation of the New Year pictures, and their works usually don't match the real style of the Yangliuqing lunar New Year Pictures. In addition, it is difficult for them to create outstanding masterpieces.

4.3 The industry chain was broken

The process of the Lunar New Year Paintings includes drafting, carving the wood, painting, coloring and mounting. It need professional persons to finish one of the produce. As it is difficult to master the whole process, so the apprentices are usually engaged in one or two specific process in the whole life. And as these process are inherited



by their families, so each family has their own advantages. In history, the folk artists, wood carvers and the handicraftsmen created abundant Lunar New Year Paintings. However, with the development of the urbanization, lots of villages are demolished and merged into the large neighborhoods. In this process, many workshops were closed down. This causes them difficult to finish one bulk order¹². According to our investigation, some workshops tried to take the bulk order over, and then assigned different workshops to produce. As a result, there are many different styles in the same batch order, which left negative effect on the Lunar New Year Paintings. Therefore, the number of the Lunar New Year Paintings' products declines this years.

4.4 The products lose culture connotation

As the number of the workshops and staffs is declining, many merchants adopt-machines to print instead of the traditional wood carving. This behavior caused the loss of culture connotation of the Lunar New Year Pictures, so fewer and fewer consumers think it deserves to buy it¹³.

4.5 Lacking of advertising

As the theme of the Lunar New Year Paintings is not attractive to the consumers, and because of less dissemination, fewer and fewer consumers know about the Paintings and would like to buy them. Moreover, the groups that buy the pictures almost are the collectors, dealers and franchiser. To buy the real artwork, these people tend to buy paintings at the workshops in Yangliuqing instead of the shops in market. This has led to fewer sales of New Year pictures and fewer stores.

5. Summary and suggestions

From the analysis above, we can find that the physical space is improved under serious of preservation plannings, especially the historical architectures and the lanes in the core zone. While the texture in the development control zone needs to be transformed to be coordinate with that in the core zone. And the public space in both zone need to be improved. In addition, to build up the Historical Cultural Town, the government paid more attention on the material. While the intangible culture is not preserved and inherited properly. The urban construction led to lots of the Lunar New Year Paintings workshops being demolished. To save the Lunar New Year Paintings industry, the government planed an area for the merchants to sell paintings and paper-cutting. However, the sales and fame are declining.

As we all know, the inheritance of the culture cannot leave from the material carrier, neither of the intangible culture. The intangible culture is the living heritage, so its material carrier also has the living features. Among them, the culture space is the indispensable material carrier to exist, inherit and create. The communities, villages, religious sites and natural environment etc. are all could be the carrier to the intangible culture¹⁴. Without these carrier, it is impossible to inherit and create the culture¹⁵. Therefore, it is very important to build the culture space to preserve the intangible culture. However, the government doesn't realize this problem, and they doesn't realize that it is important to maintain the industry chain. Besides, the planning area for selling Lunar New Year Paintings is too cramped to attractive tourists. This causes the decline of the sales, and many artists had to do other work because of the low income.

Therefore, in present, in order to improve the visibility and sales of the Lunar New Year Paintings, the government should implement the funding system for the artist, so as to encourage more people to devote themselves into creating Lunar New Year Paintings. And it is important to build culture creation space. What's more, it is important to enrich the theme of the pictures combining the era backgrounds, and let more people appreciate the Lunar New



Year Paintings and buy them. This is the key sector to improve the pictures industry. Moreover, the urban construction we mentioned above caused many workshops close down, the key reason is that the unbalance between the input and output. So lots of people choose to do other work. And that leads to the breakdown of the culture space. Therefore, with the development of our life, the paintings should be incorporated with people's new demands. It is better to register a trademark or apply for patent to maintain the characteristic of the Yangliuqing Lunar New Year Paintings. Encouraging the staffs to create more gadgets with the characteristics of the Lunar New Year Paintings to make it more popular and expand the sales channels.

Moreover, it is important to let more people be able to identify the quality of the Lunar New Year Paintings, and prevent the low quality products leave a negative impact on the Paintings. The last but not least, the merchants could cooperate with the universities, museums and the exhibition centres, and the government should better to reduce the tax. By this, it could make the Yangliuqing Lunar New Year Paintings more popular and improve its sales.

Endnotes:

¹ Fei Long. 2005. The Current Protection Situation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage outside China. *Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art*. No.5:59-66.

² Dong Jianyi. 2014. "Let the Area 'Folk Art' Into the Art Classroom." Master diss., Shenyang Normal University:6.

³ Ma Xianying. 2014. "Research on the Historical Famous Towns Protection and Development Strategy under the Background of Tourism Development ——Taking Yang Liuqing, Xi Qing District of Tian Jin for Example." Master diss., Tianjin University:19-20.

⁴ Shen Hong. 2007. *Yangliuqing Nianhua ZhiLv*. Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe:57-77.

⁵ See the Preservation Planning of Yangliuqing Historical Cultural Town.

⁶ Jizhu Xiangchou I. <http://tv.cntv.cn/video/VSET100216296129/417c3b2ae4764becbed5d259b5cc8a13> (accessed February 17, 2015)

⁷ It means Public Participation Geographic Information System, it makes up for the traditional GIS mainly depends on remote sensing. The interviewers put up the different value signs on the map to express their cognition to the sites. In this way, the people's subjective activities such as values, attitudes and ideas, etc could be analysed together. In this survey, we interviewed 207 samples, and asked which sites do they think have historical, aesthetic, recreational, ecological, characteristic, spiritual or economic value. In this paper, I mainly analyze the historical value.

⁸ The deadline of the Preservation Planning of Yangliuqing Historical Cultural Town is 2020.

⁹ Li Wuqing. 2009. *Yishu Shequ Xin Tansuo*. Liaoyang: Liaoning Minzu Chubanshe.

¹⁰ Shen Hong. 2007. *Yangliuqing Nianhua ZhiLv*. Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe:77-105.

¹¹ The shopkeeper A, interview by the author, February 8, 2018.

¹² Resident A, interview by the author, July 04, 2017.

¹³ The shopkeeper B, interview by the author, July 20, 2017.

¹⁴ Xing Li. 2006. The Substantial Layer of Oral Non-substantial heritage. *Journal of the Central University for Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* 33, no.6: 80.

¹⁵ Yang xueyin. 2007. Ecological Anthropology and the Protection of Cultural Spaces-Taking Yunnan Ethnic Culture Reserve as an Example. *Journal of the Guangxi University For Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)* 29, no.3:43.

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Image sources

Figure 1-4: Cited from the Internet.

Figure 5: Cited from *The Preservation Planning of Yangliuqing Historic Cultural Town*.

Figure 6-7: Photoed by the author.

Figure 8: Drawn by the author.

Figure 9: Cited from *The Preservation Planning of Yangliuqing Historic Cultural Town*.

Figure 10-12: Drawn by the author.

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