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Living Inheritance and Innovative Expression of Intangible Cultural Heritage Quyi: A Case Study of Beilu Shandong Qinshu

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Abstract: This study comprehensively examines the living inheritance and innovative expression of Beilu Shandong Qinshu, a highly representative form of traditional Chinese Quyi, situated within the broader theoretical framework of intangible cultural heritage preservation. Using a rigorous qualitative case study approach, this research systematically explores the underlying transmission mechanisms, contemporary performance practices, and innovative transformations that characterize this traditional art form today. The in-depth analysis highlights how traditional apprenticeship-based inheritance models and active community participation fundamentally sustain cultural continuity across generations. Furthermore, it demonstrates how evolving performance contexts and novel expressive strategies reflect an ongoing, necessary adaptation to rapidly changing modern social environments. The empirical findings clearly indicate that Beilu Shandong Qinshu is successfully maintained through a highly dynamic interaction between historical tradition and contemporary innovation, where its enduring vitality depends heavily on continuous artistic reinterpretation rather than mere static preservation. At the same time, the strategic integration of modern performance spaces and advanced digital media significantly expands its communicative reach to younger audiences, though it simultaneously raises critical scholarly concerns regarding the maintenance of cultural authenticity and historical depth. Ultimately, this study significantly contributes to the academic understanding of living heritage by emphasizing adaptive mechanisms as the primary key to long-term cultural sustainability. It strongly suggests that a carefully balanced integration of traditional transmission methods, robust institutional support, and innovative digital dissemination is absolutely essential for the successful, long-term preservation of global intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage; quyi; living inheritance; cultural sustainability; innovation

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Significance

Intangible cultural heritage constitutes an essential pillar of human civilization, encompassing a diverse array of practices, representations, and expressions that are transmitted across generations. These cultural elements are not merely relics of the past but living traditions that adapt and evolve in response to societal changes, serving as vital conduits for identity formation and cultural continuity. Among the myriad forms of intangible cultural heritage, Quyi stands out as a traditional Chinese art form that integrates oral storytelling, musical performance, and dramatic expression [1]. Its multifaceted nature allows it to function as both a repository of historical narratives and a dynamic medium for creative innovation.

Beilu Shandong Qinshu, a distinctive genre within the broader Quyi tradition, exemplifies the intricate interplay between regional culture and artistic expression. Rooted in the cultural landscape of northern Shandong Province, this art form reflects the linguistic, musical, and thematic characteristics unique to its locality [1]. Its performance

style, characterized by rhythmic storytelling and melodic accompaniment, embodies the collective memory and aesthetic sensibilities of the region. Moreover, Beilu Shandong Qinshu serves as a living archive, preserving the intangible cultural heritage of its community while simultaneously providing a platform for artistic experimentation and reinterpretation.

This study situates Beilu Shandong Qinshu within the broader discourse of cultural sustainability, highlighting its dual role as a vessel of tradition and a catalyst for innovation. By examining its historical evolution, contemporary practices, and potential for future development, the research underscores the importance of fostering living inheritance as a strategy for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how traditional art forms can remain relevant and vibrant in an era of rapid social and cultural transformation.

1.2. Research Objectives and Scope

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the mechanisms through which Beilu Shandong Qinshu achieves living inheritance and adapts innovatively to contemporary contexts. By examining this traditional art form, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper theoretical and practical understanding of intangible cultural heritage preservation. Specifically, the study focuses on the transmission practices that sustain Beilu Shandong Qinshu, the roles and agency of practitioners in maintaining and transforming the art, and the ways in which contemporary elements are integrated into its traditional framework [1]. These aspects are explored to uncover how this cultural heritage navigates the challenges posed by modernization and globalization while retaining its core identity.

The scope of this research encompasses a detailed analysis of both historical and contemporary practices within Beilu Shandong Qinshu. This includes an exploration of oral transmission methods, apprenticeship systems, and the evolving performance contexts that reflect broader societal changes. Additionally, the study examines the creative strategies employed by practitioners to innovate within the art form, such as incorporating modern themes, technologies, and performance techniques [2]. By using Beilu Shandong Qinshu as a focused case study, the research aims to generate insights that are applicable to the safeguarding of other forms of intangible cultural heritage, offering strategies for balancing tradition with innovation in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework of Intangible Cultural Heritage

The theoretical framework of intangible cultural heritage is grounded in concepts that emphasize the dynamic and participatory nature of cultural transmission, as well as the capacity of traditions to endure and evolve within shifting societal landscapes. Living inheritance serves as a foundational principle, highlighting the importance of active engagement and intergenerational participation in the preservation of cultural practices [3]. This approach underscores the idea that heritage is not static but rather a living entity that thrives through continuous interaction and adaptation. Similarly, cultural sustainability focuses on the ability of traditions to maintain relevance and vitality amidst external pressures, such as urbanization, globalization, and technological advancements. It emphasizes the need for cultural practices to evolve while retaining their core identity, ensuring their survival in modern contexts.

Adaptive resilience complements these frameworks by addressing the mechanisms through which cultural heritage adapts to change without losing its essence. This concept recognizes the inherent flexibility of intangible cultural heritage, allowing it to respond to societal transformations while safeguarding its authenticity. Together, these theoretical constructs provide a comprehensive lens for understanding the preservation and evolution of art forms like Beilu Shandong Qinshu, which are deeply embedded in local traditions yet face challenges posed by modernization. The interplay between continuity

and innovation becomes critical in fostering cultural vitality, as it enables heritage practices to resonate with contemporary audiences while maintaining their historical significance. However, the process is not without obstacles, as the pressures of modernization often threaten the delicate balance between adaptation and preservation. By leveraging opportunities for cultural continuity, such as community engagement and creative reinterpretation, intangible cultural heritage can remain a vibrant and enduring component of human expression.

2.2. Studies on Quyi and Beilu Shandong Qinshu

Existing research on Quyi has predominantly centered on its historical evolution, stylistic diversity, and regional distinctions, reflecting its role as a multifaceted form of traditional performing arts [4]. Scholars have extensively examined its narrative frameworks, vocal techniques, and the interplay between music and storytelling, emphasizing its cultural significance and artistic complexity. Within this broader context, Beilu Shandong Qinshu has garnered attention as a distinctive genre, with studies delving into its narrative structure, melodic patterns, and performance methodologies. These investigations have illuminated its unique characteristics, such as the integration of spoken and sung elements and the intricate relationship between performer and audience.

However, significant gaps remain in the understanding of how Beilu Shandong Qinshu is transmitted across generations and how it adapts to contemporary cultural and social contexts. Existing literature has yet to fully address the mechanisms through which this art form negotiates the balance between preserving traditional elements and incorporating modern influences [5]. Moreover, there is limited exploration of the ways in which performers innovate within the constraints of established conventions, as well as how audiences engage with these evolving expressions. These gaps underscore the need for a more nuanced analysis of the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, offering insights into the living inheritance of this intangible cultural heritage in a rapidly changing world.

3. Living Inheritance Practices of Beilu Shandong Qinshu

3.1. Traditional Modes of Transmission

The inheritance of Beilu Shandong Qinshu has historically relied on a traditional transmission model centered on oral teaching and apprenticeship-based learning. As a representative form of Quyi, its artistic techniques, narrative style, melodic patterns, and performance skills are primarily passed down through direct interaction between masters and apprentices. This mode of transmission emphasizes "learning by listening, observing, and practicing," in which younger performers gradually internalize vocal techniques, rhythmic control, and expressive storytelling through long-term participation in rehearsals and live performances [6].

Among these modes, the master-apprentice relationship plays a particularly important role. Senior artists not only teach performance techniques but also transmit the cultural values, aesthetic principles, and historical memory embedded in the art form [7]. Through face-to-face instruction, apprentices acquire a deeper understanding of pronunciation, local dialect usage, emotional expression, and the narrative rhythm that characterize Beilu Shandong Qinshu. This process reflects the typical feature of intangible cultural heritage as a "living tradition," where knowledge is preserved through human practice rather than written documentation alone.

In addition to formal apprenticeship, family-based inheritance and community transmission also constitute important pathways for the preservation of this art form [8]. In some local communities, older generations introduce younger family members to traditional repertoires, performance customs, and regional cultural meanings, allowing the tradition to continue within everyday social life. Community cultural activities, temple fairs, folk festivals, and local performances further provide spaces in which Beilu Shandong Qinshu is practiced, observed, and learned collectively.

However, under the influence of modernization and urbanization, these traditional modes of transmission are facing considerable challenges. The reduction of folk performance spaces, the aging of senior practitioners, and the declining interest among younger generations have all weakened the continuity of oral and apprenticeship-based inheritance. Therefore, understanding the traditional transmission mechanisms of Beilu Shandong Qinshu is essential for exploring sustainable strategies of living inheritance in contemporary society.

3.2. Contemporary Performance Practices

In contemporary contexts, Beilu Shandong Qinshu has gradually transitioned from traditional folk settings to more diversified and institutionalized performance spaces. This transformation reflects not only changes in cultural dissemination environments but also the evolving expectations of modern audiences. While traditionally performed in rural gatherings, local festivals, and informal community occasions, it is now frequently presented in cultural centers, heritage exhibitions, educational institutions, and staged performances. This spatial shift has led to significant adjustments in performance organization and expressive strategies. Performances are often restructured in terms of duration, narrative density, and stage presentation to suit formal settings and program-based scheduling. As a result, Beilu Shandong Qinshu has developed a more standardized performance format, which enhances its accessibility and communicative clarity for wider audiences beyond its original regional communities.

Another important feature of contemporary performance practice is the diversification of audience groups. In addition to local residents who are familiar with the cultural background of the art form, audiences now include students, urban cultural consumers, and tourists with limited prior exposure [9]. This diversification has encouraged performers to adopt more explicit storytelling techniques and enhanced expressive clarity in vocal delivery, ensuring that cultural meanings can be effectively conveyed across different levels of cultural familiarity.

Furthermore, institutional support has played an increasingly important role in shaping contemporary performance practices. Cultural heritage centers, educational programs, and public cultural initiatives have provided structured platforms for performance and training. These institutions not only offer regular performance opportunities but also contribute to the professionalization and standardization of the art form, thereby strengthening its visibility within broader cultural systems. However, this transformation also brings certain tensions. The shift toward formalized and staged performances may reduce the spontaneity, improvisational interaction, and community-based atmosphere that traditionally characterized Beilu Shandong Qinshu. Therefore, while contemporary performance practices have significantly expanded the reach and social presence of the art form, maintaining the balance between formal presentation and traditional expressive authenticity remains a critical issue in its ongoing development [10].

3.3. Innovative Expression and Digital Integration

In response to rapid socio-cultural transformation and the diversification of audience preferences, Beilu Shandong Qinshu has increasingly incorporated innovative expressive strategies into its traditional performance framework. One prominent trend is the integration of contemporary thematic content into classical narrative structures. Performers gradually introduce modern social topics such as urbanization, intergenerational relations, and cultural identity, allowing the art form to resonate with present-day lived experiences. This thematic adaptation does not alter the fundamental storytelling logic of Qinshu but expands its interpretive space, enabling it to maintain cultural relevance while engaging contemporary audiences.

In addition to thematic innovation, stylistic experimentation has also become an important feature of modern performance practice. Some performers combine traditional melodic patterns with elements of popular music or introduce more dynamic stage movements and expressive gestures to enhance visual engagement. These modifications enrich the aesthetic dimension of Beilu Shandong Qinshu while preserving its core

narrative and musical identity. Such hybridization reflects the creative agency of performers in negotiating between cultural inheritance and artistic renewal.

Moreover, digital media technologies have significantly reshaped the dissemination and preservation of Beilu Shandong Qinshu. Online video platforms, short-form media, and live-streaming technologies have expanded its reach beyond local communities, allowing the art form to enter broader cultural and digital spaces. These technologies not only enhance visibility but also provide new mechanisms for documentation, archiving, and audience interaction. However, this digital expansion also raises concerns regarding simplified representation and potential loss of contextual depth. Therefore, balancing digital accessibility with cultural authenticity has become a key issue in the ongoing innovative development of Beilu Shandong Qinshu.

4. Discussion

4.1. Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings of this study suggest that Beilu Shandong Qinshu evolves through a continuous negotiation between cultural continuity and adaptive transformation. Rather than functioning as a static cultural form, it operates as a dynamic heritage system in which transmission practices, performance contexts, and expressive strategies are constantly reshaped in response to changing social and cultural environments. From the perspective of cultural sustainability, this indicates that the survival of intangible cultural heritage depends not on rigid preservation, but on the capacity for selective adaptation and contextual renewal.

The persistence of apprenticeship-based transmission and community participation ensures the continuity of core artistic knowledge and cultural memory. These traditional mechanisms remain essential in maintaining stylistic integrity and cultural identity, even under conditions of social change. At the same time, the diversification of performance contexts reflects the necessity of responding to broader cultural consumption patterns and institutional influences, as Beilu Shandong Qinshu increasingly moves from rural and informal settings to formal cultural platforms and educational environments. In this sense, the study demonstrates that living heritage is sustained through active reinterpretation rather than passive inheritance, with practitioners playing a central role in balancing continuity and innovation, thereby forming the core logic of its sustainable development.

4.2. Cultural and Theoretical Implications

The case of Beilu Shandong Qinshu offers important insights into the theoretical understanding of intangible cultural heritage, particularly within the frameworks of living heritage and cultural sustainability. The findings reinforce the view that cultural inheritance should not be understood as the passive preservation of fixed forms, but rather as a dynamic and ongoing process of reinterpretation. In this sense, Beilu Shandong Qinshu illustrates how traditional performing arts can maintain continuity while simultaneously adapting to new social, cultural, and institutional environments. This dynamic process extends existing theoretical discussions by emphasizing the active role of practitioners in shaping the evolution of heritage through everyday performance and transmission practices [11].

From a broader perspective, the study also contributes to Quyi research by highlighting the dual identity of regional performing arts as both repositories of local cultural memory and adaptive cultural systems engaged with modernity. The interaction between tradition and innovation observed in this case challenges rigid preservation-oriented approaches and supports a more process-based understanding of intangible cultural heritage. It suggests that sustainability is achieved not through the freezing of cultural forms, but through their continuous negotiation with contemporary realities, where meaning is constantly reconstructed through performance, participation, and cultural exchange [12].

4.3. Practical and Policy Implications

The findings of this study highlight several practical implications for the safeguarding and sustainable development of Beilu Shandong Qinshu and similar forms of intangible cultural heritage. Strengthening structured yet flexible transmission systems is essential. A hybrid model that integrates traditional apprenticeship with institutional education and community-based learning can ensure both the continuity of core artistic knowledge and its adaptability to contemporary contexts. Such an approach can mitigate the risk of knowledge discontinuity caused by generational gaps while maintaining the authenticity of the art form.

Policy support plays a crucial role in sustaining the vitality of practitioners [13]. Targeted measures such as financial subsidies, regular performance opportunities, and systematic training programs can address the declining number of inheritors and improve the overall ecological environment for cultural transmission. Encouraging younger generations to participate in Quyi practices through schools, cultural centers, and public cultural initiatives can contribute to long-term sustainability by expanding the social base of inheritance.

The integration of digital technologies should be strategically promoted as a complementary tool for documentation, dissemination, and audience engagement [14]. Online platforms, short video media, and digital archives can significantly enhance the visibility of Beilu Shandong Qinshu and broaden its audience reach. However, such digitalization should be carefully guided to avoid oversimplification or decontextualization of cultural content, ensuring that the artistic depth and cultural meaning of the tradition are preserved in digital representations.

5. Discussion

5.1. Interplay between Tradition and Innovation

The dynamic relationship between tradition and innovation in Beilu Shandong Qinshu exemplifies the broader challenges and opportunities inherent in the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Tradition serves as the cornerstone of cultural identity, anchoring the practice in historical continuity and providing a sense of authenticity that resonates with both practitioners and audiences. However, the static preservation of traditional forms risks rendering the art form obsolete in rapidly changing social and cultural contexts. Innovation, therefore, emerges as a critical mechanism for ensuring the adaptability and relevance of Beilu Shandong Qinshu in contemporary society.

Practitioners of Beilu Shandong Qinshu navigate this interplay by selectively incorporating modern elements into traditional frameworks, balancing respect for historical authenticity with the need for creative expression. This process often involves reinterpreting traditional narratives, integrating contemporary themes, and experimenting with new performance techniques or technologies. Such innovations not only attract younger audiences but also enable the art form to engage with current societal issues, thereby reinforcing its cultural significance. Importantly, these adaptations are not arbitrary but are guided by a deep understanding of the core values and aesthetic principles that define the tradition.

Theoretical perspectives on cultural sustainability highlight the importance of this dynamic interplay, suggesting that the vitality of intangible cultural heritage depends on its ability to evolve while maintaining its foundational essence. In practical terms, the experiences of Beilu Shandong Qinshu practitioners underscore the need for flexible preservation strategies that empower cultural bearers to innovate within traditional boundaries. This approach ensures that the art form remains a living heritage, capable of bridging the past and present while fostering its future development [1,8].

5.2. Implications for Intangible Cultural Heritage Preservation

The findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of adaptive strategies in the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. By examining the living inheritance of Beilu Shandong Qinshu, this research demonstrates how traditional art forms can integrate modern elements without compromising their cultural essence. Such

integration not only ensures the continued relevance of these practices but also fosters their appeal to contemporary audiences, thereby enhancing their sustainability. This approach challenges the conventional notion that preservation necessitates rigid adherence to historical forms, advocating instead for a dynamic model that embraces innovation as a means of safeguarding tradition.

The implications extend beyond the specific case of Beilu Shandong Qinshu, offering valuable insights for global efforts to protect intangible cultural heritage. In an era of rapid globalization and cultural homogenization, adaptive preservation strategies provide a pathway for diverse traditions to thrive amidst changing societal contexts. By prioritizing flexibility and creative expression, policymakers and practitioners can develop frameworks that support both the authenticity and evolution of cultural practices. This study highlights the importance of viewing heritage preservation as a living process, one that balances respect for historical continuity with openness to contemporary influences, ensuring the vitality of cultural traditions for future generations.

5.3. Policy Recommendations

To ensure the sustainable development of Quyi, it is imperative for policymakers to adopt a multifaceted approach that addresses both the preservation and innovation of this intangible cultural heritage. Prioritizing financial support for cultural practitioners is essential, as it enables them to focus on their craft while fostering an environment conducive to creativity and continuity. Establishing structured platforms for intergenerational transmission can facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills between older and younger generations, ensuring the vitality of Quyi traditions over time. Leveraging digital tools for documentation and dissemination can significantly enhance accessibility and engagement, allowing broader audiences to experience and appreciate these cultural expressions in contemporary contexts. Collaborative efforts between governmental and non-governmental organizations can further amplify these initiatives by pooling resources, expertise, and networks to promote the visibility and viability of Quyi. Such integrated strategies are critical for balancing heritage preservation with the demands of modern society [2].

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Findings

The study emphasizes the importance of living inheritance and innovative practices in safeguarding Beilu Shandong Qinshu, a representative form of intangible cultural heritage. It reveals that the mechanisms of transmission are deeply rooted in oral traditions, apprenticeship systems, and community-based participation, which collectively ensure the continuity of this art form. However, the findings also highlight the necessity of adapting these mechanisms to contemporary contexts, as shifts in societal structures and audience preferences demand new approaches to engagement and dissemination. Creative adaptations in performances, such as the incorporation of modern themes, diverse musical elements, and multimedia technologies, demonstrate the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, allowing the art form to resonate with both traditional audiences and younger generations.

The challenges faced by Beilu Shandong Qinshu in its preservation are multifaceted, encompassing issues such as the declining number of practitioners, limited financial resources, and the pressures of cultural homogenization. Despite these obstacles, the study identifies significant opportunities for sustainable development, including the potential for digital platforms to expand audience reach, the integration of heritage education into formal curricula, and the cultivation of cross-disciplinary collaborations that enhance the visibility and relevance of this cultural practice. By bridging the gap between historical authenticity and contemporary expression, Beilu Shandong Qinshu exemplifies the resilience and adaptability of intangible cultural heritage.

Ultimately, the findings underscore the need for a balanced approach that respects the core values of tradition while embracing innovation as a means of ensuring long-term

viability. This dual strategy not only preserves the cultural identity embedded within Beilu Shandong Qinshu but also enables its evolution in response to changing societal dynamics, securing its place in the cultural landscape for future generations.

6.2. Future Research Directions

Future research on the preservation and innovation of intangible cultural heritage within Quyi genres could benefit from comparative studies that examine shared characteristics and distinct approaches across various forms. Such investigations may reveal underlying patterns in preservation strategies, offering a broader understanding of how different genres adapt to contemporary challenges while maintaining their cultural essence. Additionally, the integration of digital tools and platforms presents a promising avenue for enhancing cultural transmission. Exploring the potential of virtual archives, interactive applications, and online performance spaces could illuminate how technology facilitates accessibility and engagement, particularly among younger audiences. Furthermore, expanding the scope of research to include cross-cultural collaborations could provide valuable insights into the interplay between local traditions and global influences. By examining how diverse cultural contexts interact and contribute to the preservation of intangible heritage, researchers can uncover innovative methods for fostering mutual understanding and sustainable cultural exchange. These directions not only enrich the academic discourse but also offer practical implications for safeguarding and revitalizing Quyi traditions in a rapidly evolving world.

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