**heritage/遗产(Yí Chǎn)**

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China became the State Party of The World Heritage Convention on December 12th, 1985, and started to nominate properties to be considered for inscription on the World Heritage List in the following year. From then on, “Yi Chan” (遗产) in contemporary context has gradually become synonymous with “cultural heritage”, “cultural property” and “cultural capital”. Heritage research and conservation becomes a professional field. By the end of 2021, 56 properties are inscribed on the World Heritage List, including 38 cultural, 14 natural, and 4 mixed. As time goes by, people’s interest in heritage has increased substantially.

The conception of heritage is closely connected with the progress of archaeology especially public archaeology in China. With the rapid process of urbanization and modernization, China has definitely felt the urgency of conservation of culture and nature, like most countries in the world. In recent years, China also sees the threat to cultural diversity from globalization. Currently Chinese scholarship of heritage can be classified into two categories: tangible and intangible heritage. It is the professionals who study the tangible heritage such as huge archaeological sites, monuments, etc. And intangible heritage like living traditions - festivals and ceremonies - are preserved and practiced by Chinese people, while traditional or folk arts and crafts are taken care of by folk artists and craftsmen.

However, long before heritage becomes a professional field, a distinct awareness of heritage can be identified in classical metrical poetry. In ancient times, Chinese men of letters tend to trust and cherish the past. Consequently, themes like nostalgia for hometown, height ascending, and mood like being sentimental about rhythm of the seasons or petals carried away by stream are repeated and stereotyped. This tendency can even be traced in contemporary popular songs. Meanwhile, it cannot be overlooked that the repetition of image and mood is effective in shaping and handing down the intangible, spiritual heritage. In this respect, short metrical poetry is highly credited, because it is flexible for the poet to sketch the scenery, or express his/her instant mood and feelings. For the reader, metrical poetry is easy to chant and recite. Moreover, subject is missing in most cases, and no specific person or event appears in text but often in title (there are exceptions as always, e.g., Li Bai (701-762) once writes “I wish to ride the wind to be home”, and “Not as deep as Wang Lun’s friendship”). Therefore it is quite convenient for readers to be sympathetic to poet’s sensation. Chinese men of letters take “reading eagerly and travelling extensively” as an ideal way of living. Therefore a considerate amount of poetry rendering natural beauties has been composed. Some of the masterpieces have been chanting for so many years that the poems and the sceneries are eventually combined as one, and the poetry even becomes an inseparable part of the nature. Mountain Tai, situated in eastern China, is only 1500 meter in height, but it is prestigious among other mountains, partly because Mencius records the story that when Confucius was on the peak of the Mountain, he exclaimed that the world seemed smaller. The episode makes Mountain Tai a hotspot for men of letters, including Du Fu (712-770), “China’s greatest Tang poet” as BBC documentary addresses. Du Fu directly borrows from the two founders of Confucianism and composes his Mountain Tai poem as follows: “Someday I must climb up to its summit/ Looking down, see how small all the other mountains are.”

If the popularity of Mountain Tai could be traced back to Confucius’ ascending the mountain, Du Fu’s masterpiece, as well as sacrificial ceremony to heaven held by emperors; then the story of Han Shan Temple in Suzhou would owe to one Tang poem- “Mooring by Maple Bridge at Night” (枫桥夜泊) by Zhang Ji (张继, ca. 715-779), whose fame cannot be compared with Du Fu in the least. The poem sounds as follows:

Crows cried at the moonlit, frosty night,

Facing riverside maple and fisherman’s lantern,

In gloom I slept.

Outside Suzhou City, from Han Shan Temple,

Midnight bells reached the boat of wanderers.

The poem was composed at the turbulent period of the Late Tang Dynasty, but it doesn’t mention a word about the historical background. On the contrary, the poem renders the wanderers’ loneliness and anxiety in a simple and straightforward way. At the end of the poem, the poet consoles all the lonely souls with quiet and peaceful Buddhist temple bells. It is this exquisite poem that makes Han Shan Temple prominent among many other Buddhist temples of the lower range of Yangtze River. Through history, Han Shan Temple repeatedly unfolds a drama of destruction and rebirth, and expressions like “crows cried in the moonlight”, “riverside maple and fisherman’s lantern”, as well as “midnight bells” have been inscribed on the heart of Chinese men of letters. For them, Han Shan Temple is almost a place of pilgrimage, where they hand-copy the poem in different styles of calligraphy, and compose their own poems to salute Zhang Ji. Today Han Shan Temple has covered thick layers of cultural memories including historical Buddhist temple, masterpiece Tang poem, poem stone carvings, and the Zen-mood bells. Since 1979, listening to the temple bells on New Year’s Eve has become a ceremony, although the Tang bell had long been lost and replaced, and the Buddhist claim of agony-relieving bells has intertwined with New Year celebration. Interestingly enough, “Jiang Cun Bridge” outside the temple now is considered as “Maple Bridge”, though it is impossible to identify the exact location of the latter. Ultimately, Han Shan Temple and the Tang poem, tangible property and intangible property become as one; the “thing” (物) and the “event”(事) together constitute the “reality” of the Temple. And this “reality” is more of idea, of fantasy, and of feelings than of existence. In a word, Han Shan Temple has been transformed into a symbol of Zen-mood, a timeless sign of Chinese mentality and affection, as well as the heritage which can be handed down.

To a certain extent, the conception of “reality” embodied in Han Shan Temple shares much similarity with philosophy of Ernest Cassirer. When dealing with “things”, especially with historical “things”, Chinese people are in fact not dealing with “things” themselves, but rather with cultural memories about “things”, with language, poetry, myth and ceremony, etc. In other words, “things” in Chinese’s eyes are never simply material, but more cultural and historical. The Sun and the Moon appear frequently in classical poetry. For the former, ancient poets tend to describe its rhythmic movement, for instance, the concise lines “Sun up, work/ Sun down, to rest”, which are cited by Ezra Pound word by word in his Canto XLIX. In other cases, the poet either renders the sunrise in flaming color as Bai Juyi (772-846) does in his “Dreaming of the South” – “At sunrise riverside flowers are redder than fire/ In spring river water is as blue as sapphire”; or the sunset solemnly as Wang Wei (701-761) does - “In desert the only smoke rises straight up/ Over river the Sun sinks round.” In contrast, phases of the Moon is closely connected with sorrow and joy, parting and reunion, as famous poet and essayist Su Dongpo (1037-1101) of the Song Dynasty chants in his Mid-autumn night lyrics: “Men have sorrow and joy, they part and meet/ The moon waxes or wanes/ Things have never been perfect.” Probably owing to that reason, poetry about the Moon often bears a touch of chill and loneliness, like Wang Wei’s picturesque “Moonbeams shine among pine trees/ Spring water runs on rocks”, or Li Bai’s “Raise my cup to invite the Moon/ Moonlight with my Shadow make us three”. Symbolizing perfection and family reunion, the Full Moon can best make wanderers feel homesick. In that respect, both Li Bai and Du Fu leave the posterity well-known lines like “Eyes raised, I see the moon so bright/ Head bent, in homesickness I’m drowned”, and “Dew turns into frost since tonight/ The Moon at hometown is brighter.” Meanwhile, Zhang Jiuling’s “The Moonlight shines over the sea/ People all under the heaven share this moment” somehow go beyond the homesickness for hometown and project the sensation on a broader space. Suppose one day in the future, people might be indifferent to the legend “Chang’e flying to the Moon”, but the Moon as a symbol of homesickness and reunion would remain the same, since all these masterpieces have immersed in the “reality” of the Moon.

So far it can be concluded that language and poetry are two valid means to form the intangible heritage. Consequentially, it seems that Chinese people do not care too much about the accuracy of “things” or “events”, at least not in the extreme way. The justifiability of the “name”(名) is more important than the accuracy of the “thing” (实), since according to Confucius, when the “name” is not justifiable, what is said cannot be correct. Thus “things” do not have to be consistent with “names”, especially when people are musing over the remote past. When Su Dongpo was relegated to Huang Zhou of current Hu Bei Province, he visited Chi Bi Ji (赤鼻矶) in 1082 AD, a spot considered by the locals as the place where the Battle of Red Cliff (赤壁, pronounced as Chi Bi) took place in 208 AD. In fact the Battle took place at Pu Qi (蒲圻), south of the Yangtze River, which was renamed Red Cliff in 1998. It was at the wrong spot where Su Dongpo composed his masterpiece lyrics “Musing over the Past at Red Cliff”. From the lyrics it is clear the poet knew which was which, because after the grand opening lines “Eastward flows the Yangtze River/ Man of the day in the remote past/ Gone with huge waves”, he continued writing that “West of the ancient fortress/ People say/ It is Red Cliff where General Zhou won his fame”. Commentator pointed out that Su Dongpo was conscious that he was not on the accurate battleground, but he chose to “follow the local recognition”. No matter where he was, the poet did not hesitate to fantasize how graceful General Zhou won his victory over powerful Cao in “laughing and jesting”. What’s more, the poet expressed his sentiment over the past glory in lines “Visiting the old place in mind/ How laughably sentimental I was/ I have my hair turned grey earlier”. This episode demonstrates that the “name” is higher than the “thing”.

The mentality can still be spotted today in reconstruction of famous landmarks once appeared in classical poetry. Repairing ancient landmarks will be under strict supervision and required to “do the needlework”, but reconstructing is another story. First built in ca. 223 AD, Yellow Crane Tower has gained its fame mostly because of Li Bai’s masterpiece “Seeing Meng Haoran off at Yellow Crane Tower”. The last two lines “His sail is lost in boundless azure sky/ Where I see but the Yangtze River flows to the horizon” somewhat fix the grand view seeing from the peak of the Tower. According to historical records, the tower had been destroyed and reconstructed for more than 30 times, and the latest took place in 1884. A hundred years later, the tower was rebuilt on a higher ground and 1000 meters away from the original spot (which had been taken when Wu Han Yangtze River Bridge was built in 1957). Now 51.4 meter in height, the new 5-storeyed Yellow Crane Tower has reinforced concrete structure, and is ca. 20 meters higher than the former one. It looks more majestic and can offer a panoramic view. Tourists come and go, but nobody bothers it is not the same Yellow Crane Tower which inspired Li Bai. Another example is the reconstruction of Xun Yang Tower, located in Jiu Jiang of Jiangxi Province. Its popularity probably comes from the opening lines of “Song of a Pipa Player” by Bai Juyi, the famous Late Tang poet: “I abode my friend goodbye one night by Xun Yang River/ Maple leaves and rushes rustled in autumn wind”; and definitely from the stories of Chinese classic *All Men are Brothers* (水浒传, to use Pearl S. Buck’s translation), where two prominent heroes Song Jiang and Li Kui performed unforgettable deeds at the Tower. The designer of reconstruction project consulted the illustrated versions of *All Men are Brothers* as well as the famed Song painting *Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival* (清明上河图), and decided to make it in the Song style. The new Tower even has mural paintings delineating stories of *All Men are Brothers*. In this case, fiction is taken as history without distinction.

To summarize, for Chinese tangible heritage is not simply visible “things”, but encompasses cultural memories stemming from and connected with Chinese language and poetry. To a certain degree, to visit tangible heritage is to revisit the images and atmosphere of classical poetry, and to re-collect the poet’s mind and mood. Gradually, the Chinese mentality and feelings are formed and fixed as intangible heritage for people whose mother tongue is Chinese. And this kind of intangible heritage will be handed down forever.

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