

## Safeguarding the Far-Away Spiritual Home

Ts. Haschimeg

Investigation on the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in Tongliao in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region Inner Mongolia Tongliao 028000

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### Abstract

Tongliao, the hinterland of Horqin grassland, has a vast territory and abounds in natural resources. The Mongolians created a colorful oral and intangible cultural heritage during their long practice of living and producing. The simple and kindly Mongolians are still tenaciously guarding their spiritual home. This article investigated the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in Tongliao; and proposed some problems and feasible specific comments for the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

### Keywords

Tongliao City, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Conservation Situation, Consideration and Suggestion

Tongliao city is in the hinterland of Horqin grassland. "Horqin" is a word in Mongolian, that means the guards with bows and arrows. In the Secret History of the Mongols, "Huerchen" is the person who carries bows and arrows; In the history of the Yuan Dynasty, "Huerchen" refers to the person, or the guard wearing bows and arrows<sup>i</sup>. Horqin is a tribal group led by the descendants of Habtu Hasar, the Genghis Khan's younger brother. Since ancient times, Horqin grassland is the land where people live and multiply; With its vast territory and abundant resources, Horqin is ideal land for people's living and reproduction. An ancient and new human civilization was bred in Horqin. With the development of society, the cultural ecosystem in Horqin has not been damaged completely, many forms of original art are remained relatively intact; Simple and kind Horqin people are still tenaciously guarding their spiritual home. In the first batch of the national intangible cultural Heritage list approved by The State Council, "Mongolian Sihui", "Kurunqi andaiwu", " Uliger" and other three items of Tongliao were on the list<sup>ii</sup>. By March 2019, 163 items of intangible cultural heritage have been included in the municipal protection list<sup>1</sup>.

### 1 Tongliao nurtured rich intangible cultural heritage resources

Tongliao City (formerly Jirem Meng) lies in the eastern Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and on the northwestern end of the Songliao Plain. There are 32 nationalities such as Mongolian, Han, Manchu, Hui, Korean, and Daur. For thousands of years, through long-term production and life practice, the ancestors who lived in Tongliao cultivated virgin land and created rich material civilization. At the same time, they created and accumulated rich and mysterious national culture; and after thousands of years of oral teaching, constant enrichment, and development, the unique regional culture of Tongliao formed. Tongliao is also located at the junction of North China and northeast China, where the dominant nomadic culture, Khitan culture in the Liao and Jin dynasties, the Manchu culture in the Qing Dynasty, and the farming culture converged. A variety of cultures collide, influence, and penetrate each other, forming a unique intangible cultural heritage of Horqin. According to the 2021 Tongliao intangible cultural heritage census statistics, the intangible cultural heritage projects of

Tongliao are as many as 163 kinds<sup>2</sup>. Based on the classification standards of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China<sup>3</sup>, the including items are below:

1. Folk Literature	Horqin Folklores, Gada Meilin, The Story of Myhuhhot, Red Ballads, et al.
2. Traditional Art	Jarud Printmaking, Paper Cuttings, Clay, Cloth Stickers, Horqin Embroidery, et al.
3. Traditional Music	Mongolian Sihu, Mongolian Long Song, Modentsuur, Horqin Narrative Folk Song et al.
4. Traditional Dance	Charmaine Dance, Yasushiro Dance, Peace Drum Dance, Bo Dance, et al.
5. Traditional Medicine	Horqin Bonesetting, Mongolian Medicine Ulla Acupuncture, et al.
6. Traditional Opera	Northern-east Dialect, Shadow Play, Horqin Mongolian Opera, et al.
7. Traditional Skills	Mongolian Sihu Production, Harness Production, Paper Cuttings, Chao er production, Beef jerky et al.
8. Traditional Sports, Entertainment acrobatics	Zhulu GO, Mongolia Blu, Horse Racing, Wrestling, Archery, et al.
9. Folk	Uliger, Holnoble, The Story of Mongus et al.
10. Folklore	Horqin Marriage Custom, The Custom of Horses and Raising Dogs, Sacrificing Aobao et al.

During the research work, more than 100 examples of Mongolian and Chinese human behavior were compared with animal behavior and attitudes and were selected and compared as follows to find out how Mongolian and Chinese mental patterns and dimensions are expressed. (By the way, this time we did not pay much attention to the principle of balancing the translation when translating Chinese idioms and phrases.) As can be seen from the above table, Tongliao has rich intangible cultural heritage resources, with a long history, a wide variety of reserves, and wide coverage; and formed a charming ecological network of intangible cultural heritage. Such colorful intangible cultural heritage has its unique resource advantages. It shows mainly in some following aspects:

1.1 Uniqueness. Many of Tongliao's intangible cultural heritages are generated and developed in the special local cultural-ecological environment and formed through the oral instruction of artists for thousands of years. Many cultural heritages are unique to the Horqin and Mongolian people, which

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are unique in China and even in the world. For example, in "Uliger", the Qing Court proposed "borrow land to raise people" in Zhuosotumeng Banner<sup>4</sup>; this promoted the integration of Mongolian and Han cultures, the storytelling in the Beijing dialect with drum accompaniment, Storytelling, and Lianhualuo entered the steppe and blended with the "Tao Li" (an art form specializing in the singing of heroic epics) accompanied by the traditional Chao er. Absorbing the essence of both sides, Uliger, a folk-art form with the characteristics of Horqin, was developed. Uliger is a combination of farming culture and nomadic culture with typical regional characteristics. In addition, the magic effect of "Horqin Mongolian bonesetting", the healing magic of "Andai", "Chama" and "sacrificial ao Bao" are of great academic value to studying Mongolian witchcraft belief, ancestor worship, and the origin of song and dance. There are "Gada Melin", "Holnoble" and so on, all only exist in Tongliao City, Horqin.

1.2 Inheritance. Various folk intangible cultural heritage in Tongliao has a long history. All kinds of traditional folk skills, myths, legends, national epics, folk songs, dances, etc., can only rely on orally taught, words and deeds by folk artists and their generations. Therefore, the inheritance of these intangible cultural heritages has a strict relationship with teachers, which is passed down from generation to generation in the family. For example, Bao Jinshan, the inheritor of Horqin Mongolian Bone setting (an intangible cultural heritage of the Autonomous Region), is the fourth-generation descendant of Nareen Abshamanbo, the founder of Khorqin Borzhijin (Bao) Mongolian medicine bonesetter. Bambula, the inheritor of Uliger in Inner Mongolian, grew up listening to narrative folk songs sung by his great-grandfather Tegus. At the age of 14, Bambula began to learn from famous entertainers Guanga and Timur and later became Hulzi<sup>5</sup>. Horqin embroidery, Mongolian "bo dance" and Mongolian ancestor worship ceremony all have their inheritance systems. Although belonging to the same cultural heritage, the inheritance and development of each banner in Inner Mongolian are different. It is these characteristics that are helping it to constitute the diversity and richness of contents of Tongliao's intangible cultural heritage resources.

## **2 The endangered status of Tongliao intangible cultural heritage resources and the problems existing in the protection and inheritance**

The rich intangible cultural heritage of Tongliao is the precious memory of Horqin Mongolian traditional culture and the spiritual home of nourishing Mongolian people's spiritual world. However, since the 1950s, the intangible cultural heritage of Tongliao has suffered a holocaust, and the remaining varieties and contents become increasingly scarce. As UNESCO pointed out in its declaration, in the globalized world, many forms of cultural heritage are threatened by cultural monoculture, armed conflict, tourism, industrialization, agricultural exodus, migration, and environmental degradation. "The intangible cultural heritage is in danger of disappearing, the protect is imminent"<sup>6</sup>. The integration and modernization of the global economy and culture have a serious impact on intangible cultural heritage. The progress of times, the impact of multiculturalism, the sharp decline of inheritors and underdeveloped economy, financial difficulties, and lack of protection awareness in minority areas are accelerating the extinction of intangible cultural heritage.

Through the field investigation and interview, it is found that the extinction rate of the intangible cultural heritage in Tongliao is very surprising. Such as Mongolian "bonesetting", in Horqin Mongolian before liberation, Odugen (Medicine Woman) was professional and did not engage in production work and was passed down from father to son or grandchild (usually only the eldest son or grandchild) for generations, so the scope of inheritance itself is very narrow. Bao Angga, a doctor of traditional Orthopedics at The Institute of Mongolian Medicine in Tongliao, is the third-generation successor of

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Hari Mind Taiji, who is honored as the "Divine Doctor" in Horqin Grassland, he only taught it to his son, Baohu 7. "Andai dance" was banned as feudal superstition, so now the people who can complete the whole set of "andai dance" in Tongliao are less than 10, and all of them are old. Therefore, the ancient and mysterious "Andai dance" culture will soon be lost as the old "Andai" people pass away. The same is true for many other cultural heritages, even the "Bo dance", "Mongolian Sihu", "Horqin embroidery", "Fried rice processing technology" and "Horqin hunting customs", which are listed in the national intangible cultural heritage list, are also facing the danger of extinction and loss. The intangible cultural heritage resources in the Tongliao area are on the verge of extinction and facing the problems of protection and inheritance. It is expressed in the following aspects:

### **3. Some suggestions on the protection and inheritance of Tongliao intangible cultural heritage**

In recent years, Tongliao municipal governments at all levels have made great efforts to protect intangible cultural heritage, and the whole city has set off an upsurge in protecting intangible cultural heritage. However, as mentioned above, there are still many noteworthy problems in the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. Below are my thoughts and suggestions on the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

3.1 The protection of Tongliao's intangible Cultural Heritage must follow "authenticity" and "integrity". The "authenticity" means to protect the native, original, and true historical relics of intangible cultural heritage, and protect all the historical and cultural information it remains. With the upsurge of intangible cultural heritage protection and the drive of some economic interests, some non-authentic and even "false folk customs" have appeared in the intangible cultural heritage of Tongliao. To promote the growth of the local economy, folk resorts and tourist spots have been built in banner and county where tourism is booming. Hotels, restaurants, karaoke halls, and commercial outlets have been set up to sell some folk craft imitation products or fake shoddy products. Driven by economic interests, the trend of commercialization of folk customs in some areas is obvious. Therefore, governments at all levels should attach great importance to the principle of "authenticity" when protecting and inheriting intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, the principle of "integrity" must be adhered to in the protection and inheritance, that is, to protect all the contents and forms of cultural heritage, including the inheritors and the ecological environment.

3.2 Make full use of the market operation mode to realize the value conversion of Tongliao intangible cultural heritage resources, generate economic benefits, and return to support the rescue, protection, and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. Such as the establishment of the Tongliao intangible cultural heritage website, and gradually transition to produce economic benefits, the content of intangible cultural heritage protection be enriched in the municipal government websites at all levels. Mobilize social forces to participate in strengthening research on creative folk culture and art, organize a comprehensive display of Tongliao folk art, such as "Glamour Horqin" or "Mysterious Horqin" to show both at home and abroad, create Horqin culture and art masterpieces, actively attract ethnic and folk culture and art experts to participate in planning and guidance, improve the regional ethnic culture taste of tourism spots.

3.3 Protect and encourage inheritors to actively disseminate folk culture and art. The city and flag (county) governments should strengthen support for inheritors and pay attention to the cultivation of the next generation of would-be inheritors. The government should include the inheritors and would-be inheritors of folk culture in the financial budget, grant inheritance allowances in the form of salaries, carefully screen would-be inheritors, and treat inheritance of intangible cultural heritage as a career. The government should check and approve the personnel specially engaged in the protection and

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inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, and truly implement the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

In conclusion, through the investigation of the current situation of the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in Tongliao, we can not only see the rich resources of intangible cultural heritage in Tongliao and the solid and effective protection of cultural heritage but also see the problems existing in the actual work of protection and inheritance. Some of these problems are common problems encountered and need to be solved in the protection of intangible cultural heritage in China, and some are special local problems. There is still a process to be taken to solve these problems, as both the theory and practice of intangible cultural heritage protection are still in the exploratory stage nationwide. However, we firmly believe that with the state's great attention to the protection of intangible cultural heritage and the support of Tongliao governments at all levels and social forces, the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in Tongliao will be promoted to a new level, and the people of all ethnic groups in Tongliao will surely protect their spiritual home.

2.1 The continuous decrease and aging of inheritors make the intangible cultural heritage face an inheritance crisis. Some scholars pointed out that intangible cultural heritage exists depending on specific people and environments. Therefore, the protection of intangible cultural heritage is not only to protect its cultural form but more importantly to 'inherit' it. The lack of 'inheritance' is a serious problem of intangible cultural heritage at present<sup>8</sup>. The inheritor is the most important living carrier of intangible cultural heritage, which is the individual, group, or group that directly participates in the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage and enables it to be inherited. According to the list of the first batch of non-hereditary inheritors published by Tongliao, there are 10 categories of intangible culture involved in inheritors, and there are inheritors all over the city. These inheritors of folk culture were handed down from one generation of artists to the next through oral instruction. Through field interviews with some of the inheritors, we found that 80% of them are over 60 years old, many of them are too old or ill to sing or show, and some have even passed away. For example, Wu Yunlong, the national inheritor of Mongolian Sihu; Lauser, the national inheritor of Mongolian Uliger, have both passed away; and Tenge Xiduleng, another national inheritor of Mongolian Sihu music, has also blind in both eyes. In addition, many inheritors are limited by economic conditions, so they do not or are unable to teach apprentice skills, and the training of would-be inheritors has not been included in the protection of ethnic and folk culture. Therefore, many precious intangible cultural heritages in Tongliao are facing the situation of "people dying, songs disappearing, people disappearing".

2.2 The impact of industrial civilization and multi-culture makes the intangible cultural heritage in Tongliao disappeared rapidly. With the establishment and improvement of the social market economic system, it has been an inevitable trend of historical development for the vast rural pastoral areas to shift from farming and animal husbandry civilization to industrial civilization. Industrial civilization drove large farmers and herdsmen away from the land on which they had lived for generations. To work in the city, their way of life has changed. The national and folk culture that was born and inherited on the original land has been lost in situ and could not be brought into a new life. After the 1980s, many farmers and herdsmen in Tongliao moved to big cities and coastal areas to earn their life, especially the young generations. They received Pop songs, modern or western music, and danced every day. The original traditional culture and art have been slowly withdrawn from the memory and gradually forgotten. At the same time, many young people, as they moved out of their homes and broadened their horizons, gradually lost their confidence in the traditional culture of the nation in the surroundings and the impact of some powerful culture, and even formed a blind sense

of inferiority to the traditional culture. Most people consider that the traditional culture is "primitive", and they are not willing to learn it because they cannot make money from it.

2.3 There is a big gap between school education and the inheritance of outstanding folk intangible cultural heritage. The General Office of the State Council's Opinions on Strengthening the Protection of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage clearly pointed out "Gradually forming the Protection system of Intangible cultural heritage with Chinese characteristics": "To establish a scientific and effective inheritance mechanism for inheriting intangible cultural heritage. Through social and school education, the representative works of intangible cultural heritage will be inherited"<sup>iii</sup>. However, we know from the survey that the education department of Tongliao rarely included intangible cultural heritage in the teaching plan of primary and secondary schools. Due to the limitation of teachers and funds, the results of the courses are not ideal. Although the municipal government called the primary and secondary schools to carry out the intangible cultural heritage teaching activities, due to the shortcomings of the current education system, the biggest task for schools is to increase the rate of graduation rates, some schools just show something, such as teaching students "Andai dance", "morin khuur" in extracurricular activity time. When nine-year compulsory education was fully rolled out in the vast rural pastoral areas, the national and folk intangible cultural heritage is not included in school education, which interrupts its inheritance. In things continue this way, the serious consequences are obvious.

2.4 Current, the problem of " value application overprotection " is still outstanding. In recent years, the declaration and project approval of Tongliao's intangible cultural heritage has achieved remarkable results, which is in a leading position in the whole region and even relative to neighboring provinces. This is illustrated by the successful application and approval of the first batch of three national and 20 autonomous regional intangible cultural heritage items. As mentioned above, the municipal government has also issued a series of documents or regulations to strengthen the protection of intangible cultural heritage. However, we found that Tongliao's intangible cultural heritage protection is the same as other parts of the country, and there is also the problem of " value application overprotection". The municipal government's annual allocation of funds for the protection of intangible cultural heritage is insufficient. Therefore, the enthusiasm for inheriting intangible cultural heritage cannot be mobilized at all, and no one in the next generation of young and middle-aged people is willing to learn. Therefore, on one hand, the government is actively applying for the intangible cultural heritage list; on the other hand, many precious intangible cultural heritages are still in danger of disappearing.

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