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Transmission and Development of Food Heritage under Rural Revitalization: Yongfeng chili sauce in China

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Abstract

In the context of China's rural revitalization strategy, this study explores the transmission and development of food heritage, using the case of Yongfeng Chili Sauce as a reference for local governments to formulate intangible cultural heritage protection policies. Qualitative methods were employed to gather data from family workshops and factories. Narrative analysis was conducted on data obtained from observations and interviews through fieldwork, addressing the research questions. Findings indicate, Yongfeng Chili Sauce carries rich culture and unique production techniques; is one of the pillar industries of the local economy; and significantly promotes rural revitalization if the local government's current concern.

Keywords: Food Heritage; Transmission; Development; Rural Revitalization

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1.0 Introduction

Food culture occupies a significant position as a cherished traditional aspect of Chinese society. Rooted in the essence of Chinese values, the adage "Food is heaven" has resonated throughout history. Chinese food culture boasts a profound history, diverse food traditions, and invaluable cultural heritage. Within this cultural tapestry lies food heritage (FH), a vital rural cultural resource and a catalyst for rural development. The "Rural Revitalization Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China," effective in 2021, underscores the importance of preserving agricultural cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage (ICH). It emphasizes the responsibility of all levels of government to implement protective measures and unearth the profound essence of agricultural culture (Cong and Yexin 2022). However, with the rapid advancement of China's economy and the swift pace of urbanization, rural areas face the challenges of economic disparities and underdevelopment. Traditional food culture faces formidable obstacles in the face of emerging food trends.

Rural revitalization stands as a pivotal strategy in China's current economic development, offering innovative ideas and approaches to redress the imbalances and inadequacies of rural economic growth. Within this framework, the preservation of ICH is recognized as a vital force propelling rural economic development and cultural advancement. FH encompasses various elements, such as cultural

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identity, historical and traditional knowledge, and social cohesion, rendering it an indispensable component of agricultural cultural heritage and ICH. In the context of rural revitalization, the protection and transmission of FH have emerged as significant concerns. Notably, the traditional technique of Yongfeng Chili Sauce (YFCS), designated as a provincial ICH in Hunan Province in 2009, holds immense cultural value owing to its long-standing history and widespread popularity. As a representative example of food-related ICH, this study focuses on exploring the transmission and development of YFCS within the context of rural revitalization. The aim is to provide insights that can contribute to the preservation and transmission of Chinese FH while fostering rural economic development.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Food Heritage

Bessiè re (1998) proposes that FH encompasses agricultural products, ingredients, dishes, cooking artifacts, and the symbolic dimension of food, including techniques, recipes, eating practices, and food-related beliefs. This conceptualization of FH has been adopted by several scholars, such as Matta (2013), and Littaye (2016). Matta (2013) highlights that FH includes agricultural products, ingredients, dishes, preparation techniques, recipes, food traditions, table manners, as well as material aspects like utensils and dishware. Bessiè re (2013) further defines FH as a set of material and immaterial elements of food culture that are considered a shared legacy or a common good. Quintero-Angel, Mendoza-Salazar et al. (2022) define FH as a significant body of knowledge and techniques related to food production, storage, processing, consumption habits, traditions, and practices developed throughout history. In China, FH is defined as heritage associated with food production, exchange, and consumption, including food production heritage, food exchange heritage, and food consumption heritage (Qian 2022).

In summary, FH is an umbrella concept that includes different definitions, such as agri-food heritage, culinary heritage, and gastronomic heritage. Zocchi, Fontefrancesco et al. (2021) distinguish the differences between them. Agri-food heritage primarily focuses on the relationships between agricultural products, production practices, and traditional knowledge tied to rural contexts, often expressed through the concept of terroir (Teigen De Master, LaChance et al. 2019). Culinary heritage centers on elements and practices related to the preparation and consumption of food (Mardatillah, Raharja et al. 2019). In terms of gastronomic heritage, it shares a similar meaning, emphasizing elements such as sociability, legacy, identity, tradition, and a sense of belonging (Romagnoli 2019).

2.2 Food heritage transmission

The viability of FH practices relies on the ongoing transmission of specialized food knowledge and culinary techniques. Shariff, Zahari et al. (2021) highlight that element of gastronomy knowledge, such as pre-preparation, cooking methods, cooking skills, and food decorum, are transferred. However, UNESCO reports that social and demographic changes pose threats to the transmission of ICH, reducing intergenerational contacts. Sharif, Zahari et al. (2013) identify limited knowledge and skills of traditional food and lack of family support as factors that restricted the younger generation from practicing and transferring food knowledge. Additionally, Xiaomin and Ganqian (2017) suggest that taste memory and cultural identity can strengthen the intrinsic rules of FH transmission, with "locality" and "authenticity" posing innovative requirements for its transmission and development.

Formal and non-formal education play significant roles in ensuring the viability of ICH transmission. In terms of school education, researchers have elaborated on curriculum construction and assessment systems for FH in vocational education (Hangjian 2019). However, China's theoretical research outcome on transferring FH knowledge and culinary techniques through school education is still limited. Notably, Changqu (2020) proposes that the transmission of FH should rely on culinary majors in vocational colleges. Informal education also plays a crucial role in transmitting FH to the younger generation. Family serves as an important domain for transferring food knowledge, with oral communication, observation, and hands-on experiences being key methods (Nor, Sharif et al. 2012). Research indicates that purchasing food ingredients, observing food preparation, hands-on cooking, regular practices, participating in ceremonial events, and consuming traditional food contribute to passing on food knowledge to younger generations (Md. Sharif, Mohd Zahari et al. 2018). Shariff, Zahari et al. (2021) conduct exploratory research on traditional gastronomy knowledge transfer, revealing that transfer modes involve observation, assistance, hands-on experience, and instruction in a sequential manner.

2.3 Food heritage development

The emphasis placed by the Chinese government on safeguarding ICH has given rise to a new model of FH development that combines culture and tourism. Xiaodong and Yexin (2020) analyze the FH tourism model, highlighting its integral role in preserving the authenticity, holistic experience, and transmission of ICH. Qian and Jieyun (2021) suggest incorporating tourism experience activities, multi-dimensional publicity, strengthening the development of cultural and creative products, and promoting the integration of FH and tourism. Moreover, this development is not limited to specific regions. Schools, travel agencies, and study travel institutions are increasingly incorporating FH elements into tourism itineraries, making FH study travel a popular educational phenomenon. Zhiwei (2021) finds that the interactive development of FH and study travel can facilitate the transformation of traditional FH elements and enhance their heritage value. Cong and Yexin (2022) argue that industrialization development serves as the main pathway for the growth and development of FH, and promoting FH can also contribute to rural revitalization efforts.

3.0 Methodology

A qualitative approach employing ethnographic methods, including observation and interviews, was utilized in this study with informants from Yongfeng Town, Shuangfeng County. Purposive sampling was employed to select informants, including officially nominated

representative bearers from family workshops and factories involved in YFCS production. This qualitative approach was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of transmission issues and the strategies employed by informants in developing their family workshops and factories, as opposed to relying solely on statistical procedures (Fetterman, 2019).

Observations provided an overview of the FH program and the current state of YFCS development, while interviews with informants allowed for in-depth and targeted qualitative data to complement the observational findings. Informal and semi-structured interviews lasting between 0.5 to 2 hours were conducted with the four representative bearers of YFCS. These interviews aimed to gather data on FH transmission, production practices, and development.

Narrative analysis was employed to analyze the gathered information, allowing for the identification of common issues and patterns. A set of open-ended interview questions was developed to guide informants in sharing their opinions on transferable modes and countermeasures in production practices within the context of rural revitalization. This approach enabled a deeper exploration of the experiences and perspectives of the informants, providing valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities related to YFCS production and the broader rural revitalization efforts.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Informants Profiles

Four sets of informants were selected for the interviews, representing family workshops and factories involved in the production of YFCS within Shuangfeng County. Four informants were nominated as representative bearers by the government, ranging from 35 to 70 years old. Additionally, the daughters of three representative bearers, aged between 23 and 45 years old, and the mother-in-law of the youngest representative bearer, aged 61 years old, were also included in the study. The profiles of these informants are presented in Table 1 for reference.

Table 1. Informants' Profiles

Informant	Age	Educational level	occupation	Title	No. of children
Group Informant 1 father	55	Junior school	Chili sauce family workshop owner	Municipal-level Representative bear	2
daughter	31	degree	Hotel partner		1
Group Informant 2 father	50	High school	Chili sauce factory owner	Municipal-level Representative bear	1
daughter	25	degree	Clerk		0
Group Informant 3 mother	70	diploma	Chili sauce factory owner	County-level Representative bear	2
daughter	45	High school	Civil servant		1
Group Informant 4 Mother-in-law	63	Primary level	Housewife		3
Daughter-in-law	37	High school	Chili sauce factory owner	County-level Representative bear	2

4.2 The Transmission of Yongfeng Chili Sauce Traditional Techniques

The interviews with the informants provided valuable insights into the transmission of YFCS. These issues highlight the generational transfer of knowledge and skills, the role of observation and hands-on experience, the consideration of personal suitability for inheriting the craft, and the importance of innovation and adaptation.

The prominent issue that emerged first is the generational transmission of YFCS within families. Informants highlighted how they learned the art of making chili sauce from their parents or grandparents at a young age, observing and participating in the production process. It reveals they acquired the traditional techniques through observational learning, oral instruction, and hands-on practice from their parents. Informant 1 highlights the significance of closely observing and learning from his father's techniques from a young age. Similarly, in Informant 3, the mother describes watching her mother make YFCS as a child and later establishing her sauce factory after retirement. This issue underscores the role of experiential learning in mastering the complex production processes of YFCS. This family-based transmission played a crucial role in preserving the food heritage associated with YFCS.

The second issue that surfaced is the challenge of succession and the generation gap. Many informants expressed concerns about the lack of successors to carry on the tradition of making YFCS. In the narratives of the daughters in Group 1 and Group 3, they express reservations about taking over the chili sauce business due to the demanding nature of the job and their circumstances. While the daughters acknowledge their knowledge of the process, they opt for pursuing other career paths or suggest alternative family members carry on the tradition. This highlights the need to address the issue of succession planning and engage younger generations in the preservation of these cultural practices.

The third issue identified is challenges related to the production process, particularly the complex enzymatic process. Informant 2 and Informant 4 highlighted the need for technical expertise and guidance to overcome difficulties in the production process. All

Informants mention the economic benefits and market opportunities as factors influencing their motivation and willingness to continue the tradition.

Lastly, the interviews highlight the issue of innovation and adaptation. The father in Informant Group 2 emphasizes the importance of innovation according to his practices. This underscores the dynamic nature of YFCS production and the willingness to adapt to changing market demands.

Table 2. The transmission modes

Group Informant	Answer
Group Informant 1	
Father	I learnt chili sauce making from my father. I closely observe him during the process. I started with simple tasks, gradually progressing to more complex techniques. I dedicated myself full-time to making YFCS alongside my father. At 27, I took over the responsibility of overseeing the production of the family workshop.
Daughter	When I was young, I observed my parents making YFCS, I know the production process but don't have extensive experience in making YFCS. I don't plan to take over my father's workshop. It's unsuitable for girls. Maybe my husband might take over the business.
Group Informant 2	
father	My father was a master of making YFCS, he strongly desired me to continue the family tradition and helped me establish the factory. I constantly strive for innovation and successfully developed a new fried-chili sauce with my father, showcasing our commitment to evolving the food tradition.
Daughter	I began to observe my grandfather and dad make YFCS from 6. I know the production process. I will take over my father's YFCS business.
Group Informant 3	
mother	When my mother made YFCS, I observed from the side and learned the process. I made YFCS annually for self-consumption. In 2006, I founded the factory after retirement.
Daughter	I saw my grandma make YFCS every year. I know how to make it, but I have never done it myself. I'm a civil servant and don't want to work too hard, so let my cousin take it over.
Group Informant 4	
Mother-in-law	I started learning chili sauce-making from my mother from 8. I know the production processes and produce it annually. In the past, I mainly made it for my family, and gave away the excess to relatives and friends.
Daughter-in-law	After marriage, my mother-in-law taught me the production process by hand. Under her guidance, I operate this factory. When I encounter technique difficulties, if my mother-in-law cannot guide me, I would ask for help from the first informant.



Fig. 1: The representative bearers stirring Yongfeng Chili Sauce
(Source: The author)

4.3 The Development of Yongfeng Chili Sauce Traditional Techniques

The interviews first reveal a strong emphasis on preserving traditional techniques. Informant 1 and Informant 4 express a strong commitment to preserving and utilizing traditional techniques in the production of YFCS. They emphasize the importance of maintaining authenticity and adhering to traditional processes, except for minor modifications like machine crushing of peppers. This issue highlights the significance of cultural heritage and the desire to continue the legacy of YFCS.

Secondly, a balance between innovation and tradition is observed. Informant 1 and Informant 2 discuss their efforts to introduce innovations in taste and production techniques. Informant 1 mentions trying out new flavors, indicating a willingness to experiment while still preserving traditional methods. Informant 2 mentions using improved techniques such as utilizing glass drying rooms for making YFCS during the rainy season and frying the sauce to extend shelf life and increase output. This highlights the willingness to adapt and improve while staying true to the roots of the sauce.

Thirdly, quality control and authenticity play a significant role. Informant 3 and Informant 4 highlight the connection between YFCS production and rural development. Informant 3 mentions establishing chili agricultural cooperatives to address rural labor employment issues. Informant 4 mentions hiring rural workers and establishing a tracing system. These emphasize the role of YFCS in supporting the economic well-being of rural areas and focus on the commitment to producing high-quality YFCS.

Moreover, there is potential for industrial tourism and branding. Informant 1 suggests the creation of a chili sauce industrial park. This indicates the desire to develop an industry that can attract visitors, providing them with a firsthand experience of the production process and contributing to the overall brand image of YFCS.

Overall, the analysis reveals a commitment to preserving traditional techniques, while also embracing innovation in taste and production. The development of YFCS is seen as an opportunity for rural revitalization and socio-economic growth. Furthermore, the emphasis on product quality control and transparency highlight the importance of consumer trust in the traditional production methods of YFCS. These findings provide insights into the strategies and approaches employed by individuals involved in the development of Yongfeng Chili Sauce traditional techniques.

Table 3. The development of Yongfeng Chili Sauce Traditional Techniques

Informant	Answer
Informant 1	I insist on utilizing traditional techniques to make the most authentic YFCS. I ventured into taste innovations. I have repeatedly proposed the establishment of a YFCS industrial park, where all workshops and manufacturers can unite. To embrace industrial tourism, we can create an attraction that draws visitors to our region.
Informant 2	Half of the sauce is crafted using traditional techniques, the other half incorporates my innovations. One such innovation involves a glass-drying room, allowing for year-round production. Additionally, I fried the sauce in oil, which extends its shelf life and increases output.
Informant 3	I wholeheartedly produce traditional YFCS. The raw materials used are grown by me. I have taken steps to address rural labor employment by establishing chili agricultural cooperatives. I developed an invention patent on YFCS.
Informant 4	I am committed to producing YFCS with traditional techniques. My factory provides employment opportunities for rural residents. To enhance transparency and consumer trust, I implemented product traceability equipment.



Fig. 2: (a) Production in the family workshop; (b) Production in the factory
(Source: The author)

5.0 Discussion

The analysis of the interview provides insights into the relationship between traditional industry and rural revitalization. The findings reveal several key points in this regard.

Firstly, the informants emphasize the use of traditional techniques in making YFCS. They take pride in preserving the authenticity of the sauce by adhering to traditional production processes. This highlights the cultural significance of the industry and its connection to the community's food heritage. Secondly, the informants mention the employment of rural laborers in production. They emphasize the role of industry in providing job opportunities for rural communities. This aligns with the goals of rural revitalization initiatives, which aim to stimulate economic growth and improve livelihoods in rural areas. Furthermore, the informants propose the establishment of a chili sauce industrial park, indicating their recognition of the need for collective action and infrastructure development to support the growth

of the industry. Such initiatives can contribute to the overall revitalization of the rural economy by creating a favorable environment for businesses and attracting visitors. In addition, the informants mention the installation of product traceability equipment is financially supported. This demonstrates a commitment to quality control, transparency, and consumer trust. It also aligns with the broader objectives of rural revitalization programs that aim to enhance the competitiveness and marketability of rural products.

The findings highlight the potential of the YFCS industry to contribute to rural revitalization efforts. By preserving tradition, creating employment opportunities, fostering collective action, and ensuring product quality, the industry can become a catalyst for economic development and cultural preservation in rural area. The integration of the chili sauce industry into broader rural revitalization strategies can help to unlock its full potential and contribute to the sustainable growth of the region.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

Enhancing the transmission of YFCS as a cultural heritage can be achieved through various strategies and approaches closely related to rural revitalization. However, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The research primarily focused on Shuangfeng County, and the findings may not be universally applicable. Future research should consider a broader geographical scope and diverse cultural practices.

One effective method is to seek national recognition for YFCS as an ICH element. The traditional production techniques and the cultural practice of sharing chili sauce with neighbors align with the criteria for representative elements of national ICH. Seeking national ICH status can further facilitate the preservation and transmission of YFCS, while also promoting cultural identity, social harmony, and sustainable development. In addition, the establishment of a transmission education system is crucial for cultivating future transmission groups and addressing the challenge of a lack of successors. Local governments can take the initiative to integrate YFCS into primary and middle school education, developing compulsory courses, and school-based teaching materials, and organizing chili sauce-themed study trips. These educational initiatives will play a vital role in fostering a new generation of YFCS transmission groups, ensuring the continuity of this heritage.

To promote the integrated development of culture and tourism, it's recommended to expand the practice of transmission and create dedicated spaces for showcasing the heritage of YFCS. Establishing a YFCS museum and a transmission base can provide platforms to display historical documents and artifacts related to sauce culture. Integrating the YFCS element into existing tourist routes and enhancing the level of element display and utilization can enhance the cultural tourism experience. Furthermore, the development of industrial tourism with a focus on YFCS heritage can contribute to the productive protection of YFCS and its sustainable development.

Collaborative efforts and technical advancements are essential for the development of YFCS as a pillar industry. Cooperation with local universities and establishing school-enterprise joint R&D Center can facilitate the training of technical personnel and drive product innovation. Diversifying chili sauce products and exploring their applications in different culinary contexts can further enhance the development of YFCS. Optimizing the production process and ensuring food safety are vital considerations. Improving and standardizing the production process based on traditional methods can enhance consistency and minimize food safety risks, thereby further strengthening the industry.

Future research should explore the potential of digital technology in promoting YFCS and other ICH. The use of digital platforms for education, promotion, and distribution could be a new direction for the sustainable development of ICH industries. By implementing these strategies, the transmission and development of YFCS as an ICH can be effectively promoted and safeguarded, ensuring the preservation of intangible cultural heritage while also driving economic growth and sustainable development in rural areas.

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