

Research on the Current Situation of the Inheritance of the Production Skills of the Xinlong Medicine Mud-hidden Mask

Jiawei Hu

Academy of Fine Arts, Sichuan Mingzu College, Kangding, Sichuan, China

**Corresponding Author.*

Abstract: Masks, as a cultural phenomenon, are both ordinary and unique in human life, with a long history found in almost every corner of the world. The emergence of Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask is deeply connected to the lives and spiritual beliefs of the original inhabitants. In 2009, the production technique of Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask was recognized as a provincial-level intangible cultural heritage project in Sichuan Province. However, due to the intricate craftsmanship involved and the difficulty in passing down the skills, this cultural heritage was once on the brink of extinction. This article conducts research through a combination of literature review and field investigation to explore the origins, transmission methods, characteristics, and challenges faced in the transmission of Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask. It reveals that the complexity of the production process, geographical limitations, and inadequate income for artisans have become the primary factors hindering the inheritance and development of this cultural heritage.

Keywords: Xinlong County; Medicine Mud-hidden Mask; Status of Inheritance

1. Introduction

The intangible cultural heritage is an essential part of China's outstanding traditional culture. Protecting, inheriting, and utilizing these intangible cultural heritage resources hold significant importance in consolidating cultural confidence and building a strong socialist cultural nation. [1] Leader provided crucial instructions on China's intangible cultural heritage protection work in November 2022, emphasizing the need for substantial and systematic protection of intangible cultural heritage. This is to better meet the increasing

spiritual and cultural needs of the people and to advance cultural confidence and strength. [2] It is evident that China's emphasis on the protection of intangible cultural heritage has only increased over the past decade. In 2009, the Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask was included in the second batch of Sichuan Province's intangible cultural heritage list (project number: VIII—26). Since then, an increasing number of scholars have turned their attention to the historical, cultural, and artistic value of the Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask, initiating research endeavors. In Deng Xiaoying's work "The Inheritance and Protection of the Mask Art in Xinlong County in Ganzi Area," the author discusses the classification and artistic features of the masks in Xinlong County, proposing a series of strategies beneficial for the inheritance and preservation of mask art. [3] Furthermore, scholars such as Guo Changping, Chen Jianbing, and Yang Yan have published articles in newspapers introducing the Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask. However, given the passage of time, the current situation regarding the inheritance of the Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask production techniques and the new challenges it faces are subjects that still warrant investigation and research.

2. The Origin of the Xinlong Medicine Mud-hidden Mask

According to the "Wangtong's Historical Mirror," the history of medicine mud masks can be traced back over 2,000 years ago when people used various precious materials such as sandalwood, gemstones, gold, silver, and copper in the production of masks, imparting a fragrant aroma to the masks and statues. The Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask originated in the 7th century AD. As documented in the "Compendium of

Knowledge" by Songtsen Gampo, the masks statues were traced back to the era of Songtsen Gampo and Princess Wencheng. Legend has it that during a woman's prayer at a temple, an accidental fire occurred when she inadvertently ignited the temple's curtain while burning incense, resulting in a devastating fire that left the local people deeply saddened. Songtsen Gampo and Princess Wencheng decided to reconstruct the temple to prevent further fire hazards from incense or other sources. To introduce a new method of worshipping, Princess Wencheng conceived the idea of using uncontaminated clay mixed with precious medicine, gemstones, and fragrances to create masks. This innovation led to the creation of medicine mud masks and statues. These scented masks not only fulfilled the people's wishes for worshipping but also had the added benefit of warding off disasters and illnesses, while eliminating the fire hazard associated with incense and candles. At this point, the clay mask became popular.

3. The Inheritance Method of the Xinlong Medicine Mud-hidden Mask

The production skills of Xinlong medicine mud-hidden masks have historically been passed down through blood relations, following the rule of "not transmitting outside the family and not passing on to females," exhibiting the hereditary nature of family learning. Due to the complex ingredients and manufacturing techniques involved in making medicine mud-hidden masks, it often takes several years, or even decades, for an individual to become proficient from being an apprentice to becoming a master. This process immensely tests the temperament and patience of the mask maker. Today, the fifth-generation inheritor of the Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask-making technique is Silong Jiangze. He began learning the craft in Xinlong County at the age of 12, studying under his uncle, Boruo Renzi. According to his recollection, his uncle was extremely demanding, and any shortcomings in his work led to strict reprimands. However, perseverance paid off. After years of dedicated study, diligent research, and relentless practice, Silong Jiangze mastered the entire process of making medicine mud-hidden masks, from collecting soil, preparing medicine, molding the figures, to painting them. Currently, he is the sole

individual capable of completely understanding the formula and proportion for preparing the medicine mud. In October 2009, Silong Jiangze was recognized as the representative inheritor of the Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask-making technique, a provincial intangible cultural heritage project in Sichuan Province. Furthermore, he has received numerous honorary titles such as Sichuan Provincial Rural Handicraft Master, Top Ten Artisan in Sichuan Province, Top Ten Craftsmen in Kham, and Sichuan Provincial Arts and Crafts Master.

Nowadays, Silong Jiangze has three apprentices, with the most experienced disciple named Chichi Jiangcuo, who hails from Xinlong County. According to Silong Jiangze, Chichi Jiangcuo is a monk who voluntarily approached him to learn the craft. He is known for his stability, good character, and reliability. Chichi Jiangcuo has been studying the technique of making medicine mud-hidden masks under Silong Jiangze's guidance for over 30 years and has become proficient in skills such as carving and sculpting. In recent years, Chichi Jiangcuo has taken on several apprentices himself, contributing significantly to the preservation and advancement of the medicine mud-hidden mask tradition. The second apprentice is named Jiang Chu, from Daofu County, who has been studying the technique of making medicine mud-hidden masks for 17 years. Currently, he is mainly responsible for coloring the medicine mud-hidden masks. The third apprentice is named Bai Ma Duoji, from Xinlong County, who is Silong Jiangze's nephew. He used to work in agriculture. Silong Jiangze mentioned that his nephew is in his thirties, talented with his hands, but lacks stability. Initially interested in learning, he later found the process too monotonous and might not be able to persist. As of now, Silong Jiangze hasn't shared the formula for the medicine with his apprentices. He once stated that when these medicinal ingredients are mixed correctly, they become medicine; if not, they can be poisonous. Therefore, he intends to entrust the formula only to someone reliable and steady. He expressed his intention to pass on the formula to his apprentice, Chichi Jiangcuo. When asked why he didn't pass the formula to his children, Silong Jiangze said he only has one daughter who has never been

interested in making mud-hidden masks since childhood. Additionally, she has been busy with her studies and has never learned the technique of making medicine mud-hidden masks. Currently, she is working at an electric power company, and her job keeps her extremely occupied, leaving no time to learn mask-making. He now has two grandchildren, one of whom, his granddaughter, is 16 years old and is busy studying in high school. Similar to her mother, she has no interest in learning the art of making medicine mud-hidden masks. The other grandchild is too young, only 6 years old. Silong Jiangze mentioned that he hopes his grandchildren will be interested in learning the art of making medicine mud-hidden masks in the future. He also hopes to pass on the formula to them, but no one can predict what will happen in the future. Today, nearing 70 years old, Silong Jiangze has abandoned the traditional notion of "only teaching within the family and only to males." He believes that regardless of gender or blood relations, anyone can learn the craft of making Xinlong medicine mud-hidden masks. He even aspires to compile a textbook and write a specialized book to enable more people to learn about and understand this ancient folk craft. Additionally, Silong Jiangze has conducted classes in places like the Xinlong County Cultural Broadcasting and Television Bureau and Xinlong High School to enlighten more people about the cultural significance behind the medicine mud-hidden masks. Through collaborative efforts between Longxiangze and the local government, museums displaying these masks have been established in Daofu and Xinlong counties, freely accessible to the public. This shift signifies that the inheritance of Xinlong medicine mud-hidden masks is no longer confined to the internal transmission between males within families. Government bodies, educational institutions, museums, and other establishments are progressively engaging in the transmission ecology of these masks, leading to a more diverse mode of inheritance.

4. Characteristics of the Inheritance of Xinlong Medicine Mud-hidden Masks

The main medium through which the composition of folk art styles or patterns is conveyed and developed is the image inherent within the artworks themselves. The

transmission of folk art skills emphasizes the use of artistic patterns as a means of dissemination; for instance, New Year prints, paper-cutting, and embroidery are circulated through design patterns and motifs. Similarly, some sculptures, pottery, woodcarvings, and brick carvings have standardized templates. This direct transmission of the entity's visual form through objects has also led to the inheritance of certain artistic styles and techniques, including artistry, by subsequent generations.[4] The production technique of the Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask is mainly passed down through a combination of pattern manuals and oral teaching. Nowadays, in the home of Silong Jiangze, there are still many ancestral scriptures preserved, including books such as the "Excavation Schedule," "Prayer for Sacred Mountain During Excavation," and "Precious Medicine and Herbal Blessing Scripture." These scriptures record the craftsmanship of producing medicine mud-hidden masks, containing patterns for masks. In 2004, with the support and concern of the Xinlong County Committee and Government, Silong Jiangze dedicated himself to developing molds for the Xinlong medicine mud-hidden masks. Finally, by the end of that year, he successfully created the first mold for the Xinlong medicine mud-hidden masks, marking the first instance of combining traditional folk craft with modern techniques in the creation of masks. [5]This illustrates the significant role that patterns and molds play in the inheritance of the Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask-making craft.

The inheritance of the Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask-making craft also demonstrates an innovative aspect based on market demand. Over the past decade, the inheritor, Silong Jiangze, has continuously innovated the styles of masks. This progression has expanded the variety of the medicine mud-hidden masks from just over ten types in the past to nearly three hundred types today. For instance, he has developed masks depicting Songtsen Gampo and Princess Wencheng. Additionally, Silong Jiangze and his disciples have ventured into creating various products beyond masks. They have developed items like decorative paintings using medicine mud, statues of historical figures, talismans, and car ornaments. This

innovative behavior based on market demand is not a departure from tradition; instead, it stands as a new characteristic of their inheritance. [6]

5. The Inheritance Dilemma of Xinlong Medicine Mud-hidden Masks

The first challenge lies in the complexity of the process in making Medicine Mud-hidden Masks. The technique involves intricate methods and a highly complicated formula, requiring a lengthy apprenticeship and a high level of expertise. The craft of producing Xinlong medicine mud-hidden masks is intricate, with a manual production cycle spanning from 12 to 20 days. This involves several steps including soil collection, water gathering, herbal collection, ingredient mixing, fermentation, sculpting, coloring, embedding sacred texts, sealing, consecration, and more. From the perspective of sculpture alone, artisans require a strong foundation in painting and sculpting skills. These abilities aren't something that can be acquired overnight; they demand years of dedicated practice to master. Additionally, as previously mentioned, it often takes several years or even decades for someone to progress from being an apprentice to mastering the craft. Consequently, many young individuals find it difficult to endure this long journey, leading them to abandon their apprenticeships after a brief period. Consequently, even in Xinlong County, the birthplace of Medicine Mud-hidden Masks, the number of individuals engaged in creating these masks has dwindled significantly.

The second challenge lies in the geographical restrictions for production. To create the Xinlong medicine mud-hidden masks, uncontaminated water and soil above 4,600 meters altitude are essential. Locals believe that the soil displaying a strip-like red coloration represents the veins of the mountains, making it the most suitable for crafting the Medicine Mud-hidden Masks. According to Silong Jiangze, the mud used in the masks must undergo fermentation and molding processes in areas with good air quality and high altitudes like Xinlong and Daofu, and cannot be produced in heavily polluted cities like Chengdu. Failure to do so may affect the efficacy of the masks. Hence, the geographical requirements imposed on the

production of Xinlong medicine mud-hidden masks pose significant constraints on their development.

The third challenge is the unsatisfactory income leading to attrition among practitioners. As explained by Silong Jiangze, the sales of Medicine Mud-hidden Masks primarily involve government procurement, exhibitions, local orders, and online platforms such as WeChat and TikTok, without yet venturing into e-commerce platforms like Taobao. Generally, significant quantities are bought by the government, museums, and universities, while local residents make fewer purchases. After all, acquiring a Medicine Mud-hidden Mask allows for generations of veneration at home, reducing the need for frequent purchases. Presently, the prices of each mask range from 300 to 6000 yuan, determined by their size and the complexity of craftsmanship. Due to being mud-based products, the market prices for Medicine Mud-hidden Masks have not been able to increase significantly. However, the valuable raw materials used in production remain a substantial expense. [7]Silong Jiangze once remarked that since Medicine Mud-hidden Masks cannot make people earn big profits, it fails to attract today's young people. If there are no individuals willing to learn this craft, the technique of producing Medicine Mud-hidden Masks risks being lost. [8] Consequently, the high production costs, low profits, and limited sales volume make the income of artisans less than ideal. This presents the most significant challenge in the inheritance of the Medicine Mud-hidden Mask production technique.

6. Conclusion

The Xinlong medicine mud-hidden mask, due to its unique materials, not only embodies ethnic culture but also possesses various functions such as mosquito repellence, snake and insect prevention, sterilization, antiviral properties, air purification, flu prevention, high-altitude hypoxia resistance, and fatigue relief. It can be regarded as a unique gem within mask art. This article combines literature research with field surveys to investigate and study the current status of the inheritance of Xinlong medicine mud-hidden masks, aiming to promote their dynamic inheritance and protection.

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