

Research on Multiple Pathways for the Living Heritage of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Innovation in Educational Mechanisms

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ABSTRACT

In the context of growing global cultural diversity and threats to cultural locality, the dynamic inheritance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has become a key concern in cultural and rural educational strategies. This paper employs a systemic perspective, grounded in cultural ecology theory, and centers on the “pot and jar restoration” practice in Tenghao Village, Shaoxing. Through comparative analysis with other ICH projects, it advances the theoretical paradigm of “educational inheritance.” This approach advocates for an integrated ICH education ecosystem that connects families, schools, communities, and digital spaces, aiming to shift ICH from passive “heritage preservation” to active “cultural reproduction.” The paper thus offers theoretical and practical pathways for rural revitalization and educational innovation.

1. Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is a living cultural form rooted in specific social environments and sustained through real-life contexts and cultural identity. Amid rapid modernization and urbanization in China, ICH transmission faces structural challenges including an aging cohort of inheritors, diminished original functions, and disrupted traditional transmission mechanisms, eroding the social foundations essential for its survival.

While national policies advocate for integrating ICH into modern life and the education system, practical questions remain: how to meaningfully regenerate ICH’s cultural significance in contemporary society and construct dynamic, modern-adapted transmission pathways. This area still requires deeper exploration.

2. A Systems Perspective on Living Heritage Transmission and the Cultural Ecology Lens

2.1 From Material Preservation to Cultural-Ecological Balance

The international discourse on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has shifted from “material preservation” to “living heritage transmission.” UNESCO’s definition highlights its communal, practical, and dynamic nature. In response, Chinese scholars introduced “productive safeguarding,” though an overemphasis on economic value risks commodifying ICH and diluting its authenticity.

This paper adopts a systems perspective based on cultural ecology theory, viewing ICH as a complex system of skills, knowledge, values, social relations, and the ecological environment. Its transmission should pursue a

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balanced regeneration of cultural significance, social function, and economic value.

2.2 The “Four-Dimensional Integration” Transmission Model

To address the contemporary challenges of living heritage transmission, this article proposes an integrated, multi-dimensional model, structured around four core dimensions: Educational Integration. Resolves the issue of “who transmits and to whom.”; Digitalization. Responds to “how to transmit and how far.”; Productive Dimension. Focuses on “why transmit and for what purpose.”; Community Governance. Maintains the ecological foundation, answering “where to transmit and what roots to preserve” through participation, identity, and social networks. These dimensions are interlinked and function synergistically, with education as the central, coupling hub, forming a holistic ecosystem for the living transmission of ICH.

3. Educational Integration—Constructing a Lifelong Intangible Cultural Heritage Transmission System

The educational transmission of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) through systematic talent cultivation and cultural dissemination is fundamental to its intergenerational continuity. While the traditional “master-apprentice system” effectively transmits refined skills, its small-scale and lengthy nature limits its capacity in modern society. Therefore, it is essential to build a comprehensive ICH education system that integrates “school education, community education, and lifelong learning.”

3.1 Institutionalized Exploration of Integrating ICH into the National Education System

In recent years, the “ICH into Schools” initiative led by China’s Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has made notable progress. For instance, Beijing has widely introduced ICH elective courses in primary and secondary schools, while Zhejiang has integrated “ICH Transmission Teaching Bases” into its education assessment system. Nevertheless, challenges persist, including a shortage of qualified teachers, fragmented curricula, and incomplete evaluation mechanisms.

To address these challenges, the practical experience of Tenghao Village in Shaoxing offers valuable insights. In collaboration with universities, the local team developed a thematic research course titled “Repairing and Mending Jars and Urns,” structuring the skills into three modules: “Cognition–Experience–Creation.” This “Knowledge–Practice–Innovation” teaching approach not only deepens students’ understanding of traditional culture but also fos-

ters their initiative, enthusiasm, and innovative thinking toward cultural heritage.

To integrate intangible cultural heritage (ICH) into curricula from an educational management perspective, a systematic approach is needed—coordinating curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation to holistically develop students’ cultural literacy. This can be achieved through: Vertical integration across educational stages, progressing in alignment with students’ cognitive development; Horizontal cross-disciplinary collaboration, integrating ICH projects organically across subjects; Diversified assessment, emphasizing process and performance-based evaluation, focusing on growth in cultural identity, practical skills, and innovative awareness. Together, this forms a curricular management pathway that connects educational levels, bridges disciplines, and adopts comprehensive evaluation^[1].

3.2 Lifelong Integration Paths for ICH Transmission

The transmission of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is rooted in specific community environments and social networks. Community education fosters everyday transmission scenarios, integrating ICH into the local socio-cultural fabric. For instance, Tenghao Village created the “Urn Heart Workshop” and the “Urn Repair Market,” turning jar-repairing skills into public cultural activities shared by both villagers and visitors. This model of “skill demonstration + experiential participation + social interaction” not only strengthens cultural identity but also enhances community cohesion^[2].

Comparative research shows that successful community-based ICH education is characterized by three core elements: empowerment of subjects, activation of settings, and intergenerational interaction. Empowerment transforms villagers from passive recipients into active inheritors and cultural interpreters, making transmission self-motivated. Scenario activation repurposes traditional spaces like old streets and houses into immersive venues, blending spatial memory with cultural practice. Intergenerational interaction through programs like “Grandparent-Grandchild Workshops” and “Family ICH Days”—fosters skill transmission and emotional ties, ensuring ICH thrives across generations. Together, these elements reinforce one another, creating a sustainable and vibrant ecosystem for community-based ICH transmission.

3.3 Higher Education and Professional Talent Cultivation

Higher education institutions play a vital role in ICH transmission through research, innovation, and talent cultivation. Currently, nearly a hundred Chinese universities

offer ICH-related programs, such as “ICH Protection and Innovative Design” at the Central Academy of Fine Arts and “Cultural Heritage and Museology” at Zhejiang University. However, progress is still needed in interdisciplinary integration, linking theory with practice, and expanding career opportunities.

To address this, the “University–Community–Enterprise” collaborative cultivation model should be promoted. In this model, universities provide academic support, heritage sites serve as practice bases, and enterprises contribute market access and employment channels. A successful example is the “New ICH Artisans” project, jointly run by Tenghao Village and Zhejiang Sci-Tech University. It involves university students living in the village to learn skills, develop creative products, and plan promotional activities, effectively tackling challenges such as limited transmission capacity, lack of innovation, and market adaptation.

4. Digital Existence – The Revolution of Inheritance Empowered by Technology

Science and technology have provided unprecedented tools and platforms for intangible cultural heritage (ICH) inheritance. Digitization is not merely a recording method, but a fundamentally new mode of transmission that reconstructs the time-space logic, participant relationships, and forms of experience in cultural transmission.

4.1 From “Digital Archiving” to “Digital Revitalization”

Current digital practices in intangible cultural heritage (ICH) can be summarized into three stages: Stage One, Recording and Archiving, Digitally documenting ICH through high-definition scanning and 3D modeling; Stage Two, Dissemination and Promotion, Using platforms like short videos to increase visibility^[3]. For example, the Tenghao Village team released content on “repairing vats and pattering jars” on Douyin and Bilibili, gaining over 30,000 views and bringing niche craftsmanship into the public eye; Stage Three, Interactive Innovation, Creating new cultural experiences through immersive interaction and digital twins.

Notably, digitization is a means, not an end. Technology must serve the transmission of cultural value. Tenghao Village’s live-streamed “cloud repairs” not only demonstrated craft skills but also included artisan interviews, historical context, and storytelling, building a “technology + content + emotion” communication model.

4.2 Ethical and Educational Challenges in Inheritance in the Digital Era

While emerging technologies aid intangible cultur-

al heritage (ICH) protection, they also raise ethical and governance issues. Digitization brings ICH into the public view, yet practical challenges remain. First, digital platforms often lose the tactile and human warmth of traditional crafts, challenging immersive experience preservation. Second, many elder artisans struggle with digital tools, limiting their participation in modern dissemination. Third, easy replication and adaptation of digital content can blur cultural attribution and lead to intellectual property disputes^[4].

To address these challenges, a multi-stakeholder digital governance framework should be established. Digital education must enhance inheritors’ digital skills while increasing public cultural discernment and appreciation, fostering shared awareness of cultural origins and resistance to inappropriate appropriation.

5. Productive Inheritance – The Creative Transformation and Industrial Development of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Productive safeguarding is essential for the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Its core involves revitalizing ICH within the modern economy through creative design, industrial integration, and market adaptation. Importantly, this process is not mere commercialization but a creative transformation of cultural value into social and economic value^[5].

5.1 Transforming Cultural and Creative Development from “Object” to “Meaning”

Successful ICH cultural and creative products distill the essence of traditional crafts into modern life. The Tenghao Village team exemplified this by creating the “Beng Xiao jiang” IP and related products, transforming pottery repair elements such as “cracks” and “clamps” into everyday items like badges, tote bags, and stationery. This approach translates the craft’s aesthetic and philosophical spirit rather than merely replicating its form.

Current ICH creative development typically follows three models: Symbol Transplantation, Directly applying ICH visual elements (e.g., patterns, shapes) to modern goods, such as paper-cut-inspired phone cases; Functional Transformation, Adapting ICH techniques to meet contemporary needs, like using embroidery skills in fashion design; Narrative Experience, Building interactive products (e.g., script-based games, immersive theater) around ICH stories and cultural emotions, allowing audiences to engage deeply and form emotional connections. These models collectively illustrate the pathways for ICH’s creative transformation in the modern era.

5.2 Building a “ICH+” Ecosystem through Industrial Integration

The sustainable inheritance of ICH depends on establishing deep integration with related industries. Tenghao Village exemplifies this through its multidimensional “ICH + cultural tourism + education” approach. By linking with tourism, the village developed a “Pottery Art Cultural Corridor,” connecting sites like ancient trees, temples, and workshops into themed routes. Collaborating with education, it designed experiential courses that attract school visits. Additionally, by integrating with local agriculture and specialty industries—such as using restored traditional pottery jars in rice wine brewing and pickle making—the village formed an industrial cycle of display, education, and practice, revitalizing ICH in contemporary life.

From a macro perspective, aligning ICH with national strategies—such as the creative industries, rural revitalization, and urban renewal—is crucial. This can include incorporating ICH into characteristic town development, creating ICH-themed homestays for rural revitalization, or applying traditional crafts in urban public art. Such integration helps build a holistic “ICH+” ecosystem.

5.3 Market Adaptation and Brand Building

To transition intangible cultural heritage (ICH) products from being “well-received” to genuinely “marketable,” systematic innovation and transformation are key. This involves: Precise Market Positioning, Differentiating between markets such as collectibles, daily necessities, and gifts, and designing products accordingly; Brand Storytelling, Infusing products with narrative and emotional value. For example, Tenghao Village linked jar and pot repair with themes of “reviving nostalgia” and “cultural continuity.”; Diversified Channels: Actively utilizing platforms like e-commerce, live streaming, and cultural markets to blend online promotion with offline cultural experiences. This integrated approach helps build compelling brands that attract modern consumers.

6. Community Governance – Rebuilding the Social Foundation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is the shared legacy of communities, and its living transmission depends on community participation and social networks. Today, many ICH projects face issues like “community hollowing” and “weakened cultural identity,” necessitating governance innovations to rebuild the social foundations of transmission.

6.1 Innovation in Community Participation Mechanisms

Traditional ICH transmission often relies on kinship and geographic ties. Amid modern societal mobility, there is a need for more open participation mechanisms. Tenghao Village’s “ICH Operation Center” has piloted a co-governance model of “village collective + inheritors + youth teams.” The collective provides venues and policy support, inheritors pass on skills, and youth teams handle creative planning and promotion, preserving community agency while integrating outside innovation.

Effective community participation generally includes: Shared Decision-Making, Creating discussion platforms that involve villagers, inheritors, experts, and enterprises; Shared Benefits. Ensuring villagers gain economic returns through cooperatives, shareholding systems, or similar arrangements; Shared Responsibilities. Clarifying all parties’ roles in transmission and protection, forming a contractual cooperation framework.

6.2 Reconstructing Cultural Identity and Local Education

The transmission of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is fundamentally driven by cultural identity. In the face of globalization and urbanization, many rural youth lack connection to their local culture. To address this, local education must rebuild cultural confidence.

Effective local education, as seen in Tenghao Village, should: Link ICH to personal histories using oral accounts, old photos, and family stories; Revitalize or reimagine traditions such as the “Jar-Opening Festival” or “Pottery Mending Competition.”; Reveal the ecological wisdom, craftsmanship, and everyday aesthetics within ICH to connect with modern values.

6.3 Building Social Networks and Support Systems

The transmission of ICH requires support from diverse social forces. Governments should guide through policies, funding, and platforms; enterprises can contribute via social responsibility initiatives; social organizations can provide professional services; and the media can enhance public outreach. The key is to build collaborative networks and trust mechanisms among these actors.

For instance, the Keqiao District ICH Protection Center in Shaoxing has established regular cooperation with Tenghao Village, offering professional guidance and resources. University teams have conducted social practices there, introducing fresh ideas, while media coverage has amplified the project’s impact. This multi-party collaboration among government, community, universities, and me-

dia creates a supportive ecosystem for ICH transmission.

7. Constructing a “Four-Dimensional Integration” Collaborative Ecosystem Education Mechanism

These four dimensions are not isolated but interconnected and synergistic, unified through the core mechanism of education. Education serves multiple roles in intangible cultural heritage (ICH) transmission: as a transmitter of values, a catalyst for innovation, and an integrator of systems. Consequently, society must adopt a systems-thinking approach to build an education-led ecosystem for the living transmission of ICH.

7.1 Education as the Central Hub for Value Transmission

The transmission of ICH centers on passing cultural values across generations. Through curricula, activities, and environments, education conveys the historical memories, aesthetic concepts, technical wisdom, and ethical values within ICH to the young. This process is not one-way instruction, but a dialogic, experiential, and reflective construction of meaning.

7.2 Education as a Platform for Catalyzing Innovation

Contemporary ICH transmission faces the enduring challenge of bridging tradition and modernity. Education drives its creative transformation by cultivating students’ innovative thinking, providing experimental spaces, and enabling interdisciplinary dialogue. For instance, design students blend traditional craftsmanship with modern design to create products suited to contemporary aesthetics, while communication students use new media to produce youth-oriented content—both demonstrating how education sparks innovation.

7.3 Education as the Nexus for Systemic Integration

The living transmission of ICH involves multiple stakeholders, contexts, and stages, and can only achieve full effectiveness through systemic integration. In this process, educational institutions, leveraging their neutrality, professionalism, and public trust, can effectively serve as integrators. They bring together diverse stakeholders such as government, businesses, communities, and families through mechanisms like university-enterprise and university-local collaboration. Simultaneously, they connect various learning environments—school classrooms, community spaces, digital platforms, and industry sites—to build a seamless learning ecosystem. Furthermore, they integrate scattered cultural, technological, human, and market resources into cohesive transmission solutions, fa-

cilitating the better incorporation of ICH into modern life.

7.4 Constructing the “Educational Transmission” Paradigm

Based on the above analysis, this paper proposes a new theoretical paradigm: “Educational Transmission.” Compared to traditional models, it features: Diversified Actors, Including not only artisans but also teachers, students, designers, and researchers; Systematized Process: Encompassing cognition, experience, creation, and reflection rather than mere skill instruction; Integrated Contexts, Occurring across schools, communities, families, the internet, and industries; Holistic Objectives, Balancing cultural continuity, educational development, social cohesion, and economic growth.

At its core, this paradigm views ICH transmission as a unique form of educational practice, integrating educational concepts and methods throughout the process. This necessitates re-examining issues such as curriculum design, teacher training, evaluation systems, and resource allocation from the perspective of educational management.

Project

Research on the Pathways for the Living Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of the ‘Xiu Gang Bu Beng’ Intangible Cultural Skill in Shaoxing (202513280023)

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