

Article

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## Research on the Integration of Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection and Tourism Sustainable Development

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**Abstract:** Intangible cultural heritage is a valuable treasure of human cultural diversity, and it faces serious challenges of preservation and transmission in the process of globalization and modernization. The tourism industry, as an important force to promote economic development, provides new opportunities for the protection and dissemination of ICH. This paper explores the current situation and path of the integration of ICH protection and tourism through literature analysis, case studies and field research. It is found that the integrated development of ICH and tourism can not only enhance the attractiveness of tourism, but also enhance the living heritage of ICH, but at the same time, we also need to be alert to the problems of cultural alienation and insufficient carrying capacity of tourism brought by excessive commercialization. Through scientific planning and reasonable guidance, the combination of intangible cultural heritage and tourism will become a new mode of sustainable development.

**Keywords:** intangible culture; heritage conservation; tourism integration; sustainable development

### 1. Introduction

The combination of intangible cultural heritage protection and tourism has been a hot topic in recent years in both academic and practical fields. Intangible heritage not only carries rich historical and cultural information, but also is the cohesion of national spirit and emotion. The development of tourism can not only bring economic benefits, but also provide a strong platform and channel for the protection and inheritance of ICH. However, in the process of promoting the integration of intangible cultural heritage and tourism, how to achieve benign interaction between the two and avoid the erosion of culture by excessive commercialization is an issue that must be thoroughly explored. In addition, the degree of recognition and participation of the community in the integration of ICH protection and tourism also directly affects the prospect of its sustainable development.

### 2. Definition and Characteristics of Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection

Intangible cultural heritage refers to the practices, expressions, knowledge and skills, as well as associated tools, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. Intangible heritage is unique in its intangible and living nature, in that it exists in people's daily lives and is transmitted from generation to generation through oral tradition. Unlike tangible cultural heritage, ICH focuses more on its intrinsic spiritual and emotional values than on concrete material forms. UNESCO emphasizes that the protection of ICH is not only about preserving traditions, but also about transmission and revitalization. In the context of

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globalization and modernization, NHs are facing great challenges, and many traditional skills and cultural expressions are rapidly disappearing. Therefore, preserving NHs is not only a matter of respecting history, but also a responsibility for the future. The core of NHL preservation lies in maintaining its original authenticity and vitality, and ensuring that it can still be useful in modern society, conveying cultural values and national spirit [1].

### **3. Intangible Cultural Heritage and Ecological Environment**

#### *3.1. Relationship Between Cultural Ecology Research and Ethnic Culture*

Cultural ecology views culture and the natural environment as an interdependent organic whole and explores their inherent symbiotic relationship. In this field, national cultures are seen as products of specific ecological environments, reflecting the harmonious symbiosis of man and nature. For example, the traditional cultures of many of China's ethnic minorities are characterized by a deep understanding of and reverence for the natural world. Traditional Tibetan culture emphasizes a deep connection between human values and nature, the Miao's silver jewelry skills cannot be separated from the rich local mineral resources, and the Dong's great songs are sung on the banks of the mountains and water, all of which illustrate the close connection between culture and the environment. The study of cultural ecology reveals that the protection of intangible cultural heritage is not only to protect a certain skill or ritual, but also to protect the ecological environment on which it depends. Only by maintaining the integrity and health of the natural environment can NHLs be truly protected and passed on. However, the rapid changes in modern society have posed a serious challenge to this balance, with industrialization and urbanization leading to the destruction of many traditional ecosystems, which in turn affects the survival of ICH. Therefore, in the protection of intangible cultural heritage, the protection of the ecological environment must be included in order to realize the ecological inheritance of culture [2].

#### *3.2. Ecological Environment and Traditional Culture of Ethnic Minorities in China*

China's vast landscapes are scattered with numerous unique ecological environments, which have nourished the rich and colorful traditional cultures of ethnic minorities. In these ecological environments, nature and culture are intertwined, forming an inseparable relationship. For example, the plateau and grassland nomadic culture of the Tibetans relies on the magnificent natural landscape and vast grasslands of the Tibetan Plateau. The ecological environment here has not only shaped the Tibetan people's way of life, but also deeply influenced their religious beliefs and artistic expressions. Similarly, the silver jewelry skills and embroidery art of the Miao people cannot be separated from the rich mineral resources and abundant plant species of the region. These techniques are not only a display of beauty, but also carry the Miao people's respect and love for nature. In the tropical rainforest of Yunnan, the water culture and rice culture of the Dai people are deeply rooted in the local humid environment. Water is not only an important resource of the Dai people's life, but also the core of their festivals and celebrations. Every year, during the Water Splashing Festival, the Dai people express their blessings for life and gratitude for nature through revelry. And in the forests of the Northeast, the traditional lifestyles of the Oroqen people have been closely intertwined with the biodiversity of the forests for generations. These traditional lifestyles not only reflect the survival wisdom of the Oroqen, but also demonstrate their concept of living in harmony with nature. However, with the advancement of modernization, China's ecological environment faces many challenges. Industrialization, urban expansion, and tourism development have posed challenges to many traditional ecosystems. Such destruction will not only directly affect the livelihoods of ethnic minorities, but also threaten the survival of their traditional cultures. For this reason, the protection of the ecological environment is closely linked to traditional ethnic cultures, and comprehensive measures must be taken to ensure the

health of the natural environment in order for these precious intangible cultural heritage to survive.

### *3.3. Relationship Between Ethnic Culture and Art and Protection of Ecological Environment*

In China, the cultural and artistic forms of various ethnic minorities are rich and colorful, deeply rooted in specific natural environments, and a vivid reflection of the harmonious coexistence of man and nature. For example, Miao silver jewelry and embroidery not only show the aesthetic taste of the Miao people, but also reflect the rich natural resources of the region. The production of silver jewelry requires local silver mines, and the embroidery patterns are mostly taken from local plants and animals, which are closely related to the natural environment and dependent on each other. The Water Splashing Festival of the Dai people is a feast of water and culture. During the festival, people bless and purify water by splashing it, showing the Dai people's reverence for and reliance on water. Water is not only the basis of Dai agriculture, but also runs through their daily life and religious ceremonies. This deep emotion for water makes the Dai people pay extra attention to the protection of water resources in their daily life, forming a unique water culture and ecology. The Mongolian long tunes and huomai are also inseparable from the vastness and tranquility of the grassland. The melody of the long tune is as melodious as the wind blowing on the grassland, while the multiple tones of the huomai are like the natural echo of the deep grassland. These forms of music are not only artistic expressions, but also the Mongolian people's deepest feelings for the ecological environment of the steppe [3]. In the process of urbanization and industrialization, the grassland ecosystem is facing the threat of degradation. Protecting the grassland is not only protecting the nature, but also protecting the artistic roots of the Mongolian people. In this context, the protection of national culture and art is inseparable from the protection of the ecological environment. Every form of national culture and art is the result of long-term interaction between human beings and nature, carrying deep cultural memory and ecological wisdom. If we do not pay attention to the protection of the ecological environment, these valuable cultural arts will lose the soil on which they depend for survival and eventually die out. Therefore, only by combining the protection of national culture and art with the maintenance of the ecological environment can we realize truly sustainable development and allow these cultural treasures to continue to shine and blossom with their unique charm.

## **4. Intangible Cultural Heritage and Industrial Development**

### *4.1. Intangible Cultural Heritage Experience Tourism Industry*

The cultural experience tourism industry of intangible cultural heritage has become an important force in promoting local economic development. This form of tourism not only allows tourists to personally experience the rich and colorful intangible cultural heritage, but also brings economic benefits to local communities and inspires enthusiasm for the protection of traditional culture. Taking the Dai ethnic group in Yunnan as an example, tourists can participate in the Water Splashing Festival, make Dai bamboo rice with their own hands, and listen to Dai elephant foot drum music. This immersive experience not only allows tourists to feel the charm of the Dai culture, but also enhances their respect for the natural and cultural environment. Similarly, the silver jewelry making and Miao embroidery crafts of the Miao people attract a large number of tourists. In the Miao villages in Guizhou, tourists can visit the silversmith's workshop to learn the whole process of silver jewelry making, and they can also follow the embroiderer to learn the techniques of Miao embroidery. These experiential programs not only provide a unique way to travel, but also allow Miao craftsmen to receive more economic support and improve their quality of life. More importantly, this type of interaction conveys the value of Miao culture and enhances tourists' sense of cultural identity. The development of ICH cultural experience tourism is also linked to efforts in ecological conservation. Many ICH programs

rely on specific natural environments, and preserving these environments is essential for safeguarding ICH traditions and practices. For example, the Mongolian long tunes and huomai require experiences on the grasslands, and the ecological environment of the grasslands is crucial to the survival of these art forms [4]. By ensuring that the impact of tourists' activities on the grasslands is minimized through rational tourism planning, not only is the ecological environment protected, but the roots of Mongolian culture are also preserved. The support of local governments and communities also plays a key role in this process. They not only provided the necessary infrastructure, but also actively promoted the NRM projects and organized various cultural activities so that tourists could understand and experience the NRM culture in a deeper way. This model of community-participatory tourism development not only enhances local economic vitality, but also strengthens the cultural confidence and cohesion of the community.

#### *4.2. Intangible Cultural Heritage Cultural and Creative Products Development Industry*

The intangible cultural heritage cultural and creative product development industry has gradually become an important way to pass on and protect intangible cultural heritage. These products are not only handicrafts, but also carriers of culture, carrying deep historical memories and unique regional characteristics. Take Miao silver jewelry as an example, each piece of silver jewelry contains the wisdom and emotion of the Miao people. Visitors through the purchase of these silver jewelry, not only get a fine jewelry, but also experience the flavor of the Miao culture. This form of consumption not only brings economic gains for the Miao craftsmen, but also inspires their passion for traditional culture preservation. Another example is Suzhou's Su embroidery, a skill passed down from generation to generation that has found a new stage in modern society. Suzhou embroidery is not only used in traditional clothing and household items, but also innovatively applied to modern fashion design. Embroiderers have combined traditional patterns and techniques with modern design concepts to create a series of internationally influential works. The success of these cultural and creative products has not only enhanced the market value of Su embroidery, but also made more people recognize and love this ancient skill. The development of intangible cultural heritage cultural and creative products has also brought new growth points for the local economy. In some remote areas, the commercialized development of intangible cultural heritage projects has provided employment opportunities for local residents and improved their living conditions. For example, Tibetan thangka painting has not only formed a complete industrial chain in the local area, but also attracted many foreign tourists to come to learn and experience. This interaction not only promotes cultural exchanges, but also boosts local economic development. However, in the process of developing ICH cultural and creative products, it is important to strike a balance between commercialization and cultural preservation, ensuring that the core cultural elements are retained while adapting to modern consumer preferences. Therefore, when developing intangible cultural heritage cultural and creative products, more input should be given to craftsmen and cultural inheritors to ensure that traditional elements are retained in the design and production of the products [5].

#### *4.3. Intangible Cultural Heritage Digital Content and Media Industry*

The intervention of digital technology has enabled intangible cultural heritage culture to be presented to the public in a more vivid and diversified way. For example, virtual reality (VR) technology can restore ancient intangible cultural heritage scenes, allowing people to experience the charm of traditional performing arts in an immersive way. In recent years, many local non-legacy programs have launched immersive experience courses with the help of VR technology, such as Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera, which have not only attracted the attention of the younger generation, but also injected new vitality into traditional culture. Digital media platforms have also become an important

channel for the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage culture. Short-video platforms such as Jinyin and Shutterbugs show the production process and performing arts of NH projects to audiences through videos of just a few seconds, and this immediacy and interactivity has greatly improved the efficiency of NH dissemination. Through these platforms, many intangible cultural heritage bearers share their skills and stories, which not only increases their visibility, but also finds new supporters for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage culture. This phenomenon shows that the popularization of digital media has enabled NHM culture to be no longer confined to a specific geographic space, but to spread to a wider audience across the boundaries of time and space. The development of intangible cultural heritage digital content has also brought new inspiration to the creative industries. Many designers have integrated non-legacy elements into modern product design, creating works with cultural connotations that meet modern aesthetics. For example, cell phone wallpapers incorporating the traditional art of paper-cutting and animated short films inspired by shadow puppetry. These works have not only achieved good response in the market, but also promoted the rejuvenation and internationalization of intangible cultural heritage culture. However, the commercialization of intangible cultural heritage digital content also needs to be handled carefully. Excessive digitization may lead to superficialization of traditional culture and loss of its original profound connotation. Therefore, developers and platforms should fully respect the wishes of cultural inheritors when producing and promoting NH digital content, and ensure that the production and dissemination of digital content can accurately convey the essence of NH culture.

#### *4.4. Intangible Cultural Heritage Education and Study Training Industry*

The intangible cultural heritage education and study and training industry is gradually becoming an important means of intangible cultural heritage protection and inheritance, and this kind of education not only allows participants to experience the charm of traditional culture in depth, but also inspires them to have a sense of reverence for intangible heritage. Taking Shaanxi's shadow play as an example, local cultural centers and schools have jointly launched shadow play study courses, allowing students to make shadows with their own hands and perform traditional plays. This hands-on experience not only enhances the students' hands-on ability and creativity, but also allows them to truly understand the historical background and cultural value of shadow theater. Miao silver jewelry making in Guizhou has also benefited from study training. Many Miao villages have cooperated with tourism companies to offer silver jewelry making experience courses, attracting tourists and students from all over the country. They can learn the skills of hammering and engraving silver jewelry under the guidance of Miao silversmiths and experience the unique charm of Miao culture firsthand. This interaction not only brings extra income to the silversmiths, but also promotes the dissemination and inheritance of traditional culture. The development of the intangible cultural heritage education and study and training industry also provides a platform for cooperation between communities and schools. Cultural inheritors in the community can come into schools and teach their skills, while students in schools can gain an in-depth understanding of the local cultural heritage through study and research activities. For example, in Jiangsu province, through school-enterprise cooperation, embroiderers are invited into schools to conduct embroidery workshops, and students not only learn traditional skills, but also enhance their understanding of the culture of Suzhou embroidery. This two-way interaction not only enriches the learning experience of students, but also enhances the cultural confidence of the community. However, intangible cultural heritage education and study training also need to focus on quality and effectiveness. It is difficult to understand the essence of NHs in depth with simple experiential courses, so the design of the courses should give full consideration to the depth of traditional culture and combine modern educational means to enhance the teaching effect.



## 5. Conclusion

The integration of intangible cultural heritage protection and tourism is a complex and multidimensional process that requires the joint efforts of governments, enterprises, communities, the public, and international organizations such as UNESCO. Through scientific planning and reasonable guidance, the combination of ICH and tourism can not only effectively enhance the cultural connotation and attractiveness of tourism projects, but also strengthen the living legacy of ICH and the sense of community participation. However, this process also requires careful attention to balancing commercialization and conservation, ensuring that cultural transformation respects traditional values and maintains authenticity. Future research should further explore how to build a more flexible and effective integration model in different geographical and cultural contexts, so as to ensure the sustainable development of NRLs and tourism, and to jointly guard the spiritual home of mankind.

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