

Innovative Strategies for Integrating Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Tourism:A Global Perspective

Ke Ren

University College London, Bloomsbury, WC1E 6BT, UK

ABSTRACT

With the continuous advancement of the global integration process, China's tourism and cultural industries have ushered in new opportunities for development, and cultural exports have provided important resources for economic growth. The research objective of this article is to explore innovative paths for the integrated development of China's intangible cultural heritage and cultural tourism industry from a global perspective. Firstly, the significant value of the integrated development of intangible cultural heritage and the cultural tourism industry was analyzed. Then, the problems existing in the integration process of the two were analyzed. Finally, effective countermeasures were proposed for these problems. The research results show that integrating intangible cultural heritage art into the tourism industry can tell Chinese stories more vividly, promote local economic development, enrich tourism formats and tourists' experiences, and is also conducive to the inheritance and protection of intangible cultural heritage.

KEYWORDS

Globalization intangible cultural heritage; Tourism industry; Integration; Strategy

1 Introduction

Against the backdrop of the in-depth development of globalization, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) serves as a living carrier of national memory and cultural genes. The vigorous rise of the cultural tourism industry has also provided a new path for the contemporary transformation of intangible cultural heritage art. The deep integration of the two is not only a practical exploration to transform cultural resources into development momentum, but also a strategic choice to enhance cultural identity and improve the country's cultural soft power. At present, although the integration of intangible cultural heritage and cultural tourism has initially taken on forms such as "intangible cultural heritage entering scenic spots" and "festival performances", from a global perspective, there are still problems such as insufficient exploration of cultural connotations, serious paper-based content, and weak international communication efforts. How to break through geographical limitations Activating the contemporary vitality of intangible cultural heritage art with innovative strategies and achieving the transformation and upgrading from "resource display" to "value co-creation" has become an important issue that current research needs to address ^[1].

2 The significant value of integrating intangible cultural heritage art with the cultural tourism industry in the context of globalization

2.1 Facilitate the dynamic inheritance and international dissemination of intangible cultural heritage arts

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) art is an important part of Chinese civilization and can be seen as the crystallization of the wisdom of the working people. In today's information age where the Internet and artificial intelligence are developing rapidly, people are increasingly influenced by multiculturalism ^[2]. Traditional ICH arts are gradually being marginalized, facing challenges such as a lack of successors and a severe decline in the audience base. ICH art has always been closely linked to cultural tourism, each reinforcing the value of the other. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, cultural tourism and rural tourism have begun to rise. These two forms of tourism then merged, creating experiences that integrate local ICH into travel activities. This integration allows visitors not only to enjoy the natural scenery, but also to participate in intangible cultural art heritage and learn traditional skills from local practitioners. This experiential tourism model is increasingly favored by modern consumers. For instance, when tourists visit the Qianhu Miao Village in Guizhou Province, they can enter the local embroidery workshop and, under the guidance of ICH inheritors, try Miao embroidery skills by themselves. This hands-on experience enables tourists to deeply feel the charm of ICH and, in an imperceptible way, enhances their understanding and awareness of its preservation. Compared to the traditional classroom inheritance, the experiential inheritance under the background of cultural and tourism integration has a broader audience and faster dissemination speed, enabling more people to understand and engage with ICH, thereby promoting its dynamic inheritance in modern society.

Local ICH arts possess unique characteristics of ethnicity, regional identity and inheritance. In the global context, the

development of the cultural and tourism industry has created new possibilities for the preservation and revitalisation of ICH arts ^[3]. Since China's introduction of the 144-hour visa-free entry policy — which, as of 2024, applies to visitors from 54 countries — a growing number of international tourists have come to experience ICH art in person ^[4]. By participating in travel activities and sharing short videos and photos on social media, they have helped to promote the ICH art to a wider global audience.

2.2 Support the transformation and upgrading of the cultural tourism industry

By 2023, with the pandemic largely under control, the cultural and tourism industry experienced rapid growth. People have moved beyond traditional sightseeing model and showed a growing interest in ICH art. Conventional tourism no longer satisfies peoples' travel expectations; instead, they are seeking immersive and experiential experiences. As a distinctive cultural resource, ICH art offers opportunities for creating such experiences, forming an important foundation for the transformation and upgrading of the cultural and tourism industry in the new era.

Tourists are increasingly drawn to ICH art activities that offer hands-on participation and interactive experiences. Many ICH art traditions are well suited to these formats, with local tourism departments often organising events where skilled inheritors guide and work alongside visitors. These immersive activities not only attract wider audiences but also enhance the cultural value of tourism products. As tourism shifts from cursory sightseeing to in-depth engagement, ICH arts have become a key drive of cultural-tourism integration, transforming travel into meaningful cultural experiences and contributing to the sector's overall upgrading.

2.3 Promote high-quality regional economic development

Tourism can also play a significant role in driving local economic development. Integrating distinctive ICH art experience activities into tourism not only enhances market appeal but also supports the high-quality growth of local economies ^[5]. This integration creates employment opportunities, attracts young people to the tourism sector, and revitalizes related industries. Qingshen County in Meishan City, Sichuan Province can be a good example. The county has a long tradition of bamboo weaving, yet in recent decades, modern manufacturing and changing lifestyles had pushed bamboo-woven utensils out of everyday use. However, with the active support of the local cultural and tourism department, Qingshen has revitalized this craft by highlighting its refined techniques, distinctive artistic forms, and practical value. Bamboo weaving has been reintroduced through tourism markets, where visitors can purchase handmade products and even learn the craft from local inheritors in training workshops. This revival has generated both cultural and economic benefits. Qingshen's bamboo paper products are now sold in over 50 countries, and have appeared in the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. In 2023, the "Banbu" brand ranked first in natural color paper sales on major e-commerce platforms during the "Double 11" shopping festival. Today, Banbu holds around 30% of China's natural household paper market, achieving cumulative sales exceeding 10 billion yuan and encouraging hundreds of millions of consumers to embrace greener lifestyles ^[6].

3 Analysis of the Current Situation and Problems of the Integrated Development of Intangible Cultural Heritage Arts and Cultural Tourism

3.1 Insufficient exploration of cultural connotations and repetitive and monotonous display forms

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) art is rich in cultural meanings and reflects the identities of specific regions and ethnic groups. However, in the process of integrating ICH art with the cultural tourism industry, many ICH projects remain at a surface level of engagement. Visitors are often presented with static artefacts, without the opportunity to appreciate the generations of craftsmanship, history, and cultural depth behind them. For performance-based ICH arts, such as folk dances and drama performances in tourist attractions are frequently a loosely assembled set of performance elements designed primarily to entertain. In doing so, they overlook the historical background, cultural symbolism, folk traditions, and narrative layers that could evoke a deeper sense of cultural connection. Moreover, presentation formats tend to rely heavily on static displays and conventional staging, with little innovation. The potential of digital technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), to create immersive and engaging experiences remains largely untapped.

3.2 The integration models of culture and tourism are highly homogenised and lack innovation

In many regions, the integration models of ICH arts and cultural tourism suffer from serious homogeneity. Tourism projects often fail to tap into the distinctive qualities of local ICH resources, opting instead to imitate already successful cases. In designing ICH themed tourism routes, originality is often lacked: many are simply pieced together from existing

local attractions without a coherent theme or narrative to connect them. Few routes are designed with careful consideration of the cultural links among local ICH projects or the specific experiential needs of tourists. As a result, integration tends to remain at the conventional level of "ICH display + sightseeing + basic experience", with little exploration of more diverse models such as "ICH + healthcare", "ICH + sports", or "ICH + educational study tours".

3.3 The international communication efforts are weak and the cross-cultural exchange platforms are limited

International dissemination plays a vital role in integrating ICH art into global cultural exchange. It not only helps to strengthen a country's cultural soft power but also fosters meaningful cross-cultural interaction. Yet, the outcomes of ICH tourism integration have so far received limited exposure on the international stage. A key issue lies in the lack of targeted communication^[7]. When promoting ICH tourism projects abroad, differences in cultural background and audience interests across countries and regions are often ignored. In many cases, domestic publicity materials are merely translated, without adaptation to local contexts, making it difficult to capture the attention of overseas visitors. Another problem is the narrow range of promotion channels. The international dissemination of ICH art and the integration of culture and tourism relies heavily on government-led international cultural exchange events. There is little involvement from tourism enterprises or industry associations. There is no well-developed commercial network for promoting ICH tourism integration internationally, and its presence on mainstream global social media platforms remains limited. Moreover, there is no dedicated cross-cultural exchange platform built around the theme of ICH tourism integration.

4 Innovative strategies for the integrated development of intangible cultural heritage arts and cultural tourism

4.1 Deepen the exploration of intangible cultural heritage art content

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) art carries the weight of history, with each tradition rooted in rich stories, cultural symbols, and the spirit of the communities that created it. One way to preserve and revitalize these traditions is to trace their origins and decode their cultural symbols. This involves studying the historical trajectory of ICH projects—their beginnings, development, and transformations over time—and exploring how they connect with the social, economic and folk customs of their regions.

For example, in integrating ICH opera art with cultural tourism, relevant authorities have gone beyond performances to share the cultural depth of the art form. Through expert lectures, discussions with ICH inheritors, and cultural salons, both practitioners and visitors are introduced to the origins of the opera and its cultural significance. As a result, audiences not only enjoy the artistry of singing, recitation, acting, and martial arts, but also appreciate the legendary stories behind the performances.

Another approach is to use digital technology to build an ICH knowledge—an organised, interconnected database that links diverse aspects of a tradition. In the case of traditional embroidery, for instance, this might include the processes and techniques, the lineage of artisans, symbolic motifs, and the stories they represent. Such a knowledge graph could map the traditional stitches, color schemes, and the cultural meanings of patterns, alongside the stylistic changes and regional influences seen across different historical periods. By making this information accessible, developers in the cultural tourism sector can design richer, more innovative products and experiences that bring ICH traditions to life for contemporary audiences.

4.2 Build a rich model of cultural and tourism integration

Local government departments should make full use of their regions' distinctive ICH resources and, by combining them with local landscapes and folk customs, develop integrated culture tourism models that reflect regional identity. One approach is to design personalized integration models rooted in local characteristics. For instance, in areas where ethnic minorities live in concentrated communities, tourism could be built around unique ICH elements such as ethnic songs and dances, traditional architecture, and distinctive cuisine. An "ethnic cultural experience tour" might allow tourists not only to enjoy the ethnic song and dance performances in their natural setting, but also to take part in building experience of traditional buildings, taste authentic ethnic cuisine, and gain a deeper understanding of the lifestyle and cultural traditions of ethnic minorities.

Another approach is to expand into emerging integration models to meet the growing diversity of visitor interests. Cultural and tourism departments could actively explore integration models such as "ICH + health care", "ICH + sports", and "ICH + study Tours". In terms of "ICH + health care", traditions like Tai Chi and moxibustion could be incorporated into

wellness tourism products. Under professional guidance, tourists could learn Tai Chi forms, experience moxibustion therapy, and, in the process, relax both body and mind while discovering the charm of traditional health culture. In case of "ICH + sports", traditional martial arts, folk athletic events, and modern sporting activities can be combined. For example, hosting martial arts contests, dragon boat races, or other culturally rooted competitions to draw sports enthusiasts and enhance the visibility of ICH. Finally, in "ICH + study Tours", well-designed educational programs could center on traditional papermaking techniques. Students could visit papermaking workshops to learn about its history and techniques observe artisans art work and even participate in each stage of production. Such activities would enable them to gain hands-on experience while linking cultural inheritance with broader educational goals.

4.3 Build a global communication network

To strengthen the international dissemination of ICH arts within the cultural and tourism sector, relevant departments should begin with in-depth audience research. This means analysing the cultural background, preferences, interests, and consumption habits of audiences in different regions, and using these insights to design dissemination strategies that fit each target market. The first step is to identify target audience precisely and tailor communication accordingly. For Western markets, where people are often fascinated by the mysterious and artistic aspects of Chinese culture, efforts can be made to focus on ICH projects with strong visual appeal and symbolic depth, such as Peking Opera and paper-cutting. In these cases, promotional content might simplify complex historical contexts while highlighting artistic expressiveness. Through high-quality images and videos, the elaborate costumes, bold facial makeup, and masterful performance skills of Peking Opera to capture the attention of European and American audiences. By contrast, in culturally closer Asian markets, promotion could focus on ICH projects tied to daily life and familiar traditions, such as tea culture, traditional crafts, or culinary heritage, which resonate more directly with local life styles.

The second step is to integrate multiple communication channels to form a communication synergy. At the government level, participation in international cultural exchange events, hosting ICH-themed exhibitions and performances, and working with global travel agencies to include ICH-themed routes in their product catalogues can all enhance national cultural visibility. Governments can also leverage e-commerce platforms to sell creative ICH products with international market potential^[8]. At the same time, non-governmental cultural groups, ICH protection institutions, and other social organizations should be encouraged to engage in international exchanges and cooperation, and hold cross-border intangible cultural heritage seminars, workshops and other activities.

Finally, the role of online channels should also be taken into consideration. By making use of mainstream international platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, high-quality short videos about ICH can be produced to showcase ICH arts to a worldwide audiences. Combining storytelling, visuals and cultural explanations can help these videos go beyond simple entertainment, leading global users into deeper engagement and forming a comprehensive, multi-layered communication network for ICH tourism integration.

5 Conclusion

From a global perspective, the integration of ICH art with the cultural tourism industry holds huge market potential and carries significant cultural value. Despite numerous difficulties, sustained commitment and effective strategies can ensure meaningful progress. By delving deeply into the distinctive qualities of local ICH, fostering continuous innovation in content, avoiding the pitfalls of repetitive and homogeneous offerings, and fully harnessing the power of new media and online dissemination, these traditions can serve as a strong engine for the high-quality development of the cultural and tourism sector. Such integration does more than stimulate the local economy; it also creates valuable employment opportunities, elevates the profile of regional tourism culture and offers a sustainable pathway for the preservation and revitalisation of ICH. When these traditions are embedded in tourism in ways that are engaging, authentic, and rooted in local identity, they become more than attractions, they evolve into living expressions of heritage that connect past and present, and foster a sense of pride within the community. Realising this vision requires more than the dedication of cultural practitioners. Solid policy support from local governments, together with the active involvement of social organisations and enterprises, is essential. Only through genuine multi-party collaboration can deep integration and ongoing innovation be achieved. In doing so, ICH art can not only maintain its relevance but also thrive in new contexts, adapting gracefully to changing times. As globalisation continues to reshape cultural landscapes, such efforts will allow ICH to radiate renewed vitality, ensuring that it remains both a treasured cultural legacy and a driving force for sustainable cultural-tourism development.

About the Author

Ke Ren (2000.2), Female, Han Chinese, Native Place: Xiaoyi, Shanxi Province, master's degree, reserach focus: arts management.

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