

Research on Private-run Universities Empowering the Living Inheritance of Liaoning's Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

By leveraging high-quality resources of private-run universities and adopting digital media technologies for the living-state protection and inheritance of Liaoning's intangible cultural heritage (ICH), this study aims to excavate the fine traditional Chinese culture rooted among the folk people. Digital means are utilized to promote fine traditional Chinese culture and give full play to the exemplary role of intangible cultural heritage. Furthermore, the breadth, precision and speed of digitalization for Liaoning's intangible cultural heritage can be advanced, accelerating its digital protection process. A new mode is realized for the reproduction, protection, inheritance and resource sharing of ICH in a "living" form, so as to carry out comprehensive and three-dimensional protection and inheritance. This represents a new concept, new method and new approach in the conservation of intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords

Private-run universities, Liaoning intangible cultural heritage, living inheritance.

1. Introduction

In recent years, China has successively formulated and implemented policies including Measures for the Identification and Administration of National-level Representative Inheritors of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Special Plan for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2019-2025) and Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Key projects such as the Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance and Development Project have been carried out, providing institutional guarantees and development orientation for the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. ^[1]Meanwhile, General Secretary Xi Jinping has given important instructions on ICH protection: "We shall deliver solid work on the systematic protection of intangible cultural heritage, better meet people's growing intellectual and cultural needs, and advance cultural confidence and self-improvement."

As an ancient civilization with a long history, China boasts abundant intangible cultural heritage. Nevertheless, impacted by economic globalization and accelerated modernization, tremendous challenges confront the protection and inheritance of ICH. A large number of ICH items fail to be inherited and utilized and are even on the verge of extinction.

In recent years, universities across China have actively launched programs of "Bringing Intangible Cultural Heritage onto Campus", and set up academic disciplines and numerous elective courses for ICH protection and inheritance. However, merely introducing ICH onto campus cannot truly realize the empowerment of universities for the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

Theoretical research and practical work on ICH protection abroad started in the mid-20th century and have become relatively standardized to date. In 1997, the concept of "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" was formally adopted in documents of UNESCO and widely recognized worldwide. In 2001, UNESCO announced the first batch of 19 "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity". In 2003, the 32nd

General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Since then, global-scale intangible cultural heritage conservation has turned into a cultural project promoted by governments of many countries.

Intangible-cultural-heritage-oriented education has also been incorporated into fine-arts education in overseas universities. For instance, Japanese universities integrate intangible cultural heritage such as tea ceremony, flower arrangement and traditional handicrafts into general-education aesthetic courses and art-major curricula, constructing a teaching model of “craftsmanship plus culture” to foster students’ recognition of native culture and craftsmanship spirit.

To sum up, in current international academic circles, teaching related to intangible cultural heritage has gained increasing popularity and wide recognition among higher-education institutions across nations. It arouses public interest in the development and conservation of cultural heritage and facilitates the continuous functioning of cultural beliefs and traditional values in modern society. Nevertheless, few studies explore how high-education institutions leverage their high-quality resources to genuinely empower the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

2. Overview of Intangible Cultural Heritage Resources in Liaoning Province

As of January 2026, Liaoning Province has published seven batches of provincial-level intangible cultural heritage projects totaling 428 entries, among which 76 are national-level. They cover nine categories, traditional music, traditional dance, traditional drama, quyi, traditional sports, traditional fine arts, traditional craftsmanship, traditional Chinese medicine and folk customs.^[2]In terms of geographical distribution:

Southern-central Liaoning (Shenyang and Dalian) gathers cultural-innovation and opera-related ICH, e.g., Shenyang Manchu embroidery, Fuzhou shadow puppetry and Zhuanghe Northeast dagu. Western Liaoning (Jinzhou and Chaoyang) excels in folk customs, traditional drum music and folk paper-cutting. Eastern Liaoning (Dandong and Anshan) features Xiuyan jade carving and Manchu folk craftsmanship. Northern Liaoning (Tieling) focuses on errenzhuan and folk quyi. These resources are rich in variety and distinct in regional characteristics, possessing cultural value, artistic value as well as potential for industrial development.

Liaoning Province has built 300 intangible-cultural-heritage workshops. Activities including “ICH entering scenic spots”, the ICH Four-Season Shopping Month and ICH study-tour routes have been rolled out. Rescue-oriented digital archiving has been completed for national-level items such as Liaoning drum music. A government-led protection framework has basically taken shape.

3. Five Core Dilemmas in the Living Inheritance of Liaoning’s Intangible Cultural Heritage

3.1. Superficial Digital Protection with Insufficient In-depth Implementation of Digital-intelligent Empowerment

Although Liaoning Province has finished image-and-video archiving for some key ICH items, most materials are simply stored as videos and pictures. Databases of ICH patterns, digital models of craft procedures and VR-based immersive experience libraries are lacking. Technologies including AI, 3D modeling and interactive design have not been applied for secondary reuse of ICH elements. Digital resources are confined to the internal networks of cultural-tourism authorities, and are hardly accessible to universities, designers and

cultural-innovation enterprises. Digitalization only achieves “preservation”, rather than “activated communication and creative reuse”.^[1]

3.2. Aging Inheritors and Severe Gaps in Talent Echelons

The aging of inheritors and large talent shortages constitute the most prominent problem for Liaoning’s intangible cultural heritage. There are merely 10 living national-level inheritors for quyi in Liaoning, and provincial-level inheritors are generally elderly.^[3] Rare operas such as Liao opera and Liaoning drum music suffer from shortages of young composers and performing successors. The traditional master-apprentice system requires long-term learning yet brings relatively low economic returns, discouraging young people from long-term engagement. Popularization of ICH remains fragmented without systematic skill training. University-based ICH education emphasizes theories over practical operations and struggles to cultivate compound inheritors equipped with craftsmanship, innovative capacity and operational competence, which creates potential risks of “art vanishing upon the master’s death”.

3.3. Limited Communication Scenarios, Dull Forms and Inadequate Application of New Communication Approaches

Liaoning’s intangible cultural heritage has long been disseminated through festival performances, exhibition-hall displays and offline folk-custom events, with limited scenarios and monotonous forms. Youth-oriented communication tools such as short-video platforms, livestreaming, metaverse interaction and Guochao-style cultural innovation are underutilized. Most inheritors lack new-media operational capabilities and cannot build personal ICH IPs. Consequently, ICH gains low recognition among young generations and gradually fades out of public daily life.^[4]

3.4. Absence of Regular Cooperation Platforms; Scattered Resources Failing to Generate Joint Inheritance Forces

Government cultural-tourism authorities, ICH inheritors, universities and cultural-innovation enterprises remain largely disconnected from one another. Governments focus on formulating protective policies yet lack supporting measures for innovative transformation. Inheritors concentrate on craftsmanship itself but are deficient in teaching and market-operation capacities. Public universities face high research thresholds and long project-implementation cycles. Enterprises possess market channels but are short of creative designers for intangible cultural heritage. Without regular cooperation platforms among the four stakeholders, resources are fragmented and joint driving forces for inheritance cannot be formed.

3.5. Weak Capacity for Craft Innovation; Outdated and Homogenized Cultural-innovation Products

A large number of Liaoning ICH items stick to traditional forms without adapting to modern daily necessities and contemporary aesthetic trends. Cultural-innovation products for Xiuyan jade carving, southern Liaoning paper-cutting and cloth tigers feature outdated designs and severe homogenization. Most are merely souvenirs, lacking brand planning, IP development and cross-border co-branding. ICH inheritors are incompetent in market research, e-commerce operation and brand marketing. Their products face narrow sales channels and survive largely on government subsidies, unable to realize self-sustaining development through industrial benefits.

4. Unique Advantages of Private-run Universities in Empowering the Living Inheritance of Liaoning's Intangible Cultural Heritage

4.1. Highly Flexible School-running Mechanisms Enabling Efficient Curriculum-reform Implementation

Compared with cumbersome curriculum-approval procedures in public universities, private-run universities enjoy autonomy in adjusting teaching plans. They can rapidly embed Liaoning ICH content into specialized courses, set up micro-majors and launch short-term workshop practical training classes. For example, Phoenix Academy of Dalian Art College has quickly invited inheritors of southern Liaoning dough-modeling and Fuzhou shadow puppetry to give on-campus lectures.^[5] Liaoning Communication University has built curriculum modules for the digital ICH museum within a short cycle to satisfy teaching demands for ICH inheritance. Teaching content can be dynamically optimized according to characteristics of ICH projects and market talent demands, resolving the pain point of slow implementation of ICH-oriented teaching.

4.2. Highly Flexible School-running Mechanisms Enabling Efficient Curriculum-reform Implementation

Majors offered by private-run universities in Liaoning fit well with the whole industrial chain of ICH revitalization. Take Liaoning Communication University as an example: teachers and students from new-media-art and digital-media majors can deliver cultural-innovation design for ICH, pattern extraction, 3D digital modeling and VR scene production. Majors including online new media, film production, radio-television editing-directing, broadcasting-hosting and performance support short-video shooting for ICH, livestreaming operation, IP building and all-media communication. Majors of cultural-industry management and communication can conduct market research for ICH, brand planning, e-commerce operation and cultural-tourism project development. Such major clusters cover all links of ICH protection, innovation, communication and commercialization, addressing talent shortages and insufficient digital-intelligent implementation in ICH development in an all-around manner. ^[6]

4.3. Abundant Industry-education Integration Resources and Stronger Market-linking Capacity than Public Universities

The survival and development of private-run universities heavily rely on university-enterprise cooperation. They maintain long-term in-depth collaboration with local cultural-innovation companies, cultural-tourism scenic spots, e-commerce platforms and advertising enterprises in Liaoning, with mature channels for practical projects. Students' ICH-themed design works can be directly mass-produced and sold online by cooperative enterprises. Universities can undertake ICH-planning projects for institutions such as Shenyang Palace Museum, Liaoning Provincial Museum and Dalian Culture and Tourism Group according to market requirements, rapidly translating creative ICH outcomes into market commodities and helping ICH build market-oriented profit-making models so as to tackle outdated and homogenized cultural-innovation products. Cultural-innovation works designed by teachers and students from Liaoning Communication University for Shenyang Palace Museum and Liaoning Provincial Museum that go through market-oriented sales serve as a typical case.

4.4. Autonomous Fund Allocation Facilitating the Construction of Hardware Platforms for Intangible Cultural Heritage

Private-run universities can independently allocate school-running funds to invest in building on-campus ICH workshops, digital ICH museums and ICH laboratories. Liaoning Communication University has self-funded a nationwide public-welfare digital ICH museum equipped with VR and UE5 interactive technologies, completing digital-scene reconstruction

for Shenyang's ICH. Dalian Neusoft University of Information has leveraged its strengths in information construction to build digital material libraries for ICH. Hardware construction is delivered much faster than the special-fund-approval mode adopted by public universities.

4.5. Highly Flexible School-running Mechanisms Enabling Efficient Curriculum-reform Implementation

Private-run universities widely adopt project-oriented teaching and studio-based systems, which differ from theory-dominated teaching in public universities. A two-way practical-training mechanism of "inheritors entering campus plus students accessing workshops" is implemented. While studying on campus, students can systematically learn Liaoning ICH craftsmanship together with modern design and operational skills, growing into new-generation compound inheritors "proficient in craftsmanship, creativity and market operation". This fundamentally mitigates the problem of youth-talent gaps for Liaoning's intangible cultural heritage.^[7]

5. Construction of Systematic Paths for Private-run Universities to Empower the Living Inheritance of Liaoning's Intangible Cultural Heritage

5.1. Integrate Intangible Cultural Heritage into Aesthetic-education Curricula of Private-run Universities and Reconstruct Curriculum Systems

Through the sound integration of intangible cultural heritage and aesthetic-education teaching in private-run universities, high-quality resources of private-run universities shall be utilized to create "one framework" and construct "two systems", serving cultural-innovation development of regional intangible cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage shall be authentically recorded and inherited in a "living" form, and promoted as an ICH brand for innovative development.

5.2. Jointly Build a General Digital-resource Repository for Intangible Cultural Heritage of Liaoning Private-run Universities

Led by Liaoning Communication University and supported by the Shenyang Digital ICH Exhibition Hall, technical and human resources from private-run universities across Liaoning shall be integrated to conduct multi-modal collection for provincial ICH in a unified way. Standardized 3D modeling and VR-scene production shall be finished for craft procedures, patterns and folk-custom scenarios of the 428 provincial-level ICH items. A cloud-based digital-gene repository for ICH shall be constructed and opened free-of-charge to cultural-tourism authorities, primary-secondary schools and cultural-innovation enterprises across Liaoning, so as to avoid redundant digital construction and isolated information islands. Meanwhile, leveraging strengths in computer science and digital-media majors of private-run universities, AI-driven digital humans can be deployed as virtual ICH inheritors for regular livestreaming on Douyin and Kuaishou. UE5 and metaverse technologies shall be applied to build online virtual experience halls for ICH. Students shall be guided to develop short-video matrices, Guochao-style emoji packs and mini-games themed on Liaoning ICH, bringing Liaoning's intangible cultural heritage into young people's daily social scenarios.

5.3. Deepen Government-University-Industry-Research Cooperation and Establish a Long-term Four-party Linkage Mechanism

First, governments shall take the lead in building regular docking platforms and release demand lists for provincial ICH inheritance on a regular basis. Targeted pairing shall be promoted between private-run universities and local ICH protection centers as well as ICH

workshops. Practical ICH programs of private-run universities shall be incorporated into the overall provincial plan for ICH inheritance, with supporting resources for venues, publicity and projects provided. Meanwhile, policies shall be improved to guarantee payment for inheritors giving lectures on campus. Teaching expenses shall be jointly covered by governments and universities to motivate long-term on-campus participation of inheritors.

Second, universities shall provide inheritors with training in teaching capabilities, new-media operation and cultural-innovation brand planning, improving their teaching competence and market-management skills. Inheritors shall settle in on-campus studios to deliver practical-training teaching, pass on craftsmanship and guide students to create ICH-themed works. Both sides shall jointly apply for innovative research projects and cultural-innovation patents for ICH and share benefits generated by outcomes, forming a stable win-win cooperative relationship.^[8]

Finally, private-run universities shall cooperate with Liaoning Culture and Tourism Group, cultural-innovation industrial parks, e-commerce platforms and local brand enterprises to co-establish an ICH industrial-research institute. Design schemes of ICH finished in class shall be selectively put into mass production by cooperative enterprises. Practical-training bases for ICH-oriented e-commerce shall be set up within universities, where marketing-major students are responsible for store operation and livestream sales. Joint efforts shall be made to build a regional public IP for Liaoning ICH. Cross-border co-branding shall be advanced between ICH elements such as Manchu embroidery and southern Liaoning paper-cutting and products including apparel, home supplies and cultural-tourism peripherals. Intangible cultural heritage shall achieve self-sustaining living inheritance through industrial revenues and get rid of reliance on government subsidies.

Tri-party linkage among governments, universities and society shall be realized to jointly explore effective approaches for developing and promoting “cultural-innovation products” of intangible cultural heritage, serve socio-economic development of Liaoning and boost regional cultural communication.

5.4. Build a Brand for ICH Inheritance Among Private-run Universities in Liaoning

The Liaoning Provincial Alliance for ICH Inheritance and Development of Private-run Universities shall be founded to coordinate superior resources of participating universities and realize differentiated task division. For instance, private-run universities in the Shenyang area focus on research and development for Manchu intangible cultural heritage, Shenyang folk customs and quyi-related ICH. Institutions in the Dalian area delve into southern Liaoning shadow puppetry, marine folk customs and digitalization of cultural innovation. Private-run universities in western Liaoning (Jinzhou and Chaoyang) prioritize paper-cutting, folk drum music and study-tour courses for folk customs. Curriculum resources, digital materials and inheritor resources shall be shared among universities. Provincial-wide ICH-design competitions and ICH performance seasons co-hosted by private-run universities shall jointly build the public brand “New Echoes of Liaoning Rhythm” for ICH of Liaoning private-run universities, enhancing provincial-wide and even nationwide influence of Liaoning’s intangible cultural heritage. Moreover, linked to rural-revitalization projects, high-quality ICH study-tour routes shall be developed. Study-tour curriculum resources of private-run universities shall be exported to towns and villages across Liaoning, facilitating ICH outreach to villages and communities and achieving all-domain living-state communication.

5.5. Integrate Intangible Cultural Heritage into the Ideological-political and Aesthetic-education Systems of Private-run Universities and Unify Cultural Inheritance with Fostering Virtue through Education

Dig deep into connotations embodied in Liaoning's intangible cultural heritage, including craftsmanship spirit, Guandong patriotism and ethnic-unity culture. Practical ICH activities shall be incorporated into ideological-political practice in universities. Students shall be organized to conduct cultural investigations in ICH-rich villages in western Liaoning, perceiving folk customs and craftsman spirit in craftsmanship learning. ICH exhibitions and performances shall serve as core carriers for campus aesthetic education. In this way, living-state communication of ICH is accomplished while cultural confidence of young students is cultivated, realizing in-depth integration between cultural inheritance and the educational mission of universities.^[9]

6. Conclusion

Liaoning boasts profound cultural resources of intangible cultural heritage. Nevertheless, its living inheritance hits developmental bottlenecks due to talent gaps, outdated communication modes, insufficient market-oriented development and lack of coordination mechanisms. With core strengths including flexible mechanisms, complete applied majors, powerful industry-education integration and well-established practical-teaching systems, private-run universities can precisely engage in the full chain of Liaoning's ICH inheritance. They can exert irreplaceable empowering effects in four key links: talent cultivation for ICH, digital protection, youth-oriented communication and market-oriented industrial transformation. Intangible cultural heritage of Liaoning can therefore step out of exhibition halls, blend into modern life and genuinely “stay alive, get inherited and go global”, delivering lasting cultural impetus for building Liaoning into a culturally-strong province and pursuing high-quality development of its cultural-tourism industry.

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