



# ICH and E-Commerce: Bridging Tradition and Modernity in Cultural and Creative Products

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The development of intangible cultural heritage cultural and creative products is an important channel for revitalizing intangible cultural heritage, and the e-commerce platform is a good way to promote and disseminate intangible cultural heritage cultural and creative products. Through literature research and online research, this study analyzes the current situation, innovative changes, and value effects of intangible cultural heritage cultural and creative products development, and explores the dilemmas and challenges faced by intangible cultural heritage cultural and creative products development. This paper proposes the "intangible cultural heritage cultural and creative products + e-commerce" mode, which provides reference for stimulating the

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creativity of intangible cultural heritage cultural and creative products development and effectively promoting the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage, so as further deepens the innovation protection and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage.

*Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage; cultural and creative products; e-commerce platform.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Intangible cultural heritage is an important part of China's outstanding traditional culture, a vivid testimony to the continuous transmission of Chinese civilization, and an important foundation for linking national sentiments and maintaining national unity. The Party and the government attach great importance to the protection of intangible cultural heritage, and the report of the 20th CPC National Congress emphasizes adhering to creative transformation and innovative development, and exploring the value of intangible cultural heritage ("ICH" appears below as its abbreviation) in depth. In 2021, the General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which encourages the rational use of resources of intangible cultural heritage for artistic and literary creation and cultural and creative design, and improves the quality and cultural connotation. At present, the ICH + cultural and creative products is a "sunrise industry". The state, the government and local cultural departments are actively developing cultural and creative industries. In order to protect and inherit ICH skills and develop ICH resources, it has been very common for ICH to enter universities and classrooms (Yin & Liu, 2021; Fang, 2024). Previous studies have confirmed that culture is the engine of local development (Sacco et al., 2013), especially for the economic development of remote rural areas (Chen et al., 2021). Cultural heritage is creative inspiration, contains great value (Cerisola, 2019) and is an important development resource that can be developed and integrated. Cultural and creative products containing elements of ICH attributes are more competitive and influential than other cultural and creative products. Attaching or applying ICH elements to the innovative development of cultural and creative products will generate "1+1>2" cultural and economic benefits (Gao, 2020). For example, the ICH of Miao's batik art (Chen et al., 2021), rural craftsmen are aware of its market value. In the process of integrating into the modern commodity economy, they carry out market promotion through the trading network as an important channel for survival and skill

inheritance. Meanwhile, in the era of digital economy, utilizing the e-commerce platform to spread and expand the promotion and sales channels of related ICH cultural and creative products is the best means to reach potential consumers.

## 2. DEVELOPMENT STATUS OF CULTURAL AND CREATIVE PRODUCT WITH ICH ELEMENTS

ICH is rich in connotations, not only in cultural skills but also in real entities. They are the traditional cultures that have been handed down from generation to generation from ancient times to the present day, and have become part of the cultural heritage, as well as the physical objects and places associated with the traditional cultures. ICH is the most dynamic and important part of cultural diversity, the crystallization of human civilization and the most valuable common wealth, carrying the wisdom of mankind through the ages and symbolizing the civilization and splendor of human history. Nowadays, the extremely popular cultural and creative products mainly refer to the fusion of culture and products through innovative design, and the production of products with cultural connotation and artistic value, which can be sold for profit as well as for the purpose of publicizing and promoting culture. It can be seen that the mutual connotation of ICH and cultural and creative products is embodied in the cultural level, while cultural and creative products are in various forms, including artwork, handicrafts, decorations, daily necessities, gifts and so on.

From souvenirs with local landscapes or elements, to practical products with "labelling", to today's products with multi-dimensional or deeper cultural values, the concepts and meanings of cultural and creative products are changing with the times. Cultural creativity is the most valuable, and the concept of cultural and creative products is not static, but is constantly evolving with the development of society and the progress of designers' thinking, and has unlimited potential (Chen, 2021). Combining ICH and cultural products will undoubtedly produce mutual assistance and win-win effects.

Nowadays, many museums, cultural centers and local tourist attractions carry out a variety of ICH Hands-on experiential activities, and sell a variety of cultural and creative products containing ICH elements, which triggers the “Zhong Cao” effect (this effect is when an item is recommended by others or when search results pop up when surfing the web) on social media platforms, driving to become a must-go online popular check-in itinerary. This will also promote the development of city and local tourism industry and enhance the influence of ICH cultural industry.

### **3. INNOVATIVE CHANGES IN ICH CULTURAL AND CREATIVE PRODUCTS**

#### **3.1 Integration into People's Lives and Deepening Public Awareness and Identity**

Under the preservation of the profound cultural connotation of ICH, ICH cultural and creative products can be integrated into life, and the functionality and practicality of ICH cultural and creative products can be strengthened, so that the ICH is no longer high up and inaccessible. ICH has rich connotation and long flavor, through the traditional redesign and innovative transformation can make the ICH culture integrated into daily life. Let the public understand the cultural vein, understand the true meaning of it, and then realise the deep integration of ICH and modern life, let the ICH “out of the boudoir”. It also allows more people contact with ICH, participate in its protection work, thereby brings vitality and vigor to the ICH (Wang, 2018). Such as ICH tie-dyeing technique, is China's ancient and unique dyeing technology, contains a unique national aesthetic thinking and cultural and arts. Now in many tourist attractions, in the ICH class promoted by the cultural tourism department can be seen containing tie-dye elements of cultural and creative products and service experience, such as tie-dye square scarves, skirts, canvas bags, etc.. You can not only learn and experience the DIY ICH tie-dye technology but also take away the tie-dye products designed by yourself.

#### **3.2 Jumping Out of Traditional Design Ideas to Realize the Innovative Design of ICH Cultural and Creative Products**

Under the background of new media, the speed of social information dissemination is very rapid. Modern product designers must follow the social

development trend, through the deep excavation of China's traditional cultural connotations to give the product a more profound cultural value (Liu et al., 2023). In recent years, there are more and more cases of excellent ICH cultural and creative product innovation and design, such as the Forbidden City cultural and creative, the National Library of China cultural and creative, Qingdao Beer Museum cultural and creative, Jingdezhen China Ceramics Museum cultural and creative blind box and so on. Among them, the Forbidden City cultural creation has received unanimous praise, and the explosive products launched, such as the Forbidden City calendar, the Forbidden City cat, the Forbidden City makeup, refrigerator magnets and so on, are popular among the public, especially among young people, and have become the hot-selling cultural and creative products on the e-commerce platform, which are warmly sought after by consumers.

#### **3.3 Realize the Integration of Various ICH Cultures and Strengthen the Kernel Gene of Cultural and Creative Products**

ICH as a significant part of human culture, has a profound historical heritage and unique artistic value. The proposal of “ICH + ICH” pattern maintains the unity of the nation, promotes the development of ICH industry, and allows ICH to better adapt to the needs and changes of modern society, while allowing more people to understand the ICH culture and ICH techniques. Such as the Dragon Boat Festival celebrations and other nodes of the e-commerce platform hot sales of Traditional Chinese medicine embroidery sachet products, is a blend of ICH Chinese medicine and embroidery techniques, not only to meet the consumer's quest for medicinal value, but also reflects the aesthetic blessings.

ICH is rich in historical, cultural and artistic characteristics, providing a variety of possibilities for cultural and creative design, through the elements of ICH re-analysis, awareness, understanding, application, creative design can meet the public aesthetic products, but also can promote the protection and inheritance of ICH (Yi, 2024). ICH cultural and creative products make the creative value into product value, make the ICH not only exist in the museum, but appear in the elements of people's lives, is through the combination of modern technical ideas and traditional ICH, ICH culture and ICH skills for innovative transformation and upgrading. Using modern technology and industrialized production

means, products with high added value are developed to create more modern and practical daily ICH cultural and creative products to promote the inheritance, protection and development of ICH culture. When ICH is disseminated as cultural and creative products, the solidified purely handmade production method needs to be changed to meet the market demand. By combining ICH culture with modern design, technology and innovation, young entrepreneurs can not only create more attractive ICH products and artworks to meet the aesthetic needs of modern people, but also inject new vitality into ICH culture while passing it on, realizing the perfect combination of tradition and modernity (Zhang, 2024).

#### **4. VALUE OF ICH CULTURAL AND CREATIVE PRODUCTS**

##### **4.1 Strengthening the Protection and Inheritance of ICH**

The list of ICH with Chinese characteristics at the national, provincial, municipal and county levels recognizes more than 100,000 representative items of intangible heritage, and it is clear that it is difficult to devote attention to every item of intangible heritage. Some provincial and county-level, less well-known ICH is facing a huge dilemma of development, and some intangible heritage even has no successor and has been on the verge of extinction because it is too niche, difficult to replicate, and neither of ornamental value nor practicality (Cai, 2024). In order to let the ICH be recognized by people, we should let the ICH enter the market and the public life, so that more people will love these niche ICH, protect and pass on the ICH. ICH cultural and creative products is the best carrier of ICH into the market. ICH cultural and creative products will combine contemporary aesthetic and design with the protection of ICH, so that it meets the modern aesthetics, so as to knock on the door of the modern market, which will protect the connotations, the spirits and the ideas of the ICH.

##### **4.2 Expanding the Ideas of Cultural and Creative Product Design**

Nowadays, there are both good and bad cultural and creative product designs mixed together in the market. ICH provides more fresh ideas for cultural and creative products, improves the competitiveness of the market of cultural and creative products, and greatly improves the design standard of cultural and creative products.

While combining ICH and cultural creation, designers and inheritors carefully study and explore the elements of traditional culture that can be used in cultural and creative product design, and combine them with modern aesthetics and design to design ICH cultural and creative products with practicability and aesthetics. The profoundness of the treasury of ICH provides a constant source of creativity for the cultural and creative products, and designers should establish a bridge between cultural and creative products and ICH, so that the ICH can shift from a passive state to an active quest by the public and in that way more people can participate in the career of the ICH cultural and creative products. And then build more splendid and distinctive ICH cultural and creative products brands (Zhang, 2021).

##### **4.3 Enriching Cultural Diversity and Strengthening Cultural Self-Confidence**

ICH is rich and varied, and has strong cultural diversity in itself. Through cultural and creative products, different kinds of connotations and skills of ICH can be combined, and it can also promote the dissemination and exchange of ICH of different nationalities and regions, increase people's understanding and recognition of different cultures, and enhance the sense of national identity and self-confidence.

##### **4.4 Enhancing Economic Efficiency and Ensuring Sustainable Development**

ICH cultural and creative products will enhance economic benefits if it turns to the industrialization mode, and the development and sale of ICH cultural and creative products can create economic value. Not only increase the income of ICH bearers and related workers, but also drive the overall economic income of the relevant region. The income of ICH bearers is stable, the inheritance of ICH skills will be secure. In that way, there will be no need to worry that they will leave the profession because of the difficulty in feeding themselves with low returns as in the past, leaving no one to pass on intangible cultural heritage.

##### **4.5 Enhancing the Viability of ICH and Promoting Cultural Diffusion**

The key to the vitality of ICH is to make traditional culture young and cultural and creative

products alive, and to constantly explore and innovate. Combining ICH elements with public aesthetics and modern design, ICH cultural and creative products with contemporary characteristics are bred under the collision of modern ideas and traditional culture, promoting creative transformation and innovative development of ICH. The combination of ICH and cultural and creative products makes people all over the world pay attention to specific items with practical functions and cultural connotations, and then deeply understand the culture of ICH, which will spread and spread the ICH all over the world.

## **5. DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY ICH CULTURAL AND CREATIVE PRODUCTS**

### **5.1 Conflicts between Preservation and Innovation in the Integration of “ICH + ICH”**

In the process of integration of traditional culture and modern design, protection and innovation will appear contradictory conflicts, and the main purpose of innovative transformation of ICH culture is to make it protected and inherited. Since it is to be inherited, its uniqueness should not be changed, and in the process of integration, it is inevitable to carry out innovation. So how to balance the relationship between the two is worthy of subsequent thinking. In the research on the protection of China's agricultural cultural heritage, it is also difficult to grasp the boundary between protection and development (Yonggan, 2023), which is similar to the problems encountered in the development and innovation of ICH cultural and creative products. In realizing the integration of ICH, one side is bound to dominate, so how to ensure the uniqueness of both sides at the same time will be innovative combination of the two sides, is a major challenge in the future.

### **5.2 Smaller Audience for ICH Cultural and Creative Products**

ICH is mainly disseminated in specific areas, and the audience is limited. Most of the public follow fashion trends and love pop culture, and pay relatively little attention to traditional culture. In the age of the Internet, information is abundant, precisely because the categories that attract the attention of the public are too complicated, ICH cultural and creative products appear to go unnoticed and lonely. The limitation of the

publicity of ICH leads to few people understanding intangible cultural heritage, often only have visibility only in localised areas.

### **5.3 Inadequate Development of Supporting Industry Chain**

The combination of ICH and cultural and creative design needs to be transformed into industrialisation. Otherwise, according to the production mode of traditional skills, it is far from being able to meet the market demand. Industrialisation requires a complete industrial chain to support and promote the development, production and sales of cultural and creative products. The integration of ICH and cultural and creative products design requires cross-border cooperation and integration of resources, which involves the participation of many industries and fields. At present, the market demand for intangible cultural heritage and cultural and creative products is not strong enough, and consumers' understanding and cognition of intangible cultural heritage is relatively low, which makes the development of the supporting industry chain restricted (Xiao, 2024) and fails to form a virtuous cycle and sustainable development.

### **5.4 Rapid Technological Upgrading and High Cost of Maintaining Intellectual Property Rights**

With the progress of science and technology, modern technology is rapidly updated and difficult to innovate. At the same time, the Internet age spreads fast, and valuable ICH cultural and creative products will certainly bring huge economic benefits, leading to fierce competition in the market. As a result, there may be merchants who have crooked ideas and use inferior imitations to enter the market and make huge profits. ICH cultural and creative products should pay more attention to innovation and design, once the market is destroyed by imitation products, it will be more difficult to develop and inherit. Because the price war and the long road to defend the rights may cause the phenomenon of 'survival of the fittest'.

## **6. “ICH CULTURAL AND CREATIVE PRODUCTS + E-COMMERCE” MODE**

“ICH cultural and creative products + e-commerce” is a better strategy for protection and inheritance, “intangible cultural heritage creative

products + e-commerce” is a combination of intangible cultural heritage and e-commerce. Intangible cultural heritage is the crystallisation of the 5,000-year-long culture of the Chinese nation, carrying the wisdom, civilization and splendor of the Chinese nation. But, in the Today's fast pace of life, few people stop to pay attention to traditional culture and there are very few people who can take the responsibility of inheriting the intangible cultural heritage, resulting in intangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage skills appear the phenomenon that no one can pass on. The emergence of business model provides an opportunity for the inheritance and protection of intangible cultural heritage. The application of digital technology, especially the power of network, to realize the sustainable development of cultural heritage protection and inheritance has become a consensus (Cao et al., 2018; Oguamanam, 2009 & Lei et al., 2022). Through the e-commerce platform, let more people know those little-known traditional skills and traditional culture, break the space limitations, let the public recognize the different nationalities and regions of the characteristics of the intangible cultural heritage, such as Yunnan's "Tile Cats" (a kind of earthenware handicraft which has the effect of warding off evil spirits), Baoji's "Mashao Mask" (a mask carved or painted on a wooden spoon and hung above the front), Anhui's "Word Bean Candy" (a kind of candy inlaid with auspicious characters), and "traditional Chinese medicine embroidery perfume bag" on e-commerce platforms. Some of these ICH have not even been heard of in the past, but in today's digital era, these interesting ICH has come into the public's view step by step, and the e-commerce mode has allowed more people to recognize, understand, and even participate in the protection and inheritance of these ICH.

### **6.1 Using E-Commerce Platform to Promote the Dissemination and Sale of ICH Cultural and Creative Products**

The development of e-commerce in China has entered a mature stage. In recent years, the trade of cultural and creative products has been developed more rapidly, and the development of cultural and creative products is more and more dependent on high-tech digital Internet, which shows the importance of e-commerce to the trade of ICH cultural and creative products (Chen, 2022). Taobao, Jingdong, Pinduoduo and other large shopping platforms have a large user base and traffic, cultural and creative products in the

e-commerce platform can increase exposure and sales, consumers can browse and buy non-heritage cultural and creative products anytime and anywhere. E-commerce platform comment interactive area is a great tool, which allows merchants to keep abreast of market dynamics and strengthen market positioning. Merchants can adjust the design of ICH cultural and creative products in a timely manner according to the opinions of consumers, so that non-heritage cultural and creative products can be loved by the public without losing their uniqueness, and ICH can be better protected and passed on.

### **6.2 Consumers' Participation Can Stimulate the Vitality of Ich Cultural and Creative Products**

The design and combination of intangible cultural heritage creative products need to obtain a wide range of consumer demand opinions, the consumer views, feedback, evaluation experience, public praise can undoubtedly stimulate the vitality of ICH cultural and creative products. Social e-commerce, "Zhong Cao" effect platform are opening the channel to hope that consumers to participate in, absorbing the consumer's opinions and suggestions for the products, and consumer participation in the co-creation of value. Xiaomi cell phone in the original start also makes good use of the network effect, building fan communities and iterating products based on user feedback to win over enthusiasts. ICH cultural and creative products have natural cultural attributes intangible cultural heritage elements but is still essentially a product. They need to listen to the voice of consumers, And in that way, design developers can be inspired to integrate cultural preservation innovations and needs, so that the products can meet the market and consumer demand, will have sustainable vitality.

### **6.3 ICH Cultural and Creative Products' Cultural Effects Drive Economic Development**

Nowadays, an important aspect of the public consumption characteristics is to care about personalized experience, and the cultural elements contained in ICH cultural and creative products can help to achieve personalized experience by making good use of them. Intangible cultural heritage creative products not only have practical value, but also rich in scenarios. In particular, the combination with the tourism industry enables experiential economic

development and the integration of culture and tourism, thereby contributing to economic prosperity. In addition, ICH cultural and creative products are connected with the upstream and downstream of the relevant industrial chain, from the exploitation of creative products to the entry of specific products into the market. Once they have gained consumer enthusiasm, the relevant workers and enterprise areas in the industrial chain are prosperous, thus promoting the extension of the industrial chain. Moreover the offline mechanism can feed back online mechanism and the combination of online and offline can strengthen the public reputation.

#### **6.4 Improve the Guarantee System for the ICH Cultural and Creative Products Industry**

To realize the upgrading and innovative development of the cultural industry (Song, 2017) human's initiative is important in the cultural and creative industries (Throsby, 2008), such as ICH inheritors, product development designers, etc. ICH cultural and creative products involve the integration and application of ICH elements. In this process, we should provide basic livelihood protection for the relevant intellectual laborers and the inheritors of the skills. At the level of social policy, it is necessary to encourage the integration and innovation of ICH and cultural and creative industries. And at the level of legal regulation and supervision, it is necessary to protect original designs and pay attention to intellectual property rights. In particular, the e-commerce platform should fulfill the obligations of the platform, cooperate with the market supervision department to crack down on infringement and maintain the platform ecology. We should build mechanisms at the levels of social policies, government markets and legal platforms to ensure the vitality of the development of non-heritage cultural and creative industries.

### **7. CONCLUSION**

"ICH cultural and creative products + E-commerce" mode provides the possibility for ICH to enter the life. The e-commerce platform merchants will be timely collect consumer awareness and feedback of intangible cultural heritage creative products, providing a new way for intangible cultural heritage creative products to have an innovative transformation. Consumer-centred change is not only conducive to the

inheritance of ICH, but also allows ICH to enter into the public's life and bring new vitality to intangible cultural heritage. Cultural and creative products that incorporate elements of intangible cultural heritage have more vitality and market influence, which is a win-win situation for all parties.

### **DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)**

Authors hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

### **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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