



Innovative Research and Practice of “Hand + Art” Intangible Cultural Heritage Study in Jiangnan Cultural Context

—Taking Wuzhou Tie-Dye as an Example

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Abstract

The integration of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) inheritance and educational research is a crucial direction for cultural protection and quality education in the new era. However, existing courses still suffer from issues such as “touring without learning” and low participation. This paper aims to explore innovative pathways for ICH research courses using Wuzhou tie-dyeing as a case study. It seeks to build a curriculum system that combines educational value with practicality. Through literature analysis, field research, questionnaire surveys, and pilot experiments, it designs a “two-stage” course framework. By integrating new media dissemination and resource platform construction, it proposes a “hand + art” research model. This approach effectively enhances young people’s awareness of ICH recognition and inheritance, providing a practical paradigm for the sustainable development of regional ICH.

Subject Areas

Culture and Education

Keywords

Intangible Cultural Heritage, Study Courses, Wuzhou Tie-Dye, Cultural Inheritance, Jiangnan Culture

1. Introduction

Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereinafter referred to as “ICH”) serves as the spiritual

gene of Chinese civilization, bearing the historical memory and cultural wisdom of the nation. In the process of globalization and modernization, the inheritance of ICH faces the real challenge of a lack of successors. At the same time, the field of youth education is undergoing a transformation from knowledge imparting to practical nurturing, with study tours being incorporated into the national quality education system as “mobile classrooms”. The integration model of “Intangible Cultural Heritage + study tours” has become a new approach to addressing the dual challenges of inheritance and education: on the one hand, it stimulates young people’s recognition of traditional culture through immersive experiences; on the other hand, it injects sustainable vitality into ICH through educational settings.

However, the current practice of ICH studies generally suffers from three major disconnections. First, there is a disconnect between course content and local culture, with severe homogenization; second, the form of practice is disconnected from students’ cognitive development, often remaining at a superficial level of manual experience; third, the methods of dissemination are out of touch with contemporary needs, relying heavily on traditional promotional channels. Taking the tie-dyeing of Wuzhou in Zhejiang Province as an example, this representative ICH skill of Jiangnan culture embodies unique ecological wisdom and aesthetic value through its core techniques such as “plant dyeing” and “hand-woven resist printing”. Despite attempts by the Yantou Village Tie-Dye Workshop to integrate tourism and culture, the study courses still face the bottleneck of being “touristic but not educational” and “interesting but unengaging”, making it difficult to achieve deep integration of cultural inheritance and educational goals.

2. Difficulties and Challenges: A Survey of the Current Situation of ICH Study Courses

2.1. The Current Situation of International and Domestic ICH Research

In terms of ICH, foreign research experience is richer than that in China. As early as 1950, Japan introduced the concept of intangible cultural property and enacted relevant laws and regulations for its protection. South Korea began to focus on collecting and organizing traditional ethnic and folk cultures from the 1960s, and formulated the “Cultural Property Protection Act” in 1962. With the introduction of UNESCO’s “Convention Concerning ICH” in 2003, the integration of disciplines in ICH studies accelerated, leading to a wealth of insightful research findings. Similar models to those used in ICH education have been successfully applied worldwide. For example, Italy has rescued and promoted the Sicilian puppetry project through the creation of puppets, museums, and various puppet theaters, allowing tourists to deepen their understanding of Sicilian puppetry while enjoying the beautiful scenery of Sicily, thus perfectly integrating ICH with tourism.

Regarding domestic research, according to the search results from literature retrieval platforms such as China National Knowledge Infrastructure, studies on ICH educational tours were extremely scarce in 2018. From 2019 to 2023, the number

of annual articles related to this topic gradually increased, rising from 6 to 52. Against the backdrop of cultural protection and the integration of culture and tourism, how to leverage educational tour models to promote students; comprehensive development while enhancing the protection and development of ICH has garnered widespread and profound attention from all sectors of society, leading to significant improvements in both the quantity and quality of related research. As of February, 2024, the number of available articles on ICH educational tours from China National Knowledge Infrastructure and other literature retrieval platforms between 2023 and 2024 reached 55, providing valuable references for this study. These articles primarily focus on exploring the integration paths of ICH and educational travel, as well as the development of related products for ICH educational tours.

Regarding the exploration of integrated development paths for ICH and educational travel, Xiuyun Qi and Sisi Wang use the Jingchu ICH Skills Inheritance Institute as an example. They suggest creating a “school + base + company” industry-academia-research platform, forming a team of teachers including “masters + professional instructors + workshop practice mentors”. This would establish a scientific talent cultivation system, achieving deep integration of cultural tourism and educational travel [1]. Yunyi Dai, focusing on the Quzi Culture Park, proposes establishing an ICH expert advisory board, improving the curriculum system for ICH studies, enhancing the quality of ICH study talents, and continuously exploring healthy development paths for ICH educational travel [2].

Regarding the development of ICH educational travel products, Yue Qiu proposed that in the development of ICH educational travel, principles such as education, vitality, and practicality should be upheld. At the same time, products tailored to different student groups with distinct educational goals at various academic stages should be designed, ensuring a robust mechanism for the living inheritance of ICH in educational travel [3]. Ya Zhang, based on the analysis results from the AMP theory, proposed four development models: government-led, school-led, joint development by schools and enterprises, and commercial operation. Additionally, she emphasized four key strategies for the development of ICH-themed educational tourism: prioritizing the development concept of ICH educational travel, scientifically designing ICH-themed travel routes and products for primary and secondary school students, optimizing the team of educational travel mentors, and improving the support system for ICH educational travel [4].

2.2. The Current Situation Was Investigated Based on Questionnaire Survey, In-Depth Interview and Field Observation of Yantou Village

1) The structural contradiction between policy orientation and curriculum implementation

Despite the emphasis on “introducing intangible cultural heritage into schools” in policies such as the “Opinions on Promoting Study Tours for Primary and Secondary School Students” (2016), practical implementation faces multiple constraints.

Most schools reduce study tours to mere “check-in tasks”, with only 23% of courses explicitly setting dual goals of recognizing and mastering ICH. Additionally, resource allocation is problematic; 78% of schools rely on third-party institutions for their courses, but only 12% of these instructors have received systematic training in ICH, turning the courses into “assembly-line experiences”. Furthermore, these courses lack a scientific evaluation system, using only “work completion rate” as a criterion, which overlooks the enhancement of cultural identity and willingness to pass on traditions, leading to severe deficiencies in assessment.

2) The contradiction between cultural depth and shallow education

The core of ICH study and research should be the combination of “skill transmission” and “cultural internalization”, but the current situation tends to emphasize technique over philosophy. Taking Wuzhou tie-dye as an example, 83% of courses only retain the “tying and dyeing” process, omitting key components such as plant dye extraction (like fermentation of bluegrass) and pattern interpretation (such as the symbolism of “fish roe resist dyeing” for fertility). This disconnects the craft from its cultural roots. Moreover, courses often focus on “operational steps”, lacking explanations of the historical context of ICH (such as the connection between tie-dye and Tang Dynasty resist dyeing techniques) and regional characteristics (such as how the water systems of Wuzhou affect the quality of dyed fabrics). As a result, students struggle to develop a deep cultural identity. Additionally, there is a significant lack of innovation; 96% of courses follow a traditional model where teachers demonstrate and students imitate, neglecting the development of creativity in young people. For instance, there is minimal encouragement for students to design tie-dye patterns that incorporate modern aesthetics.

3) The contradiction between the motivation of active participation and passive experience

In ICH study tours, students are the core participants. However, survey results have revealed some thought-provoking issues. Data shows that 67% of students express a strong interest in ICH culture, but only 29% find these courses “interesting” after actually participating in existing ICH study programs. The main reason lies in the course content design, which fails to adequately consider the cognitive levels and learning needs of students at different grade levels, lacking tiered planning. For younger students, complex steps can easily lead to impatience during the learning process, affecting their enthusiasm for participation; while older students find the repetitive nature of the course content boring, making it difficult for them to gain new knowledge or enjoyment from it. Moreover, most current ICH study courses primarily follow the traditional model of “listening to explanations + doing crafts”, lacking innovation and appeal. This monotonous approach fails to meet the diverse learning needs of students, failing to fully stimulate their creativity and imagination. As a result, students’ experiences with ICH study tours often remain superficial, failing to deeply understand and appreciate the essence

of ICH culture. More concerning is that only 5% of students indicate they would like to delve deeper into ICH culture after the course, while as high as 95% view ICH study tours as a “one-time event”, lacking the interest and motivation for further exploration. This highlights a significant shortcoming in existing ICH study courses, which fall short in motivating students to continue learning, failing to fully leverage the educational value and appeal of ICH culture.

4) The contradiction between the demand for dissemination and the inefficient channels of media

In today’s era of thriving new media, ICH dissemination has indeed encountered numerous opportunities. However, it is regrettable that the promotion of ICH study courses remains stuck in traditional paths, failing to fully benefit from the dividends of new media. Take school public accounts as an example; data shows that 72% of these accounts are content with merely posting activity photos accompanied by brief text descriptions, completely unaware that the media consumption habits of young people have undergone significant changes. They prefer engaging and interactive content forms such as short videos and interactive H5 pages. Young people are a crucial group for ICH inheritance. If course promotions do not align with their media usage preferences, it will be difficult to truly capture their attention and spark their interest and passion for ICH. Furthermore, ICH projects like Wuzhou tie-dye, which have strong regional characteristics, lack dedicated IP images and complete story matrices. This makes it hard for them to stand out on emerging media platforms like TikTok and B, failing to establish deep emotional connections with audiences. In the information-overloaded online environment, ICH content lacking personalization and storytelling easily gets lost, making it difficult to build sustained influence and reach, thus preventing more people from understanding its unique cultural value and artistic appeal. Additionally, the sharing mechanism for course materials is severely lagging behind, with 91% of course materials remaining unshared, leading to loose and ineffective collaboration between schools and between schools and enterprises. High-quality courses are often confined to local or individual schools, making it difficult to replicate and promote across regions. This lack of scalability significantly limits the reach and development potential of ICH study programs, preventing a broader audience from benefiting from ICH education. These issues collectively severely hinder the effective dissemination of ICH in the new media era and pose challenges to its inheritance and sustainable development. It is imperative that all relevant parties pay attention and work to address these problems.

5) The real dilemma of Wuzhou tie-dye study

If we focus on the field case, we will find that in the dyeing house of Yantou Village, many typical problems have been exposed in the education project. Among these, “experience reduction” stands out prominently. To cut costs, the workshop replaced the plant-based indigo dye with chemical agents. This substitution severely deviates from the cultural essence of the traditional tie-dye technique, which is rooted in “pure natural craftsmanship”. As a result, the tie-dye

experience that students undergo has lost its original cultural charm and historical depth, leaving only formal operational procedures. Furthermore, the situation of “research without genuine research” is also very common. The preparation of the study manual is extremely perfunctory, merely listing simple “tie-dye steps” and mechanically guiding students through the actions without setting any open-ended inquiry questions, such as “how to express local characteristics through tie-dye patterns”, which are thought-provoking and creative. Throughout the entire educational process, students passively follow predetermined steps, unable to delve deeply into the cultural connotations behind tie-dye, making it difficult to foster independent thinking and innovation. The “sustainable gap” is even more concerning. The income generated from the course has not been used as expected to support the training of skill inheritors, leading to a shortage of successors. Currently, only three skilled tie-dye artisans remain in the area, posing a significant risk of skill loss. This undoubtedly sounds like a heavy warning bell for the long-term development of Yantou Village’s traditional tie-dye technique, severely hindering its cultural inheritance sustainability.

3. Theory and Practice: Design and Planning of ICH Study Courses

Through literature review, multi-channel information gathering, and in-depth thinking and exploration, we have addressed the shortcomings of current ICH study courses. We have transformed the course from a localized study into a chain of “pre-course + study course + ongoing follow-up”. We have also changed the single practice of study into a series of courses: “environmental explanation + pure plant dye extraction + expert presentation + creative experience + outcome display”. This allows children to gain a deeper understanding of ICH through enjoyable study experiences and to spontaneously inherit it.

3.1. Developing a Chain of Courses Consisting of “Pre-Course + Research Course + Follow-Up Continuous Attention”

Based on Dewey’s “learning by doing” theory (Dewey, 1938), the logical thread of “cultural cognition-skill practice-innovative application” can be used to implement tiered teaching across different educational stages. This approach should integrate both offline and online teaching methods to comprehensively advance the construction of teaching platforms. In terms of offline teaching, tie-dye courses are primarily conducted through art classes, elective courses, and interest clubs, providing initial guidance for students in learning tie-dye theory and simple practical skills. Drawing on the existing ICH course system, the course content is adjusted according to the teaching environment and existing experience, with more comprehensive lesson plans designed to form a progressive and richly complete tie-dye curriculum. For online teaching, a cloud platform is established to stream live recordings of offline classes for students to watch and review at any time. Additionally, students can leave messages on the cloud platform to ask questions

about their tie-dye learning process, which will be answered by instructors. The team will also invite ICH bearers to record extended courses online, further stimulating students' interest in learning and laying a theoretical and practical foundation for subsequent in-depth studies, fully tapping into the value and potential of these studies.

1) Building an in-school curriculum platform

Based on Dewey's "learning by doing" theory (Dewey, 1938), the logical thread of "cultural cognition-skill practice-innovative application" can be used to implement tiered teaching across different educational stages. This approach should integrate both offline and online teaching methods to comprehensively advance the construction of teaching platforms. In terms of offline teaching, tie-dye courses are primarily conducted through art classes, elective courses, and interest clubs, providing initial guidance for students in learning tie-dye theory and simple practical skills. Drawing on the existing ICH course system, the course content is adjusted according to the teaching environment and existing experience, with more comprehensive lesson plans designed to form a progressive and richly complete tie-dye curriculum. For online teaching, a cloud platform is established to stream live recordings of offline classes for students to watch and review at any time. Additionally, students can leave messages on the cloud platform to ask questions about their tie-dye learning process, which will be answered by instructors. The team will also invite ICH bearers to record extended courses online, further stimulating students' interest in learning and laying a theoretical and practical foundation for subsequent in-depth studies, fully tapping into the value and potential of these studies.

2) Developing characteristic school-based curriculum

In collaboration with local primary and secondary schools, under the guidance of ICH bearers of Wuzhou tie-dye, we will gather information through methods such as auditing ICH courses, assessing classroom needs, studying teaching cases, and collecting student feedback. By combining the essential teaching requirements with students' interests, we will screen, refine, and simplify content related to the historical development, representative figures, production techniques, and modern transformations of Wuzhou tie-dye. We will select exquisite works to be included in textbooks for appreciation. On the basis of highlighting the aesthetic value of tie-dye courses, we will integrate intellectual and moral education using tie-dye foundational theories and stories of pioneering figures, developing a more beneficial tie-dye curriculum for students' overall development. Additionally, we will organize relevant literature and materials, produce a documentary on Wuzhou tie-dye, and incorporate video formats into the development process of school-based textbooks to enrich their content. This will present the vitality of Wuzhou tie-dye in a more vivid manner, enhancing students' sense of responsibility for understanding and inheriting ICH. With the support of school-based textbooks, both the teaching efficiency of tie-dye classes within schools and students' internalization of the course content will significantly improve.

3.2. Field Research and Development

We have adjusted the traditional tie-dye process by formulating more detailed course plans, taking into account the difficulty level and duration of each stage. We fully consider students' knowledge needs and interest, adopting a main format of "environmental explanation + pure plant-based dye extraction + expert lectures + creative experiences + outcome presentations", to create a comprehensive educational program.

1) Environmental explanations

Wuzhou tie-dye is renowned for its purely natural production process, from washing and drying to plant growth, each step has specific environmental requirements. Yantou Village preserves its natural landscape intact, offering immense value for educational tours. Therefore, we set the first step of our study tour as an environmental visit accompanied by a guide. During this process, professional guides will introduce students to the close relationship between Wuzhou tie-dye and the natural environment in simple terms, such as the growth habits of different plants and how water sources affect the quality of tie-dye. This ensures that students gain a clear understanding of the natural conditions required for tie-dye right from the start, laying a solid foundation for subsequent course content.

2) Dye is pure plant extract

Unlike the simple dyeing and binding in class, pure plant extract dyes have more stringent requirements for raw material selection and operational space. However, this process is highly engaging and practical, effectively drawing students into it while honing their manual skills. Based on this, we designed an activity where children can experience the extraction of pure plant dyes firsthand. Students will go through steps such as identifying, placing, and grinding grass materials to gain a deep understanding of the entire dye extraction process. In this process, they not only get to touch various plant materials, but also learn about the color principles of plant dyes, sparking curiosity and a desire to explore nature and traditional crafts.

3) Expert explanation

Given the limited number of top-tier professional craftsmen, the preparatory school-based courses are primarily taught by a team composed of "volunteers + general inheritors of craftsmanship". In the study tours, we have specially arranged for highly skilled ICH experts to provide on-site guidance, which has become a major highlight of the study tours. Leveraging their rich practical experience and profound professional knowledge, these experts can offer students more in-depth and specialized explanations, helping them overcome learning bottlenecks and enhance their understanding and mastery of tie-dyeing techniques.

4) Practical tie-dye

Considering the age characteristics and cognitive levels of students in lower grades, we innovatively introduced project-based courses into our educational practices. Since different tie-dye patterns require various production methods, projects can be divided based on the patterns, allowing students to choose freely according

to their personal interests. During the practical process, multiple people work together to complete the tie-dyeing of a large piece of fabric. This design not only enables students to enjoy the fun of tie-dye while fostering teamwork and collective wisdom, but also effectively saves time and resources, improving production efficiency. Taking into account the interest characteristics of younger students, our team will set up a competition segment. Each group or individual's results will be showcased and compared, with tie-dye cultural and creative products awarded to the winners. Based on the lower-grade curriculum, the upper-grade courses further increase in difficulty and challenge, introducing tie-dye product design content that covers various cultural and creative products such as clothing and pendants. Professional artisans assist students in completing the finished products, enabling them to integrate their knowledge with practical application, fostering innovative thinking and practical skills, while also enhancing the professionalism and aesthetic appeal of the works.

5) Exhibition of works

The students' cultural and creative design works will be improved and refined by dye workers and volunteers, displayed and sold, and the funds raised will mainly be used for local environmental construction. In addition, all tie-dye works will be photographed and included in the collection, and uploaded to platforms such as public accounts and small programs for students to commemorate.

4. Diversity and Symbiosis: The Dissemination Channels of ICH Study Courses

4.1. Multimedia IP Production and Publicity

With the development of information technology, new media has become the main force in the tide of the times. Media platforms that transcend time and space constraints have absorbed large groups of people's free time, and various forms of media characterized by "short, frequent, and fast" have become the primary choice for public entertainment. Therefore, to promote ICH study programs and even the heritage itself in specific regions, multimedia platforms should be given due attention. By setting up accounts on platforms such as rednote, TikTok, Weibo, and Bilibili, and establishing dedicated IPs like official accounts and video channels, high-quality content can be released to increase the promotional efforts for study programs and even ICH.

1) Preliminary content delivery

In the form of cultural and tourism promotional videos, focus on the unique environment and handcrafting processes of Wuzhou tie-dye, producing high-quality short videos and micro-documentaries for release on various video platforms; in the form of text and images, launch a series of interviews with Wuzhou tie-dye artisans and historical stories, posting them on official account platforms to build an initial fan base.

2) Real scene projection of study courses

During the pilot trial period, ensure thorough follow-up work, capturing valuable

moments that highlight the richness of study tours, their strong appeal, and excellent experiential quality. Emphasize the meticulousness and patient guidance of the staff. Later on, conduct interviews with some participants to document their genuine experiences. Edit engaging clips and create promotional posts to disseminate the study tour content, along with detailed introductions and booking methods for the courses.

3) Undertaking and extending ICH

After the successful attention and exposure of the tie-dye study in Wuzhou, we began to undertake the video recording and release of other ICH handicrafts, and developed new study projects with the support of local culture and tourism, promoting the production of study courses and the recording of promotional videos in the same way.

4.2. Exhibition and Sale of Works

In on-site study tours, participants will actually engage in the design and creation of tie-dye works. Completing a single tie-dye piece involves multiple processes: “binding”, “dyeing”, “bleaching”, and “air-drying”, which take considerable time. Therefore, after each study tour, the works produced by the participants will be processed and perfected by a team of professional workers to form a complete tie-dye piece, which will then be included in the collection. These pieces will subsequently be exhibited and sold through several channels.

1) Cooperation with art museums and art exhibition halls

A series of excellent tie-dye works produced during the study tour will be exhibited in art galleries and art museums for public benefit, becoming a window to promote the culture of Zhuangzhou tie-dye. Tie-dye cultural and creative products will also be promoted and sold in the venues.

2) Cooperation with local scenic spots

The team will actively cooperate with local scenic spots to plan a Wuzhou tie-dye themed exhibition according to the works, so as to expand the popularity and influence of Wuzhou tie-dye culture, and let more people pay attention to Wuzhou tie-dye and tie-dye study courses.

3) Opening online sales channels to sell tie-dye products

With the rise of online sales and live streaming, our research group will open up online sales channels, set up merchants on Taobao, Wechat and other platforms to sell finished products. In addition, our team will also develop product customization business so that consumers can customize tie-dye products according to their own needs.

4.3. Building a Platform for Sharing ICH Resources

1) Launching high-quality courses on the online platform

Under the professional guidance of Wen Guoxiang, inheritor of Wuzhou tie-dye, the research group will record the online course of “hand + art” intangible cultural heritage study, and sort out and package the tie-dye series courses, and

upload them to rednote, Bilibili and other online platforms as public resources sharing, so as to expand the influence of Wuzhou tie-dye culture.

2) Sharing courses with schools and institutions

This project is dedicated to promoting “Intangible Cultural Heritage Tie-Dye in Schools”. Our team will actively collaborate with schools and art training institutions, providing them with mature and complete tie-dye textbooks, courseware, toolkits, and more. We aim to offer professional guidance and production materials for intangible cultural heritage study courses, helping students engage in systematic learning, develop practical skills, enhance their understanding of excellent intangible cultural heritage, and better preserve China’s outstanding intangible cultural heritage.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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