

Research on the Integration Path of College Students' Innovation and Entrepreneurship with Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Tourism from the Perspective of "Intangible Cultural Heritage and Innovation & Entrepreneurship"

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Abstract: In the context of multiple national strategies overlapping, such as rural revitalization, employment priority, and the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), the concept of "ICH & Innovation and Entrepreneurship (I&E)" has become a key approach to activate local cultural resources and empower the transformation and upgrading of county-level rural industries. ICH-based cultural tourism relies on the core of ICH and rural tourism scenarios to achieve mutual reinforcement between cultural preservation and industrial development. College students, as the main force of innovation and entrepreneurship, are a crucial link connecting ICH resources, university I&E education, and the development of the ICH tourism industry. Currently, China's ICH tourism industry faces common issues like product homogenization, and the integration of cultural tourism industries is limited by regional environments and market foundations, making it hard to fit the development scenarios of county-level rural areas. Therefore, shaping a complete loop of "ICH resources—college student entrepreneurial practice—ICH tourism upgrade—local employment and income growth" can address the weak connotation in ICH tourism, the difficulties in college students' employment and entrepreneurship, and provide replicable and promotable practical models in key rural tourism areas. This promotes the coordinated development of four aspects: living inheritance of ICH, youth innovation and entrepreneurship, quality improvement of ICH tourism, and local employment and income growth.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage and Innovation & Entrepreneurship; College student innovation and entrepreneurship; Integration pathway

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1. Introduction

In northwestern Sichuan, Qiang and Tibetan people have lived together for a long time, and there are many ICH resources like Qiang embroidery, Tibetan handicrafts, folk performances, traditional festivals, and village rituals; these resources show great variety, clear ethnic features, and obvious local characteristics, so they form a solid cultural base for developing local cultural tourism; ICH is a living reflection of local traditions and shared ethnic identity, and it is also a unique cultural resource for rural areas ^[1]; because of this potential, some government departments like the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Education have recently released policy documents, for example the Notice on Promoting the Deep Integration of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Tourism, which clearly supports the careful inclusion of ICH into rural tourism development; through ways like ICH workshops, experience centers, and themed tourism routes, these policies want to reach two goals: protecting traditional cultural practices and also bringing extra income to rural families. Concurrently, the ongoing national “Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation” initiative has spurred widespread curricular and pedagogical reforms in entrepreneurship education across Chinese higher education institutions, encouraging university students to engage with community-level issues and actively participate in rural development projects beyond the campus setting; moreover, the national Rural Revitalization Strategy further incentivizes localities to leverage their indigenous cultural resources, cultivate emerging rural industries and business models, facilitate the return of young skilled workers to their hometowns for entrepreneurial endeavors, and thereby progressively widen the scope of employment opportunities available in rural areas.

2. Concepts and definitions

2.1. Definition of “intangible cultural heritage (ICH) innovation & entrepreneurship” and the integration of ICH with cultural tourism

This concept refers to a business model where ICH is the core cultural resource, innovation and entrepreneurship are the main driving forces, and college students are the main actors ^[2]; it involves putting ICH skills, folk activities, and traditional festivals into all parts of the ICH tourism process, such as product design, scene setting, route planning, and service operations; through creative ideas, changing business models, and using digital tools, this approach aims to create new types of ICH-focused cultural tourism; at the same time, the ICH tourism market gives support back by keeping heritage preservation and helping college students start businesses, and finally this forms a system that benefits each other, which helps pass on culture, support youth entrepreneurship, upgrade the industry, and increase community income.

2.2. Internal Logic of “ICH innovation & entrepreneurship” and ICH cultural tourism integration

From the resource side, ICH provides the basic cultural foundation for developing tourism, and because it is the most typical representation of local cultural identity, it becomes a main strength for ICH-related tourism; for instance, Qiang embroidery and Tibetan Guozhuang dance in northwestern Sichuan are special ICH assets, and they can help avoid the common problem of villages becoming too similar to each other, which is often seen in rural tourism; natural scenery offers the basic conditions for ICH tourism, but it is the ICH cultural elements that give the tourism products their unique character and experience value; then, from the main logic, college students are the key people who turn these cultural resources into actual products and

services, because ICH resources have deep cultural value but usually lack modern creative forms and market operation skills, while ICH cultural tourism has mature offline market settings but has long been short of professionals in cultural planning, product innovation, and new media operations; thus, the college students who have received systematic innovation and entrepreneurship training in universities just fill this gap between what is needed and what is available; on the one hand, these students learn professional knowledge in cultural and creative design, tourism management, e-commerce, and new media operations, so they are able to upgrade traditional ICH in creative ways and build experience-based ICH tourism platforms^[3]; on the other hand, they are familiar with internet communication, which makes it easier to expand promotion channels and attract target consumers more accurately; besides, college students are very enthusiastic and curious about new things, and they are willing to start small businesses in rural areas, so they act as an important bridge that connects ICH resources with the cultural tourism market.

From a motivation perspective, innovation and entrepreneurship act as the driving engine for deep integration. Innovation and entrepreneurship are the two core dimensions and provide the main momentum for integration. On the innovation side, it requires breaking traditional static displays of ICH and single-operation models in ICH cultural tourism, promoting innovation in heritage forms, tourism products, and operational models. On the entrepreneurship side, college students are encouraged to create real-world projects individually or in teams, turning ICH resources and creative outcomes into marketable products and services. Innovation and entrepreneurship run through the entire process of resource integration, product development, project implementation, and market operation, providing continuous momentum for the integration.

3. Current challenges of “intangible cultural heritage + innovation and entrepreneurship”

Combining field research, the current state of innovation and entrepreneurship (I&E) education in colleges, and visits to cultural tourism sites based on intangible cultural heritage (ICH), and referring to similar domestic regional cases, the integration of the three faces significant issues across five dimensions: education, talent, products, operations, and collaboration, which seriously limit the effectiveness of this integration.

3.1. Lagging university I&E education system, disconnection between talent training and ICH cultural tourism entrepreneurship needs

Current university ICH education and I&E education are difficult to match the practical needs of ICH cultural tourism entrepreneurship, continuing the core problem of separating academic education from entrepreneurial practice. First, the curriculum system is fragmented and lacks specificity. Most university ICH courses focus on pure skill training, while I&E courses lean toward general entrepreneurship theory, lacking targeted courses such as ICH cultural creative design, ICH cultural tourism planning, cultural tourism project management, homestay management, and cultural tourism live-stream marketing. This leads to the awkward situation where “students can handle skills and understand theory but can’t design cultural tourism products or run cultural tourism projects.” Second, practical teaching is weak. University training bases are mostly on-campus and lack deep cooperation with rural ICH tourism sites, artisan workshops, and characteristic homestays. Students have limited opportunities for rural practice or hands-on operations, so theoretical

knowledge cannot easily translate into practical skills. Third, the faculty structure is limited. Most teaching staff are cultural course teachers and lack actual experience in ICH cultural tourism entrepreneurship and frontline operations, while ICH inheritors rarely participate in classes. The development of a “dual-qualified” teaching team is lagging. Fourth, entrepreneurial guidance is misaligned. University I&E education generally guides students toward entrepreneurship in the Internet sector, trade, or urban services, with insufficient interpretation of policies or case sharing for rural ICH tourism entrepreneurship. As a result, students show weak willingness to start businesses in rural areas.

3.2. Lack of entrepreneurship ability among college students, weak local adaptability and risk resistance

College students, as the main entrepreneurial force, face personal shortcomings that become significant obstacles to integration. First, insufficient local knowledge. Many students have long lived in cities or on campus and have limited understanding of rural folk culture, villagers’ lifestyles, and rural governance models. During project planning and operations, they easily lose touch with local realities, and the ICH tourism products they design are often “too sophisticated for the common audience,” not aligning with general tourist consumption habits. Second, there is a lack of overall operational ability. College students are good at creative design and online promotion, and they are becoming a key driving force for rural endogenous development, visitor services, supply chain management, cost control, and local relationship coordination ^[4]. Small cultural tourism projects may be innovative but often face operational gaps. Third, a shortage of funds and weak financing ability. Students have limited startup capital, lack collateral and credit support, making it hard to get bank loans or social investment. They rely only on school subsidies or personal savings, which makes the funding chain fragile, and projects can stall during off-seasons or emergencies. Fourth, poor team stability. College entrepreneurial teams are often made up of classmates or alumni, and factors like graduation, employment, and further studies cause high staff turnover and frequent team changes, making long-term operation of ICH tourism projects difficult.

3.3. Serious homogenization of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) cultural tourism products and insufficient depth in creative transformation

At present, the cultural tourism products based on ICH that are made by college students often have problems like simple creativity and sameness, and they do not explore the ICH culture deeply enough; first, the variety of products is still limited, most projects only stay at simple exhibition displays and craft workshops, and they make low-value items and common handmade goods, this shows that the integration of heritage into tourism is only at the surface level, and there is a lack of creative development, so ICH is not really put into visitor experiences in a meaningful way; second, because of this surface-level work, student entrepreneurs do not know well the folk stories, historical backgrounds, and symbolic meanings of local ICH, their designs often copy the outside looks but leave out the deeper cultural meanings, and this mistake hurts the brand’s specialness and makes tourists not want to come back; third, these cultural problems are made worse by the lack of different market positions, ICH products in nearby villages often copy each other, and similar things like Qiang embroidery and Tibetan crafts appear in different scenic spots, and there is little work to create special products that fit each village’s own culture and tourism plan, so this leads to bad price competition; fourth, seasonal imbalances make these problems even worse, most ICH folk activities depend on traditional festivals, so tourists crowd in during short festival periods, but the experience facilities sit idle for most of the

rest of the year, and because there are not enough all-year ICH tourism products, the local cultural resources are not used efficiently over the whole year.

3.4. Lack of a multi-party coordination mechanism among government, schools, industries, enterprises, and villages, with an incomplete guarantee system

Various stakeholders in the region—government, universities, enterprises, villages, and inheritors—operate independently without forming a coordinated effort. This is the core institutional obstacle restricting integrated development. First, insufficient government coordination and guidance. Local governments lack special support policies for college students' ICH cultural tourism entrepreneurship. Policies such as start-up subsidies, venue reductions, tax incentives, and skills training are not fully implemented, potentially leading to resource fragmentation and duplicated construction. Second, shallow cooperation between universities and villages. Cooperation between universities, villages, and cultural tourism enterprises is mostly short-term social practice, without establishing long-term training bases or talent delivery mechanisms, making collaboration superficial. Third, low participation enthusiasm from industry enterprises. Local cultural tourism scenic spots, tourism companies, and homestay operators provide limited support to college student start-up teams, rarely offering venues, orders, or operational guidance, resulting in school-enterprise resources that cannot complement each other. Fourth, poor collaboration between ICH inheritors and entrepreneurial teams. Some inheritors are firmly attached to traditional skills and may resist college students' creative modifications. The lack of a regular communication platform makes it difficult to integrate skill inheritance with creative innovation. Fifth, there is a lack of long-term supervision and evaluation mechanisms. There is no comprehensive evaluation system for ICH cultural tourism projects or college student start-ups, making it impossible to promptly identify operational issues, optimize development models, or ensure the authenticity of ICH culture.

4. The integrated development path of “intangible cultural heritage + innovation and entrepreneurship”

Based on the current challenges and combining the three-dimensional transformation theory of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) cultural capital and the discipline-based education empowerment path model, an integrated development path is built from a three-dimensional perspective of cultural capital transformation, local embedding, and digital empowerment. From five dimensions—talent cultivation, product innovation, scene creation, digital operations, and multi-party collaboration—a five-in-one full-chain integration development path is constructed, balancing theoretical adaptability and practical implementation.

4.1. Modular reconstruction of the curriculum system to meet entrepreneurial needs accurately

Based on the discipline-based education empowerment model, and focusing on the practical needs of ICH cultural tourism entrepreneurship, the conversion of skill capital into education capital is completed to solve the mismatch between talent supply and demand at its source. Breaking the traditional segmented curriculum model, a curriculum system suited for ICH cultural tourism entrepreneurship is created ^[5]. A “project-based learning + practical training” model is implemented. On campus, ICH innovation and entrepreneurship training workshops and virtual ICH cultural tourism training platforms are built to simulate tasks such

as product design, route planning, and live-stream operation; off campus, universities collaborate with local governments, ICH cultural tourism sites, ICH workshops, and specialty homestays to establish rural entrepreneurship practice bases for students, with designated incubation areas. Real ICH cultural tourism projects are also used as graduation projects or competition topics to drive the transformation of academic results into entrepreneurial plans.

4.2. Comprehensive empowerment of entrepreneurial entities, enhancing students' local adaptability and overall entrepreneurial ability

Firstly, strengthen immersion in and awareness of local culture. Universities and local rural areas jointly conduct local culture research activities, organizing students to do in-depth rural research, learn about rural governance models and tourist consumption characteristics, systematically study ICH knowledge, and guide students to plan projects and develop products based on local reality. This avoids homogeneous or niche designs detached from the rural context, ensuring ICH cultural tourism projects align with local characteristics and meet public consumption needs. Secondly, fill gaps in comprehensive operational capabilities. Focus on students' weaknesses in offline management, supply chain control, cost management, and interpersonal coordination; conduct practical training and entrepreneurship simulation exercises, linking tourism enterprises for one-on-one operational guidance, helping students gain hands-on experience in venue management, tourist service, supply chain establishment, cost control, and local community communication, optimizing micro cultural tourism operations while avoiding pitfalls. Thirdly, build a diversified financing support system. Integrate resources from government, universities, and society to solve students' startup funding issues. Local governments set up special entrepreneurship support funds, implement subsidies, tax reductions, and free venue policies; entrepreneurship investment-matching platforms are built, working with financial institutions to provide low-interest startup loans tailored for students; social capital is guided into broadening funding channels, enhancing project risk resistance. Fourthly, establish a stable entrepreneurship team mechanism. Create an incubation and retention system for student ICH entrepreneurship teams through continuous skill empowerment, cultivation of a rural entrepreneurial atmosphere, and long-term development guidance to reduce staff turnover. At the same time, an alumni entrepreneurship handover platform is set up to ensure projects are smoothly transferred, and knowledge is passed on, guaranteeing sustainable operation and long-term development of ICH cultural tourism projects.

4.3. Deepen the core of intangible cultural heritage and build a differentiated, year-round cultural tourism product system

Officials should make more types of products and expand the ways they are used in tourism, and officials need to move away from the simple model that only includes exhibition displays and basic craft experiences; by using ICH resources and combining them with rural tourism scenes, officials can create different kinds of products like ICH-themed guesthouses, immersive performances, folk study courses, cultural and creative gift boxes, and outdoor experience activities, so that the ICH tourism industry chain becomes longer and the integration becomes deeper and more practical; at the same time, educators should dig into the cultural meaning of ICH to give products a real soul, and college students need to study the history, folk stories, cultural backgrounds, and local features of different ICH items carefully, then put these cultural meanings and local folk elements into product design, scene building, and activity planning, so they do not just copy the outside look but create ICH tourism products that have stories, warmth, and special features, which can make

the products more recognizable and more valuable, and also increase visitor satisfaction and repeat visits; besides, officials should use local resource advantages to create different market positions, and each village or area should rely on its own ICH resources and tourism goals instead of copying others or developing in the same way, and they should make their own special ICH tourism IP that fits local conditions, and by using local ICH, natural views, and folk customs, they can separate product types, develop in different directions, and run things in unique ways, so that regional low-price competition can be avoided and a system of “one village, one product and one area, one specialty” can be formed for ICH tourism; finally, officials need to deal with seasonal problems and create products that can be offered all year, and while officials improve festival activities based on traditional ICH festivals, officials should also develop regular, light, and year-round ICH experience projects, and officials can offer products that change with the seasons like handicraft workshops, folk study programs, local culture check-in activities, and personalized ICH cultural items, so that tourism projects are not empty during non-festival times, and local ICH resources can be used more fully across the whole year, which helps the ICH tourism industry run normally and sustainably over time.

4.4. Build a collaborative platform involving government, schools, industries, enterprises, and villages, and create a full-chain support system for development

Local governments need to take the lead in coordinating things, and they should bring out special support policies for college students who are working on ICH tourism and cultural projects, and these policies can cover things like starting money, work spaces, tax reductions, skill training, and project development help, and there should also be a way to check that these policies are actually being carried out so that the support really reaches the student teams; second, schools and local areas should build long-term working relationships, and they can set up stable cooperation mechanisms between universities, villages, and tourism businesses, and villages can provide universities with places for students to do practical work, so that school resources and local resources can complement each other and benefit from one another; third, businesses and companies should be encouraged to take part in these ICH projects, and some incentive measures can be used to guide them to join in, and they can help build shared platforms where student teams and companies can work together, so that the projects can actually start up, make money, and keep going over time; fourth, the government and villages should help set up regular communication channels between ICH inheritors and student entrepreneur teams, and they can hold discussion meetings and joint activities on a regular basis, so that traditional ICH skills and modern creative ideas can be combined, and heritage protection and innovation can support each other; fifth, officials need to set up a long-term system for checking and evaluating the work, and this system should cover both ICH protection and business results, and it can help find problems early and improve the way things are done, and at the same time officials need to keep control over how ICH is shared with the public, make sure the true nature of ICH is respected, and achieve both good heritage protection and good cultural tourism development at the same time.

5. Conclusion

In the context of deep integration of “ICH double innovation” and the all-around promotion of rural revitalization, promoting the deep integration of college students’ innovation and entrepreneurship, ICH activation, and ICH tourism is a win-win choice that balances cultural inheritance, industrial development, talent cultivation, and the improvement of people’s livelihood, by building a multi-party collaborative

platform involving government, universities, industry, enterprises, and villages, improving policy implementation, school-local cooperation, school-enterprise collaboration, communication with inheritors, and long-term supervision and evaluation mechanisms, a comprehensive, full-chain development support system can be established. This will regulate the development order of ICH double innovation, uphold the authenticity of ICH, and achieve mutual empowerment and win-win results for ICH preservation, college student innovation and entrepreneurship, and rural cultural tourism development.

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