

# Research on the Innovative Development Path of Cultural Tourism Based on Brand Operation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Projects

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**Abstract**—In the dual context of cultural and tourism integration and intangible cultural heritage protection, how to activate the cultural and economic value of intangible cultural heritage through brand operation has become an important issue. This article focuses on the current situation and challenges of brand operation of intangible cultural heritage projects, and finds that there are problems such as vague brand positioning, single communication methods, insufficient experience, industrial chain discontinuity, and imbalance between inheritance and business. It is believed that brand differentiation can be achieved through precise positioning of regional cultural genes and market demand, extraction of core symbols, and cross-border integration; Promote innovation in cultural and tourism scenes through immersive experiences, customized products, and digital technology; Utilize new media matrix, festival marketing, and community operation to enhance communication efficiency; Building a sustainable ecosystem through multi-party collaboration, benefit sharing mechanisms, and authenticity protection.

**Keywords**—Intangible cultural heritage projects, branding, cultural and tourism innovation and development.

## I. THE CURRENT SITUATION AND CHALLENGES OF BRANDING OPERATION OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE PROJECTS AND INTEGRATION OF CULTURE AND TOURISM

### (1) The cultural and tourism value and branding potential of intangible cultural heritage projects

“Under the integration of multiple scenarios, the importance of intangible cultural heritage dissemination is reflected in its profound impact on cultural inheritance, economic and social development, etc.”<sup>[1]</sup>, as the "living fossil" of human civilization, intangible cultural heritage is gradually exploring its cultural and tourism value and branding potential. From the perspective of cultural and tourism values, the "cultural uniqueness" of intangible cultural heritage is the core competitiveness to attract tourists - whether it is the ethereal artistic conception of the Guqin art, the multi voice harmony of the Dong nationality's big song, or the collective carnival of the Dragon Boat Festival Loong Boat, it provides tourists with a "cultural depth experience" different from conventional tourism. This uniqueness not only satisfies the public's desire to explore "exotic cultures", but also carries the cultural identity of local groups, becoming an emotional bond connecting "foreign lands" and "hometown". From the perspective of branding potential, intangible cultural

heritage projects contain three core values that form the cornerstone of branding operations.

Firstly, symbolic value: The techniques, patterns, legends, etc. in intangible cultural heritage can be distilled into strong recognizable symbols. For example, the "tree of life" pattern of Paper Cuttings in Shaanxi and the "wrestling" image of Nadam in Mongolia can not only become a brand visual identity, but also convey cultural connotation.

Secondly, experiential value: The "living inheritance" characteristic of intangible cultural heritage gives it a natural experiential attribute. Tourists can participate in the process of Su embroidery, Pu erh tea making, etc., and understand the wisdom behind the skills through "hands-on practice". This experience is far better than passive observation.

Thirdly, emotional value: The historical memory and national spirit carried by intangible cultural heritage can evoke deep resonance. For example, the folk customs of admiring the moon during the Mid Autumn Festival and climbing high on the Double Ninth Festival are essentially the inheritance of values such as "reunion" and "respect for the elderly", and are easily connected to tourists' family emotions and ethical concepts.

### (2) Existing models of branded operation for intangible cultural heritage projects

The current branding operation of intangible cultural heritage projects in China presents diverse explorations, mainly forming three typical models.

Firstly, government led: With the government as the core driving force, the integration of intangible cultural heritage and cultural tourism is achieved through policy support and resource integration. For example, the "China Shadow Puppetry Theme Park" in Tangshan, Hebei Province is funded and constructed by the government, which focuses on showcasing the shadow puppetry skills of eastern Hebei, and is accompanied by shadow puppetry themed performances, handmade experiences, and other projects; The "Intangible Cultural Heritage Festivals" held in various regions (such as Guangzhou Intangible Cultural Heritage Week) are often led by the government, expanding the influence of intangible cultural heritage through exhibitions and performances. The advantage of this model is resource concentration and wide coverage, but it may lead to insufficient market sensitivity due to excessive administrative intervention.

Secondly, market driven: Enterprises, as the main body, achieve the transformation of intangible cultural heritage value through commercial operations. Typical cases include the authorization of intangible cultural heritage IP (such as Dunhuang Academy authorizing mural patterns to cosmetics brands), the development of cultural and creative products (such as the "auspicious beast series" stationery from the Palace Museum), and the operation of themed scenic spots (such as the modern expression of traditional drama at the Wuzhen Theater Festival). This type of model is more in line with market demand, but we need to be wary of excessively pursuing profits and weakening cultural authenticity.

Thirdly, inheritor participation type: With intangible cultural heritage inheritors as the core, small-scale branding is achieved through "skill display+product sales". For example, the "Intangible Cultural Heritage Workshop" in Danzhai, Guizhou is led by Miao wax printing inheritors, and tourists can visit the wax printing process and purchase finished products; Suzhou Silk Master Studio adopts the "front store back workshop" model, inheriting skills and providing customized silk works for tourists. This model preserves the authenticity of intangible cultural heritage, but due to the marketing capabilities of inheritors, brand influence is often limited to the region.

### *(3) The main challenges in the branding operation of intangible cultural heritage*

Although the branding of intangible cultural heritage has made initial progress, it still faces multiple bottlenecks in the process of integrating with culture and tourism.

Firstly, the brand positioning is vague and homogenization is severe: most intangible cultural heritage projects lack clear brand logos, resulting in a "one size fits all" approach. For example, many "intangible cultural heritage towns" across the country use "traditional handicrafts" as their selling point, without segmenting the market based on regional characteristics, making it difficult for tourists to form memorable points; Some non heritage cultural and creative products are simply printed with traditional patterns, without exploring cultural connotations, and have become "assembly line products".

Secondly, the communication methods are single and the degree of digitization is low: communication still relies on traditional channels such as offline exhibitions and festivals, and the use of new media is insufficient. The promotion of many intangible cultural heritage projects remains at the level of "official website introduction" and "newspaper reports", without utilizing forms preferred by young people such as short videos and live broadcasts; Some inheritors are unfamiliar with digital tools and find it difficult to reach a wider audience.

Thirdly, the sense of experience is insufficient and the integration of scenes is low: the combination of intangible cultural heritage and tourism scenes mostly stays at the "display layer", lacking deep interaction. For example, some intangible cultural heritage booths in scenic areas only display finished products, and tourists cannot participate in their production; Intangible cultural heritage performances are

mostly "fragmentary performances" that are not integrated into the overall narrative of the scenic area, making it difficult for tourists to understand the cultural context behind the skills.

Fourthly, the industrial chain is fragmented and the collaborative ability is weak: the production (skill inheritance), marketing (promotion and sales), and service (tourism supporting) links of the non heritage tourism industry chain lack linkage. For example, handmade products from intangible cultural heritage workshops are difficult to reach tourists due to limited channels, while scenic spots cannot provide unique intangible cultural heritage experiences due to insufficient supply chains; Conflicts often arise between enterprises and inheritors due to differences in interest distribution and cultural understanding, which affect the sustainability of cooperation.

Fifth, the balance between inheritance and commerce is difficult, and polarization is prominent: some projects excessively commercialize in pursuit of short-term benefits, such as simplifying traditional craftsmanship processes and altering folk connotations to cater to tourists, resulting in the distortion of intangible cultural heritage; The other part refuses any commercial development due to excessive emphasis on "protection", causing intangible cultural heritage to detach from modern life and face the risk of "loss of life and art".

## II. PRECISION AND DIFFERENTIATION OF BRAND OPERATION

Branding is the core lever for innovation in non heritage cultural tourism, which requires precise positioning and differentiated shaping to upgrade intangible cultural heritage from a "cultural heritage" to a "recognizable cultural tourism brand".

Firstly, precise positioning: segmenting brand types based on regional genes and market demand. The key to precise positioning is "two-way matching": it needs to be rooted in regional cultural genes while also meeting market demand. For example, in experiential intangible cultural heritage projects that focus on "hands-on practice", it is suitable for intangible cultural heritage related to skills such as pottery, embroidery, and tea making. For example, the "Taovichuan" brand in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province, relies on local ceramic techniques to create an experiential model of "ceramic workshop+market+study", attracting parent-child families and handicraft enthusiasts to participate in processes such as casting and glazing.

Secondly, differentiation shaping: Extracting core symbols and creating unique brand IP. The core of differentiation is to "extract unique cultural symbols" and transform them into brand IP with dissemination power. For example, representative elements can be extracted from intangible cultural heritage techniques, patterns, and legends. For example, Kunqu Opera can extract "Shuimodiao" (sound symbols), "Shuilu" (action symbols), and "Mudan Pavilion" (story symbols) to build an "Kunqu Opera Elegant Charm" IP; Miao silver jewelry can focus on the legend of "Butterfly Mother" (emotional symbols) and "Forging Techniques" (skill symbols) to create a "Miao Silver Craftsmanship" brand.

These symbols need to have the characteristics of being recognizable, extendable, and resonant, which can not only help tourists quickly remember, but also adapt to various products and scenarios.

Thirdly, brand collaboration and cross-border integration: breaking boundaries and expanding brand radiation. Cross border integration can enable intangible cultural heritage brands to break through traditional circles and reach a wider audience. For example, intangible cultural heritage+fashion: incorporating intangible cultural heritage elements into fashion products such as clothing and beauty. For example, the intangible cultural heritage "Yunjin" collaborates with luxury brand LV to use Yunjin patterns in luggage design; Miaoxiu and sports brand ANTA jointly launched sports shoes, combining traditional patterns with modern functions.

### III. SCENARIO BASED INNOVATION OF CULTURAL AND TOURISM PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES

The competitiveness of non heritage tourism lies in the "sense of experience", which requires scenario based design to transform tourists from "spectators" to "participants", achieving "physical participation" and "emotional resonance".

Firstly, immersive experience design: integrating intangible cultural heritage into the entire tourism scene. The core of immersive experience is the "reconstruction of intangible cultural heritage scenes", allowing tourists to fully experience culture through eating, accommodation, transportation, sightseeing, shopping, and entertainment. In the integration of accommodation scenes, intangible cultural heritage themed homestays can be created to allow tourists to experience culture while living. For example, the "Bai ethnic tie dye homestay" in Dali, Yunnan uses tie dye fabrics for room decoration. The homestay owner offers tie dye experience classes every day, and tourists can take away their own tie dye works as souvenirs; Pingyao, Shanxi Province's "Intangible Cultural Heritage Home stay in Shanxi Merchants' Courtyard" features Pingyao push light lacquer decor in the guest rooms and offers traditional Paper Cuttings, dough sculpture, and other experience activities, so that tourists can experience the culture of Shanxi Merchants. In the innovation of performing arts scenes, intangible cultural heritage live performances can be launched, which restore the context of intangible cultural heritage through the plot. For example, "Impression: Liu Sanjie" takes the scenery of Guilin as the stage, integrates intangible cultural heritage elements such as Zhuang ethnic songs, fishing and hunting customs into the plot, and allows tourists to experience the cultural concept of "harmony between heaven and man" in natural scenes.

Secondly, customized product development: designing exclusive packages based on customer needs. There is a significant difference in tourism demand among different customer groups, and targeted development of non heritage tourism products is needed. For parent-child families, intangible cultural heritage handmade parent-child camps can be developed, with products designed around "parent-child interaction+skill enlightenment". For example, the "Su Embroidery Parent Child Experience Camp" in Suzhou, Jiangsu, where parents and children learn simple embroidery

techniques together, collaborate to complete a small embroidery piece, and cultivate children's interest in traditional skills through interaction; The 'Lion Awakening Parent Child Class' in Foshan, Guangdong, involves children learning basic lion movements, parents participating in lion head painting, and finally the whole family completing a small lion awakening performance to enhance family cohesion.

Thirdly, digital empowerment: experience upgrade driven by technology. Digital technology provides the possibility of breaking through the limitations of time and space for non heritage tourism experiences, achieving an integrated experience of "online+offline". VR/AR can be used to restore historical scenes and use virtual reality technology to recreate the historical context of intangible cultural heritage. For example, Dunhuang Academy has launched the "Digital Dunhuang VR Tour", where visitors can "travel" to the excavation site of Mogao Grottoes wearing VR devices, watch the process of ancient painters painting murals, and listen to "digital guides" interpreting intangible cultural heritage stories in murals; The "Sanxingdui Intangible Cultural Heritage VR Experience" in Sichuan restores the sacrificial ceremony of ancient Shu people. Tourists can "participate" in the production and sacrificial process of the bronze divine tree, and understand the intangible cultural heritage connotation in ancient Shu civilization. And the metaverse can be used to create virtual intangible cultural heritage communities, building a parallel world of intangible cultural heritage on the metaverse platform. For example, in the "Intangible Cultural Heritage Metaverse Museum", visitors can interact with "digital inheritors" to learn how to play the guqin, purchase digital intangible cultural heritage collections (such as virtual embroidery works), and even participate in the "Metaverse Intangible Cultural Heritage Fashion Week" to watch designers create virtual costumes using intangible cultural heritage elements; The "Wuzhen Drama Festival Metaverse Sub venue" in Zhejiang Province has offline performances synchronized with live streaming in the metaverse. Online audiences can "participate" and interact through virtual seats, breaking geographical restrictions.

### IV. DIVERSIFIED UPGRADE OF COMMUNICATION AND MARKETING

The distribution of non-heritage tourism brands must overcome the conventional wisdom that "the fragrance of wine is not afraid of deep alleys" and use creative strategies and various channels to let more people "know, like, and participate".

Firstly, new media matrix dissemination: telling intangible cultural heritage stories in the language of young people. The core of new media communication is "content innovation+channel adaptation", using short videos, live broadcasts and other forms to make intangible cultural heritage "down-to-earth". You can use short videos to explain the highlights of intangible cultural heritage, and release "short and smooth" intangible cultural heritage content on Tiktok, Kwai and other platforms. For example, short videos of "intangible cultural heritage handmade" series show the production process of Paper Cuttings and pottery art with fast

rhythm clips, accompanied by suspense like "the original piece of paper can be cut like this!"; The "Inheritor's Story" series records the daily life of veteran artists (such as 70 year old embroiderers choosing lines at 3am), and touches the audience with emotional resonance. In this process, we can try to inherit the IP of the inheritor, use personal charm to drive brand communication, and create an inheritor image with a story and personality. For example, "Grandpa Amu" became popular on overseas social media platforms with his skill of building wooden arch bridges without using a single nail, and was called the "Chinese mortise and tenon master" by netizens. His personal IP has driven local woodworking intangible cultural heritage tourism in Xingtai, Hebei.

Secondly, festival and event marketing: creating explosive points for dissemination. By creating distinctive activities, attracting media and public attention, and enhancing the topicality of intangible cultural heritage brands. The intangible cultural heritage themed cultural and tourism festival can showcase the diversity and vitality of intangible cultural heritage, such as the "Shanghai International Intangible Cultural Heritage Week" setting up sections such as "Intangible Cultural Heritage Grand Stage" (performances), "Intangible Cultural Heritage Market" (product sales), "Intangible Cultural Heritage Forum" (expert discussions), etc., to attract domestic and foreign tourists to participate; By featuring unique intangible cultural heritage fashions and talent competitions, as well as Miao silver jewelry, Tujia brocade, and other novel forms, the Xiangxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival raises awareness of niche intangible cultural heritage.

Thirdly, community-based operation: User co creation enhances brand stickiness. By cultivating a community of non heritage tourism enthusiasts, users can transform from "consumers" to "participants" and enhance brand loyalty. For example, scenic spots or enterprises invite KOLs and ordinary tourists to serve as "non corpse inspectors" and experience newly developed non heritage cultural tourism products (such as intangible cultural heritage themed homestays) for free, requiring them to publish experience reports and provide improvement suggestions. These feedbacks are directly used for product optimization, and the sharing of experience officers can also drive their fans' attention.

#### V. COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE ECOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION

The long-term development of branded operation of intangible cultural heritage requires the construction of an ecological system that involves the collaboration of multiple stakeholders, sharing of benefits, and sustainable development. Clarify rights and responsibilities, and form a joint force. The core participants in the non heritage tourism ecosystem include the government, enterprises, inheritors, and communities, and it is necessary to clarify their respective rights and responsibilities to achieve a synergistic effect of "1+1>2". The government is responsible for building institutional frameworks and providing public services. For example, formulating policies to support the branding of

intangible cultural heritage (such as providing tax exemptions for intangible cultural heritage workshops and funding subsidies for intangible cultural tourism projects). Use the benefits of marketization to encourage the productization and branding of non-legacy tourism. For example, responsible for the design, production, and sales of non heritage cultural and creative products, utilizing channel advantages to expand dissemination; Introducing modern management concepts to optimize the production efficiency of intangible cultural heritage workshops; Develop digital experience projects (such as VR intangible cultural heritage tourism) to enhance product appeal. Enterprises need to respect the inheritors' control over cultural connotations and avoid excessive commercialization. The "living carriers" of intangible cultural heritage are the inheritors, who are in charge of passing on fundamental abilities and deciphering cultural meanings. For example, imparting the essence of skills to businesses and tourists to ensure the authenticity of products and experiences; Participate in product design and provide cultural guidance (such as the symbolic meaning of a certain pattern); Through oral history, skill exhibitions, and other means, enable the public to understand the history and spirit behind intangible cultural heritage. Communities are the 'native soil' of intangible cultural heritage, providing cultural scenes and social support. For example, open community spaces as intangible cultural heritage experience venues (such as ancestral halls and old houses); Organize residents to participate in intangible cultural heritage festival activities (such as acting as folk performers); Supervise the development of intangible cultural heritage to avoid cultural infringement.

"Intangible cultural heritage carries the unique cultural genes of a city, and its branding plays a crucial role in continuing cultural continuity, stimulating economic vitality, and shaping the city's cultural image"<sup>[2]</sup>, the branding operation of intangible cultural heritage projects is essentially about 'bringing tradition to life in the present'. Through precise positioning, scene innovation, diversified dissemination, and collaborative governance, intangible cultural heritage can not only realize economic value in the integration of culture and tourism, but also enable the cultural genes it carries to be passed down from generation to generation, ultimately achieving a win-win situation of "dynamic cultural inheritance, dynamic development of culture and tourism, and benefits from public participation".

This paper is the research result of the project of Mount Huangshan International Communication Research Institute of Shanghai University, "Research on the Path of Mount Huangshan Intangible Cultural Heritage Project to Promote the Deep Integration of Culture and Tourism".

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