

Art Therapy Practice in Intangible Cultural Heritage Revitalization: A Case Study of Dalian Jinjia Street ICH Experience Hall

Qingpeng Zhou¹, Heng Fu¹ and Weihua Zhang^{1*}

¹Dalian Minzu University, Dalian, 116600, China.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: 20010411@dlnu.edu.cn;

Contributing authors: 2792625947@qq.com; 2250961549@qq.com.

Abstract

Against the backdrop of global intangible cultural heritage (ICH) protection and the growing public demand for mental health support, this paper explores the innovative integration of art therapy into ICH revitalization, with a focus on its practical paths, implementation effects, and optimization strategies. Adopting a single-case study methodology, this research takes Dalian Jinjia Street ICH Experience Hall as the research object, combining participant observation, in-depth interviews, and scale testing to systematically analyze its multi-dimensional art therapy practice system. The study finds that traditional ICH handicrafts have a natural fit with the core mechanism of art therapy, and the Jinjia Street model has achieved dual value of cultural inheritance and mental healing through three core paths: offline hierarchical immersive workshops, digital technology-enabled scenario expansion, and industry-university-research integrated long-term mechanism construction. This practice not only breaks the dilemma of traditional ICH protection models such as intergenerational inheritance and low youth participation, but also provides a culturally rooted, low-threshold, and widely accessible mental health support path for communities. Finally, this paper summarizes the practical challenges of this model and puts forward targeted optimization suggestions, in order to provide theoretical reference and practical samples for the innovative development of ICH revitalization and public mental health services.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage; Digital Regeneration; Cultural Dissemination; Art Therapy; Technological Innovation

1 Introduction

Since the 2003 UNESCO ICH Convention, intangible cultural heritage protection has gained global attention. China boasts abundant ICH resources but confronts challenges including aging inheritors, weak youth engagement, disconnection from daily life and rigid static exhibition modes, which limit public appeal and sustainable development. With rising demands for mental health support, art therapy has emerged as an accessible psychological intervention. Rooted in local culture, traditional handicraft creation can alleviate negative emotions, improve self-efficacy and strengthen cultural identity. Nonetheless, current practices lack systematic integration of art therapy into ICH venues and in-depth research on digital empowerment. Taking Dalian Jinjia Street ICH Experience Hall as a case, this study constructs an integrated framework of ICH revitalization and art therapy to enrich relevant theories. It also concludes feasible practice strategies to inform ICH venue innovation and provide culture-based solutions for public mental health. Adopting a single-case study approach, this research combines field observation, semi-structured interviews and scale tests to analyze the practical effects of this integrated model, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Analysis of Scale Test Results Before and After Intervention

Evaluation Index	Pre-test Average Score	Post-test Average Score	Change	Importance
Self-Rating Anxiety Scale (SAS)	53.28	42.15	-11.13	P < 0.01
Self-Rating Depression Scale (SDS)	51.62	40.33	-11.29	P < 0.01
General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES)	23.17	29.84	+6.67	P < 0.01

As shown in Table 1, after three months of continuous participation, participants demonstrated a significant reduction in both anxiety and depression levels, alongside a marked improvement in general self-efficacy. All observed variations were statistically significant ($P < 0.01$), confirming the robust intervention effects of the ICH handicraft programs.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: the second part is the literature review, sorting out the current research status of ICH revitalization and the integration of art therapy and traditional culture; the third part constructs the theoretical framework of the integration of art therapy and ICH revitalization; the fourth part is the core case analysis, introducing the overview of Jinjia Street ICH Experience Hall, its art therapy practice paths, implementation effects and existing challenges; the fifth part is the discussion, analyzing the theoretical and practical implications of the study; the sixth part is the conclusion and future prospects.

2 Literature Review

Research on the protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) has undergone three distinct and progressive stages, each reflecting the deepening understanding of ICH’s value and the evolving needs of social development.

The initial stage, known as static preservation, emerged in response to the severe threat of extinction faced by numerous ICH items due to industrialization, urbanization, and the decline of traditional lifestyles. During this period, the core focus of scholars and practitioners was on rescuing endangered ICH forms—such as ancient craftsmanship, oral traditions, and folk rituals—by documenting them in detail, collecting physical artifacts, and establishing archives. The primary goal was to maintain the authenticity and integrity of ICH, treating it as a static cultural relic to be preserved rather than a living, evolving practice[1]. This stage laid the foundation for subsequent protection efforts by preventing the complete loss of precious cultural heritage, but it also had limitations: it separated ICH from its original social context and failed to address its sustainability in the modern world (see Fig. 1).



Fig.1 Home interface of Apple Vision Pro with system apps and the custom Cretapedia app

As research advanced, scholars reached a consensus that static preservation alone was insufficient to ensure ICH's long-term survival, leading to the transition to the second stage: live inheritance[2]. This stage shifted the focus from "preserving the past" to "integrating the present," emphasizing that the vitality of ICH lies in its integration into modern daily life. Live inheritance encourages the transmission of ICH through active practice—training inheritors, organizing folk activities, and incorporating ICH elements into education and public culture—so that it can continue to be passed down through generations and remain relevant to contemporary society. In recent years, the field has entered the third stage: creative revitalization, which seeks to inject new vitality into ICH by combining it with modern industries and technologies. Current studies on ICH revitalization mainly concentrate on three directions: integration with cultural tourism, where ICH becomes a core

attraction to drive local economic development; creative transformation of ICH and the development of cultural and creative derivatives, which make ICH more accessible to young people; and digital regeneration using technologies such as VR (Virtual Reality) and AR (Augmented Reality) [3], which help digitize and popularize ICH forms that are difficult to preserve or transmit through traditional means. However, despite the progress made in these areas, most existing studies overemphasize the economic and cultural value of ICH, paying insufficient attention to its untapped social service potential, particularly in the field of public mental health [see Fig. 2].

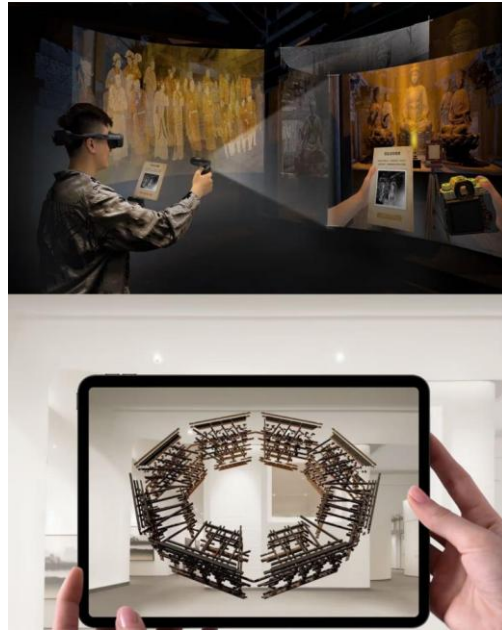


Fig.2 VR and AR applications for immersive digital heritage interaction

Against the backdrop of increasing attention to public mental health globally, art therapy is a low-threshold, non-verbal psychological intervention method—has increasingly integrated with traditional cultural practices, providing a new perspective for ICH revitalization. Both international and domestic studies have confirmed that engaging in traditional handicrafts, a typical form of ICH, can effectively relieve negative emotions such as anxiety and depression, enhance individuals' self-efficacy by completing hands-on creation[4][5], and strengthen cultural identity by connecting people with their cultural roots[6]. However, domestic practices in this regard are mostly limited to short-term, single workshops or temporary activities, lacking systematic integration into the daily operations of ICH venues (such as museums, inheritance centers, and folk art villages) and lacking the support of digital empowerment. In summary, existing research on ICH protection and revitalization has laid a solid theoretical foundation and accumulated valuable practical experience, but it also has obvious gaps: the research perspective is relatively single, focusing more on economic and cultural dimensions while neglecting social service functions; the exploration of long-term practice mechanisms for ICH-based mental health intervention is insufficient, making it difficult to achieve sustainable social impact; and there are inadequate empirical studies on the integration of digital technology, art therapy, and ICH

revitalization. These gaps are precisely what this study aims to fill through in-depth case studies, exploring a new path for ICH revitalization that combines cultural inheritance, digital innovation, and social service.

3 Theoretical Framework

This paper constructs a three-dimensional theoretical framework for the integration of art therapy and ICH revitalization, including the dual value system of ICH revitalization, the fit mechanism between art therapy and ICH practice, and the empowerment logic of technological innovation. The dual value system of ICH revitalization consists of core cultural value (inheriting traditional skills, cultural connotations and national spirit) and extended social service value (providing mental health support via ICH practice), with art therapy as the key to activating the latter and forming a positive cycle of cultural inheritance and social service. The fit mechanism is reflected in five dimensions: handicraft practice induces flow state to relieve anxiety[7], cultural narratives enable non-verbal emotional expression[8], creative production enhances self-efficacy[9], community participation strengthens cultural belonging, and ICH's historical context helps narrative reconstruction[10]. Digital technology empowers the integration by breaking space-time limitations through VR/AR and live broadcasts, enriching ICH experience forms to reduce learning thresholds[11], and expanding cultural dissemination via short videos and social media to enhance social influence.

4 Case Study: Dalian Jinjia Street ICH Experience Hall

Dalian Jinjia Street ICH Experience Hall(Fig.3), located in the core of Jinjia Street's old industrial zone carrying nearly a century of industrial memory, was invested 5 million yuan by Ganjingzi District Government, revitalized idle houses and opened on July 3, 2021, as Dalian's first social-force-operated ICH venue. Covering over 800 square meters with four theme halls, it collects 196 ICH items, exhibits 55 municipal-level and above items and 125 works, and offers over 10 interactive projects. It has established an "ICH Industry-University-Research Institute Alliance" with 7 colleges, won more than 10 honors, received 100,000+ visitors and held 200+ activities. It has built a three-dimensional art therapy system with three core paths: offline hierarchical workshops for residents, teenagers and special groups; digital empowerment via VR/AR, online platforms (50+ million views) and DIY cultural and creative products; and industry-university-research integration for talent training and practice optimization. As shown in Table 2, practice effectiveness is remarkable: over 60% of visitors joined workshops, 12 teenagers became ICH apprentices, online content achieved cross-border dissemination; a 3-month follow-up of 120 participants showed significant reductions in anxiety (SAS: 53.28→42.15) and depression (SDS: 51.62→40.33), increased self-efficacy (GSES: 23.17→29.84)[12], and most participants reported positive emotional experiences.



Fig.3 The ICH-themed stone wall at Dalian Jinjia Street ICH Experience Hall

Table 2. User Satisfaction and Emotional Experience Feedback

User Feedback Dimensions	Percentage of Agreement	Resulting Benefits
Stress Relief	92%	Forgot life and work pressure during creation
Cultural Identity	85%	Fostered a stronger sense of belonging to local
Social Integration	78%	Forged new friendships; experienced reduced

Social and Economic Value: Socially, it holds 70+ themed activities (3-year folk festival as regional brand) and supports public mental health. Economically, its "ICH Realization" brand has 30+ products, forming a sustainable model with less government reliance[13]. 4.4 Challenges: Professional gaps between inheritors and therapists; unsustainable short-term workshops; superficial digital application; lack of standardized therapeutic evaluation system (Fig. 4).



Fig.4 Embroidery handicraft display at Jinjia Street ICH Experience Hall

5 Discussion

A. Theoretical Implications

This study has three core theoretical implications:

First, this study expands the value dimension of ICH revitalization research. Different from previous studies that overemphasize the cultural and economic value of ICH, this study systematically demonstrates the social service value of ICH in the field of public mental health, and proves that the integration of art therapy can activate the social value of ICH while realizing cultural inheritance, which enriches the theoretical connotation of ICH creative transformation and innovative development[14].

Second, this study constructs a theoretical framework for the integration of art therapy and ICH revitalization, and clarifies the five-dimensional fit mechanism between ICH handicraft practice and art therapy core intervention. This framework reveals the internal logic of the integration of the two fields, and provides a systematic theoretical foundation for subsequent related research.

Third, this study verifies the empowerment effect of digital technology in the integration of art therapy and ICH revitalization. The case practice proves that digital regeneration can not only expand the boundary of cultural dissemination, but also break the space-time limitation of therapeutic scenes, enrich the form of therapeutic experience, and provide a new direction for the innovative development of ICH art therapy.

B. Practical Implications

The Jinjia Street model provides three practical inspirations for the innovative operation of ICH venues in China:

First, ICH venues should take the public's needs as the core, and build a hierarchical and targeted art therapy practice system. According to the characteristics and needs of different groups such as community residents, teenagers, and special groups, customized ICH experience programs should be designed to integrate therapeutic concepts into daily experience activities, so as to realize the organic combination of cultural inheritance and mental health support.

Second, it is necessary to break the professional barrier through industry-university-research integration, and build a long-term sustainable practice mechanism. Through the cooperation with universities and professional institutions, we can carry out professional talent training, build a scientific effect evaluation system, and continuously optimize the practice program, so as to ensure the scientificity, standardization and sustainability of the practice.

Third, we should take digital regeneration as the starting point to expand the boundary of ICH revitalization and art therapy practice. We should make full use of VR/AR, big data, social media and other digital technologies to reduce the participation threshold of ICH, expand the coverage of therapeutic services, and realize the win-win of cultural dissemination and social service value.

C. Research Limitations

This study still has some limitations: first, this study adopts a single-case study design[15], and the research results are closely related to the regional characteristics of Dalian and the resource endowment of the venue, so the universality of the conclusions needs to be further verified by multi-case studies; second, the follow-up time of the therapeutic effect evaluation in this study is 3 months, lacking long-term longitudinal tracking research, and it is difficult to confirm the long-term effect of the practice; third, this study does not conduct a comparative analysis of the therapeutic effects of different ICH projects, and the differences in the therapeutic mechanisms of different handicraft projects need to be further explored in subsequent studies.

6 Conclusion and Future Prospects

This paper takes Dalian Jinjia Street ICH Experience Hall as a case to systematically explore the practice of integrating art therapy into ICH revitalization, and draws the following core conclusions:

First, traditional ICH handicraft practice has a natural high fit with the core mechanism of art therapy. The handicraft creation process can guide individuals into a flow state, realize emotional expression and release, enhance self-efficacy, and build cultural identity and sense of belonging. The integration of art therapy and ICH revitalization can realize the dual goals of cultural inheritance and mental healing, and is an innovative path for ICH revitalization in the new era.

Second, the Jinjia Street model has built a systematic art therapy practice system through three core paths: offline hierarchical immersive workshops for multi-groups, digital technology-enabled scenario expansion and cultural dissemination, and industry-university-research integrated long-term mechanism construction. This practice has achieved remarkable effects in cultural inheritance, mental health intervention, social service and economic operation, and provides a replicable practical sample for the innovative operation of ICH venues.

Third, the integration of art therapy and ICH revitalization still faces practical challenges such as the professional barrier between disciplines, the insufficient sustainability of practice, the shallow application of digital technology, and the lack of standardized evaluation system. It is necessary to optimize the practice model through cross-disciplinary cooperation, long-term mechanism construction, technological innovation and other ways.

Future research can be carried out in the following three directions: first, carry out multi-case comparative studies, select ICH venues in different regions and with different resource endowments for research, explore the general rules and localized adaptation paths of the integration of art therapy and ICH revitalization, and improve the universality of the theoretical framework; second, construct a standardized evaluation system for the therapeutic effect of ICH art therapy, clarify the evaluation indicators and methods for the therapeutic effect of different ICH projects, and provide a scientific basis for the optimization of practice programs; third, explore the application of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and metaverse in ICH art therapy, develop personalized digital therapeutic scenes, and further expand the boundary of practice through technological innovation.

DECLARATIONS

Authors' Information

Qingpeng Zhou is a postgraduate student at the School of Design, Dalian Minzu University. His research interests include interaction design and visual communication.

Heng Fu is a postgraduate student at the School of Design, Dalian Minzu University. His research interests include animation design and graphic design.

Weihua Zhang is the Associate Dean of the School of Design, Dalian Minzu University. His main research interests include interaction design and cultural relics research.

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