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The Role of University Art Education in the Inheritance and Innovation of Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Abstract: This paper explores the pivotal role of university art education in the inheritance and innovation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Through a literature review and theoretical analysis, it first defines the core concepts of university art education and ICH, while examining the dialectical relationship between traditional craftsmanship and modern innovation. The study highlights that universities not only transmit traditional skills effectively through structured curricula and faculty training but also infuse modern creativity into cultural traditions via interdisciplinary collaboration and the integration of industry, academia, and research. The paper further discusses current institutional challenges in the inheritance process and proposes strategies — such as pedagogical reform, resource integration, and social engagement — to promote the innovative development of ICH. These suggestions aim to provide theoretical support and practical inspiration for university art education and cultural heritage practices.

Keywords: university art education; intangible cultural heritage; inheritance; innovation; interdisciplinary integration

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1. Introduction

In the context of rapid globalization and modernization, traditional cultures face the dual challenges of disrupted inheritance and a lack of innovation. As a vital carrier of a nation's historical memory and cultural identity, intangible cultural heritage embodies unique aesthetics, craftsmanship, and wisdom of life. However, societal changes and technological advancements have increasingly marginalized many traditional skills, urgently necessitating new pathways for their preservation and revitalization. University art education, with its systematic teaching framework, robust faculty expertise, and strengths in interdisciplinary integration, offers a distinctive opportunity and platform for the protection, inheritance, and innovation of ICH. Thus, studying its role in this domain holds not only theoretical significance but also practical relevance for the sustainable development of traditional culture and contemporary artistic innovation. This paper seeks to investigate how university art education can balance the preservation of traditional craftsmanship with modern expression and dynamic inheritance through educational reforms, interdisciplinary collaboration, and industry-academia-research integration. The research focuses on the transmission of traditional knowledge, the shaping of cultural identity, innovative practice pathways, and mechanisms for social interaction. By employing methods such as literature reviews and case studies, it examines controversies and shortcomings in existing theories and practices, aiming to construct a theoretical framework suited

to contemporary needs. The study emphasizes both the original spirit of traditional culture and the application of modern artistic techniques in innovating traditional crafts, offering new teaching models and practical strategies for university art education while providing theoretical and practical insights for the modern transformation of ICH [1].

2. Current Research Status and Issues

2.1. Overview of Domestic and International Research

Research on the relationship between university art education and the inheritance and innovation of ICH has made notable progress both domestically and internationally, though focuses and approaches differ. In China, studies primarily center on theoretical explorations and practical pathways for ICH preservation. Many scholars approach the topic from the perspective of cultural inheritance, examining how university art education platforms can leverage curriculum design, faculty development, and university-enterprise partnerships to facilitate the transmission and innovation of traditional skills. Some research underscores art education's role in fostering students' aesthetic abilities and cultural identity, delving into mechanisms for integrating traditional arts with modern design and creative expression [2]. However, domestic studies often lack theoretical rigor, interdisciplinary integration, and in-depth analysis of innovation mechanisms, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive theoretical framework. Internationally, scholars tend to focus on cultural diversity, community participation, and cultural reproduction in the context of globalization. Foreign research often explores sustainable models of cultural inheritance through case studies and practical projects, emphasizing the social functions of cultural heritage and the importance of cross-cultural exchange. While art education is recognized as a pathway for cultural preservation, international studies on the specific role of universities in this field remain fragmented, often approached from perspectives like cultural policy, sociology, or educational theory rather than a focused examination of the intrinsic link between university art education and ICH inheritance and innovation. Overall, both domestic and international research acknowledge the potential value of art education in cultural inheritance, yet challenges persist in theoretical development, practical models, and interdisciplinary integration, offering ample perspectives and opportunities for further exploration [3].

2.2. Controversies and Shortcomings in Existing Research

While current research on university art education in the realm of ICH inheritance and innovation has yielded theoretical insights, several unresolved controversies and shortcomings remain. First, there is a lack of alignment between theoretical models and practical pathways. Many studies prioritize abstract theoretical constructs, focusing on the basic mechanisms of cultural inheritance and innovation, but fail to adequately demonstrate how these ideas can be implemented or their operational feasibility. This disconnect between theory and practice hinders the development of effective strategies and guidance for university art education in advancing ICH inheritance and innovation. Second, existing research shows a clear deficiency in interdisciplinary integration. Given that ICH inheritance and innovation span multiple fields — culture, art, history, and sociology — a single-disciplinary lens struggles to fully uncover their interconnections and interactions. Overly narrow perspectives, limited to art education or cultural preservation, result in insufficient analysis of how diverse factors interplay, limiting the broad applicability and effectiveness of research findings. Additionally, the exploration of innovation mechanisms integrating traditional elements with modern creativity in university art education remains superficial. While some studies emphasize the protection and transmission of traditional crafts, discussions on fostering students' innovative thinking and achieving effective synergy between traditional arts and modern design often lack depth, relying on surface-level descriptions rather than systematic analysis or theoretical support. This gap restricts universities' ability to drive the modern transformation and creative expression of

ICH. Moreover, empirical research and case studies are notably scarce, with much of the field relying on literature reviews and theoretical discussions. The absence of in-depth analysis of practical cases in university art education limits the availability of data and real-world examples to guide implementation, reducing the universality and practicality of research outcomes. Finally, many studies overlook the diversity of inheritance models and innovation pathways across different regions and cultural contexts [4]. Insufficient consideration of factors such as regional culture, institutional resources, and social environments limits the adaptability of existing theories to local realities. Moving forward, research must account for regional differences and cultural diversity to refine the theoretical systems and practical models of university art education in ICH inheritance and innovation.

3. Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Analysis

3.1. The Connotation and Characteristics of University Art Education

University art education, as a vital component of higher education, encompasses a multifaceted blend of artistic theory and practice. At its core, it involves not only the transmission of traditional artistic techniques but also the cultivation of modern artistic concepts and innovative approaches. In terms of curriculum design, university art education typically emphasizes foundational training in skills such as drawing, sculpture, and design, while systematically incorporating disciplines like art theory, art history, and aesthetics. This approach aims to equip students with solid artistic proficiency and a broad cultural perspective. Furthermore, the educational process often integrates interdisciplinary elements, such as intersections with culture, media, and technology, fostering students' ability to think diversely and express themselves comprehensively in their creative work. On the other hand, university art education is distinguished by its unique features and strengths. First, it strikes a balance between artistic integrity and innovation, requiring students to master traditional techniques while encouraging them to adapt these skills creatively and express them through modern artistic forms. Second, it emphasizes the interplay between practice and theory, offering formats like workshops, experimental courses, and art projects that allow students to explore new avenues of artistic expression in real-world creative settings [5]. Additionally, universities boast robust faculty expertise and abundant cultural resources, providing students with cutting-edge artistic ideas and diverse creative platforms. These characteristics not only position university art education as a key player in nurturing professional artistic talent but also offer strong support for the inheritance and innovation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). This dual role helps safeguard traditional culture while advancing artistic innovation and sociocultural diversity.

3.2. Definition and Value of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage refers to the various forms of traditional cultural expressions, knowledge, skills, and related practices passed down through generations over the course of history. This includes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, festivals, and traditional handicrafts. Beyond specific techniques and customs, ICH carries rich historical information, cultural memory, and societal values, serving as a crucial vessel for a nation's cultural identity and spiritual life. From a cultural perspective, ICH holds irreplaceable value in historical transmission. It preserves a nation's uniqueness and traditional wisdom while reflecting humanity's shared creativity and aesthetic aspirations. Simultaneously, ICH carries significant social and economic importance. It can drive the development of related cultural industries, boost local economies and tourism, and foster public awareness and pride in traditional culture, thereby providing a continuous impetus for sociocultural diversity and harmonious development [6].

3.3. *Theoretical Perspectives on Inheritance and Innovation*

Theoretically, inheritance and innovation are not opposing forces but rather interdependent and dialectically unified processes. Inheritance focuses on preserving and perpetuating the original spirit, techniques, and customs of traditional culture, with its core lying in maintaining cultural continuity and the stability of historical memory. By systematically documenting and passing down various traditional expressions within ICH, the cultural foundation is strengthened, ensuring the uniqueness and identity of a nation's heritage. Innovation, meanwhile, centers on reinterpreting and modernizing traditional elements based on this foundation [7]. Far from mere replication, innovation respects the essence of tradition while employing modern artistic methods, technological tools, and interdisciplinary approaches to breathe new life and contemporary relevance into cultural heritage. This process enables traditional culture to meet modern aesthetic demands and thrive in new contexts, resulting in artistic expressions that resonate with the present era. Theoretically, inheritance and innovation share an interactive and complementary relationship: inheritance provides a solid cultural base and rich material for innovation, while innovation propels the evolution of traditional culture, keeping it dynamically vibrant amid changing times. University art education plays a pivotal role in this dynamic, using well-designed curricula and practical exploration to help students master traditional skills while inspiring them to break boundaries, experiment, and create. This fosters the sustainable development of culture. Such a dialectical perspective offers both theoretical grounding and practical guidance for the preservation and advancement of ICH, opening new possibilities for cultural innovation [8].

4. **The Role of University Art Education in the Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

4.1. *Transmission of Knowledge and Skills*

In university art education, the transmission of knowledge and skills serves as the foundational mechanism for ICH inheritance. Universities facilitate this through diverse channels, such as offering courses on traditional techniques, establishing practical workshops, and setting up laboratories, systematically imparting a wealth of traditional artistic knowledge and methods to students. The curriculum not only covers specific skills like traditional painting, sculpture, and folk crafts but also delves into the historical contexts and cultural significance embedded within these practices. This ensures students gain both technical mastery and a deep appreciation of the spirit of traditional culture. Additionally, universities leverage their strong faculty, many of whom possess profound expertise and practical experience in traditional arts. Through direct instruction and mentorship, these educators pass down not just techniques but also the cultural philosophies and aesthetic standards behind them. This structured and professional educational model effectively preserves the essence of traditional crafts while providing a solid foundation of talent and intellectual resources for the ongoing inheritance of ICH [9].

4.2. *Shaping Cultural Identity and Values*

Cultural identity and value formation play an essential role in university art education. Through well-rounded art courses and a variety of practical activities, students not only acquire traditional techniques and modern artistic methods but also subtly develop an appreciation and identification with the spiritual essence of traditional culture. Universities utilize historical and cultural resources, on- and off-campus art exhibitions, and interactive teaching approaches to immerse students in the unique charm and profound depth of culture during their creative and practical experiences. This process cultivates an emotional connection to traditional culture while fostering independent, multifaceted aesthetic perspectives and value systems. Moreover, instructors reinforce cultural identity by interpreting traditional aesthetics and integrating modern artistic concepts, deepening students' understanding of the intrinsic worth of ICH. Ultimately, this value-shaping

mechanism, rooted in cultural identity, provides a strong cultural foundation for students' future artistic endeavors and injects lasting, far-reaching energy into the inheritance and innovation of ICH [10].

4.3. Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Resource Integration

Interdisciplinary collaboration and resource integration stand out as key strategies in university art education for advancing the inheritance and innovation of ICH. By harnessing the strengths of multiple disciplines — such as art, history, cultural studies, and technology — universities create platforms for cross-disciplinary exchange and collaboration, sparking innovative fusion and the collision of ideas across fields. For instance, partnerships between art schools and programs in folklore, history, or digital media enable joint projects that breathe new life into traditional crafts within modern contexts, offering diverse perspectives for reinterpreting ICH. Furthermore, close collaborations with local cultural institutions, museums, ICH preservation centers, and businesses allow universities to share resources, expand students' opportunities for practice and creation, and seamlessly blend theoretical knowledge with hands-on application. This enhances the dissemination and societal impact of ICH. Such interdisciplinary models and resource integration not only optimize the teaching resources of university art education but also inject fresh vitality into the sustained inheritance and creative evolution of traditional culture.

5. The Role of University Art Education in the Innovation of Intangible Cultural Heritage

5.1. Creative Practice and Contemporary Expression

In university art education, creative practice and contemporary expression have taken on unprecedented importance, serving as critical links in the innovative transformation of traditional culture and bridges connecting the past with the present, tradition with the future. Universities establish specialized creative practice courses, art laboratories, workshops, and interdisciplinary creative platforms, enabling students to boldly innovate and reinterpret traditional techniques. In this process, students not only learn foundational skills such as traditional painting, sculpture, and folk crafts but are also encouraged to employ modern design concepts, digital media technologies, and new materials to deconstruct and reimagine traditional elements, thus achieving contemporary expressions of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Moreover, universities actively introduce exemplary art creation cases from both domestic and international contexts through exhibitions, lectures, and global exchanges. These initiatives broaden students' perspectives and inspire them to explore fusions of traditional and modern, as well as Eastern and Western artistic styles, in their creative work. Instructors guide students to deeply explore the essence of traditional culture, strengthening their understanding of traditional symbols, techniques, and cultural memory. Through interdisciplinary research and teamwork, students transform traditional arts into works that resonate with modern aesthetics and contemporary spirit. This creative practice not only provides students with a platform to experiment and showcase innovative outcomes but also breathes new life into ICH, allowing traditional culture to radiate fresh artistic appeal in today's context. Additionally, by collaborating with local cultural institutions, museums, ICH preservation centers, and businesses, universities integrate academic theory with practical application, forming a robust innovation chain that combines industry, academia, research, and utilization. This approach effectively advances the digital preservation and dissemination of ICH resources, expanding the channels and scenarios for traditional culture's outreach. In summary, creative practice and contemporary expression break through the conventional forms of traditional techniques, opening new pathways for the protection and inheritance of ICH while highlighting the unique role and boundless potential of university art education in driving cultural innovation and preservation.

5.2. Pedagogical Reform and Curriculum Innovation

In university art education, pedagogical reform and curriculum innovation play a central role in promoting the innovative development of ICH. As society increasingly demands the integration of cultural inheritance with modern artistic expression, universities are moving away from traditional teaching models to explore new curricula that blend theory and practice. On one hand, curriculum design has shifted from a singular focus on technique transmission to a multidisciplinary and diversified approach. By incorporating digital media, modern design principles, and technological applications, universities enable students to master the essence of traditional crafts while encouraging them to infuse modern elements into their artistic creations, achieving an organic synthesis of tradition and innovation. Through project-based, discussion-driven, and collaborative teaching methods, instructors create open and interactive classroom environments where students can experience the depth of traditional culture in real-world settings and proactively explore its new expressions in contemporary society. On the other hand, universities actively build collaborative platforms with external partners, such as museums, ICH preservation centers, and cultural enterprises, to jointly develop practical courses and specialized lectures that tightly integrate theoretical knowledge with hands-on practice. Through case studies, field trips, and cultural salons, students gain direct insight into the diversity and complexity of ICH, allowing them to refine their experiences into unique artistic perspectives. Furthermore, pedagogical reform emphasizes faculty development, encouraging instructors to update their knowledge and teaching philosophies by drawing on international best practices, thus providing intellectual support for curriculum innovation. In essence, pedagogical reform and curriculum innovation inject fresh vitality into university art education, meeting the demands of modern art education for creativity and practice while offering a solid educational foundation for the contemporary inheritance and development of ICH. By continuously refining teaching content and methods, universities are gradually establishing an art education system that honors tradition while embracing the future, laying the groundwork for cultivating artists with interdisciplinary vision and innovative capabilities.

5.3. Integration of Industry, Academia, and Research with Social Engagement

In university art education, the integration of industry, academia, and research (IAR), coupled with social engagement, serves as a bridge and catalyst, effectively driving the innovative transformation of ICH. Universities collaborate deeply with governments, enterprises, cultural institutions, and folk art communities to establish IAR platforms, seamlessly linking traditional artistic resources across teaching, research, and market applications. By incorporating real-world projects and case studies, students engage in practical initiatives related to ICH inheritance and innovation during their coursework, enhancing their ability to apply theoretical knowledge while fostering creative thinking and interdisciplinary collaboration. Long-term partnerships with ICH preservation centers, museums, and cultural creative industry parks enable the co-development of market-oriented artistic products and digital exhibition projects, revitalizing traditional culture through modern communication channels. Faculty and researchers, meanwhile, undertake interdisciplinary studies, leveraging modern technology to digitally preserve and innovatively express traditional techniques, offering fresh perspectives for academic research and laying a theoretical and technical foundation for the industrialization of ICH. The broad participation of society further expands the dissemination pathways of ICH, heightening public recognition and engagement with traditional culture. The IAR model not only fosters the organic integration of knowledge, technology, and cultural markets but also creates expansive opportunities for university art education to nurture innovative talents with interdisciplinary skills and a sense of social responsibility. This multi-stakeholder synergy — benefiting universities, enterprises, and society — infuses continuous momentum into the sustainable development of ICH.

6. Conclusion

This paper examines the role of university art education in the inheritance and innovation of intangible cultural heritage, drawing several key conclusions through the construction of a theoretical framework and multifaceted analysis. First, university art education plays a foundational role not only in transmitting traditional techniques but also in cultivating students' deep identification with and aesthetic appreciation for traditional culture through systematic knowledge frameworks and practical teaching. Second, inheritance and innovation are not opposing forces but interdependent processes. By integrating traditional essence with modern artistic concepts, universities reinterpret the meaning of traditional culture, injecting new vitality and contemporary relevance into ICH resources. Third, interdisciplinary collaboration and resource integration provide robust support for the inheritance and innovation of ICH. Through multifaceted interactions with cultural institutions, enterprises, and ICH preservation centers, universities establish IAR mechanisms that effectively translate academic research into practical applications, advancing the digital preservation, market development, and modern dissemination of traditional culture. Finally, pedagogical reform and curriculum innovation continuously expand the scope of university art education, facilitating the fusion of traditional techniques with contemporary artistic expressions and creating an enriching environment for training artists with interdisciplinary vision and innovative capabilities. Overall, the role of university art education in ICH inheritance and innovation extends beyond the transmission of skills and knowledge to inspiring students' profound identification with and creative engagement in traditional culture, thereby providing significant momentum for its sustainable development. Looking ahead, strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration, deepening IAR interactions, and advancing pedagogical reform will open even broader horizons for the inheritance and innovation of ICH.

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