

Research on the Transformation and Application of Intangible Cultural Heritage Visual Symbols in Modern Aesthetic Education

Xiaoyang Hu

Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou 571126, Hainan, China

Copyright: © 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: As a concrete carrier of China's outstanding traditional culture, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) visual symbols hold dual values of formal aesthetics and cultural expression, and serve as a core resource for constructing aesthetic education with regional characteristics. Hainan's ICH items, such as Li brocade, Li pottery, and coconut carving, have fostered highly recognizable visual symbols like the Hercules pattern, frog pattern, and Gangong bird pattern. These symbols embody the craftsmanship wisdom and aesthetic ideals of the Li ethnic ancestors, providing unique resources for localized aesthetic education. Taking Hainan's ICH as a case study, this paper addresses the existing problems in integrating ICH visual symbols into aesthetic education—including superficiality, formalism, and insufficient exploration of regional connotations. It defines the connotative scope and aesthetic education value of ICH visual symbols, analyzes their transformation logic and core principles, and ultimately offers a referential paradigm for local ICH-oriented aesthetic education.

Keywords: Visual symbols; Modern aesthetic education; Hainan ICH; Aesthetic education practice

Online publication: Apr 5, 2026

1. Connotation definition of intangible cultural heritage visual symbols and their value in Hainan local aesthetic education

Visual symbols of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) are concrete expressive forms within ICH that can be perceived visually, serving as cultural carriers integrating three dimensions: external form, internal connotation, and spiritual core. After a long period of cultural accumulation, Hainan has developed a system of ICH visual symbols with distinct regional characteristics. Classic totems in Li brocade, such as the Hercules pattern, frog pattern, and Gangong bird pattern, represent the core expressions of the Li people's nature worship and ethnic culture. These patterns feature symmetrical and balanced compositions, vivid and bright colors, and take diamonds, squares, and triangles as basic graphic units, forming rich patterns through line variations.

Li pottery is created using the clay-slice pottery-making technique, with core characteristics of simple textures, minimalist shapes, and understated carved patterns. It adopts ancient pottery-making processes such as the "coil-building method" and "open-air pile firing", embodying the creation concept of "harmony between man

and nature”. Coconut carving uses coconut shells as carriers, engraving patterns such as ocean waves, coconut trees, fishing boats, and Li people’s daily life scenes. It integrates marine culture and Li ethnic customs, forming a unique tropical ICH visual system in Hainan. These symbols are not merely decorative patterns but condensed essences of Li culture and island culture; their dual attribute of “integrating form and spirit” endows them with high value for the development of local aesthetic education.

Aesthetic education undertakes the core mission of cultivating teenagers’ aesthetic perception and cultural identity. In 2020, the Ministry of Education’s Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era clearly proposed to integrate China’s outstanding traditional culture into the entire process of aesthetic education in an all-round way. As the “visual genes” of national culture, ICH visual symbols are the core support for localized aesthetic education. As a tropical island province inhabited by multiple ethnic groups, Hainan possesses rich resources centered on Li ethnic ICH and characterized by marine ICH. Visual symbols such as Li brocade totems, Li pottery textures, and coconut carving patterns, which combine ethnic customs and island characteristics, are scarce resources for constructing an aesthetic education system with local characteristics and solving the problem of homogenization in aesthetic education content. However, the current integration of Hainan’s ICH visual symbols into aesthetic education still faces issues such as superficial integration, outdated transformation forms, insufficient professional teachers, and incomplete curriculum systems. Based on this, this paper takes Hainan’s local ICH as the sole case, focusing on its aesthetic education transformation logic, practical pathways, and optimization strategies to promote the transition of local ICH from static display to dynamic inheritance through aesthetic education.

The core value of Hainan’s ICH visual symbols in modern aesthetic education is reflected in four aspects. First, the value of cultivating aesthetic literacy. Hainan’s ICH visual symbols form a set of original ecological Oriental aesthetic systems, which can guide teenagers to systematically perceive the original ecological formal beauty and artistic conception beauty, and cultivate their delicate aesthetic perception ability. Second, the value of fostering local cultural identity. Through the systematic interpretation of the historical origin and cultural implication of symbols in aesthetic education, teenagers can deeply understand the core of their hometown culture and cultivate a profound sense of local attachment and cultural confidence. Third, the value of innovative practice. Guiding teenagers to extract, reconstruct, and re-create based on core symbols can cultivate their hands-on practical ability and innovative design thinking, realizing the transformation from “passively accepting beauty” to “proactively creating beauty”^[1]. Fourth, the value of infiltrating humanistic spirit. Hainan’s ICH visual symbols contain the humanistic concepts of the Li ancestors, such as reverence for nature, making the best use of materials, and harmony and inclusiveness. Through the subtle infiltration of aesthetic education, these concepts can effectively make up for the shortcoming of modern aesthetic education that emphasizes skills over humanism, realizing the goal of “nourishing the soul with beauty and educating people with culture”^[2].

2. The internal logic and core principles of the transformation of intangible cultural heritage visual symbols into modern aesthetic education

For the transformation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) visual symbols into modern aesthetic education, the first step is to systematically decode Hainan’s ICH visual symbols, sorting out their historical origins, evolution trajectories, and cultural connotations. Second, it is necessary to adapt to local aesthetic education scenarios: combined with the cognitive characteristics of students in different academic stages, traditional totems are transformed into accessible aesthetic education content that is closely aligned with the life experiences of island residents. Finally, through systematic teaching design, the aesthetic, cultural, and humanistic values of ICH symbols are truly internalized, achieving a win-win situation between the dynamic inheritance of ICH and the

education goal of local aesthetic education ^[3].

Four core principles must be adhered to during the transformation process. First, the principle of regional authenticity: it is essential to uphold the core cultural connotations and original aesthetic characteristics of Hainan's ICH visual symbols, avoid randomly altering the symbolic meanings and shapes to cater to modern aesthetics, and firmly safeguard the cultural roots of Hainan's ICH. Second, the principle of aesthetic education adaptability: it is required to closely align with the cognitive laws and physical-mental characteristics of Hainan's students in different academic stages, distinguish between the enlightening and interesting nature of aesthetic education in primary and secondary schools and the professional and innovative nature of aesthetic education in colleges and universities, and design transformed content and teaching forms in a hierarchical manner. Third, the principle of temporal innovation: based on the aesthetic preferences of contemporary teenagers, Hainan's ICH visual symbols are refined, simplified, and reconstructed in a modern way, with the integration of modern design, digital art, and other elements to create aesthetic education content that combines island charm with contemporary vibes. Fourth, the principle of practical experience: the mode of pure theoretical indoctrination should be abandoned, and emphasis should be placed on hands-on practice and immersive experience, allowing students to perceive, understand, and create beauty through practices such as Li brocade pattern drawing, Li pottery clay modeling, and coconut carving creation.

3. Exclusive application pathways of Hainan's intangible cultural heritage visual symbols in modern aesthetic education

Based on the aforementioned transformation logic and core principles, and combined with Hainan's local educational resources, four mutually supportive exclusive application pathways can be constructed.

The first pathway is integrating [the symbols] into local aesthetic education curricula and building a hierarchical school-based curriculum system. At the primary and secondary school stage, the focus is on ICH symbol enlightenment and interesting practice: basic totems of Li brocade, classic textures of Li pottery, and simple patterns of coconut carving are integrated into art, labor education, and comprehensive practical activity courses, forming a teaching content system that progresses from simplicity to complexity. Lower-grade students focus on basic perception and imitative operation; middle-grade students are introduced to the interpretation of symbol connotations; upper-grade students attempt simple craft experience and creative transformation exercises. Some primary and secondary schools in Li-inhabited cities and counties have incorporated Li brocade totem drawing into compulsory aesthetic education courses. Teachers extract core symbols to explain their cultural origins, and organize pattern copying and simple weaving experiences, allowing ICH symbols to take root in rural campuses. At the university stage, the emphasis is on in-depth research and innovative design of ICH symbols: characteristic courses such as "Li Brocade Pattern Innovation", "Coconut Carving Symbol Activation" and "Aesthetic Appreciation of Li Ethnic ICH" are offered. Art majors are organized to conduct field trips to Li villages, and carry out original creations combining modern cultural and creative designs, digital illustrations, and costume design. Some vocational colleges have established ICH craft workshops, integrating Li brocade totems with modern craftsmanship to transform them into practical cultural and creative products. Universities in the province have successively set up ICH innovation and design workshops, integrating local ICH symbols into design-related professional courses to cultivate talents with both local cultural heritage and innovative capabilities.

The second pathway is creating local immersive research and study scenarios to enrich extracurricular aesthetic education practice. On one hand, primary and secondary schools integrate ICH visual symbols into campus culture construction: corridors, cultural walls, and thematic exhibition halls are used to display high-quality Li brocade, coconut carving works, and students' creations. Regular activities such as Li brocade pattern

design competitions, coconut carving creative exhibitions, and Li Ethnic ICH Cultural Festivals are held to create a strong atmosphere for local ICH aesthetic education. On the other hand, by linking high-quality local carriers such as Binglanggu Li and Miao Cultural Tourism Area, Hainan Provincial Ethnic Museum, Li Brocade Inheritance Base, and Coconut Carving ICH Workshop, standardized ICH aesthetic education research and study classes are established ^[4]. Primary and secondary school students are organized to visit Li and Miao villages, observe the ICH production process up close, listen to inheritors explain the cultural connotations of symbols, and personally experience practical operations such as Li brocade hand-painting, Li pottery clay modeling, and coconut carving shallow engraving. The Hainan Provincial Ethnic Museum regularly carries out public welfare ICH aesthetic education activities, adopting a model that combines physical display, symbol interpretation, and hands-on experience to enable students to systematically perceive the aesthetic value and cultural connotations of local ICH symbols.

The third pathway is leveraging digital technology to expand new online spaces for aesthetic education. Hainan's cultural and tourism departments, in collaboration with education departments, have launched online micro-courses on local ICH visual symbols, focusing on core symbols such as Li brocade totems, coconut carving patterns, and Li pottery textures. These courses use animation and short videos to vividly interpret the connotations and aesthetic characteristics of the symbols, adapting to online and offline teaching in primary and secondary schools and promoting the sharing of urban and rural aesthetic education resources. Local cultural and tourism platforms, as well as education platforms, have launched ICH digital exhibition halls, displaying precious Li brocade costumes and coconut carving collections through 3D digitalization to clearly present pattern details and craftsmanship. Students can access immersive online viewing and independent learning at any time, making up for the shortage of ICH aesthetic education resources in rural schools. Meanwhile, local ICH inheritors and aesthetic education workers use new media platforms such as Douyin and Bilibili to release lightweight aesthetic education tutorials on Li brocade drawing, coconut carving creation, and Li pottery clay modeling. They adopt youthful and accessible communication methods to bring Hainan's ICH visual symbols into the daily lives of teenagers, breaking the temporal and spatial limitations of traditional aesthetic education.

The fourth pathway is constructing a home-school-community collaboration system to promote universal ICH aesthetic education. At the community level, cultural centers and community cultural hubs in various cities and counties regularly carry out public welfare aesthetic education activities such as Li brocade pattern hand-painting, coconut carving DIY, and Li ethnic rattan weaving experience, providing inclusive ICH aesthetic education services for citizens and teenagers. Art galleries and museums in the province hold regular thematic exhibitions on Li brocade and coconut carving, with supporting professional aesthetic education interpretation texts to create immersive public aesthetic education spaces. At the family level, parents use local ICH material kits to accompany their children in parent-child aesthetic education activities such as ICH symbol hand-painting and coconut shell decorative painting creation, integrating local aesthetic education into family education. At the social level, efforts are made to promote the in-depth integration of local ICH visual symbols with urban cultural construction and the cultural tourism industry. Li brocade totems and coconut carving ocean patterns are creatively applied to the decoration of urban public facilities, the development of cultural and creative products for the Free Trade Port, and the construction of campus landscapes. This integrates ICH symbols into daily life and fosters a positive social atmosphere where Hainan's ICH is valued and local culture is inherited.

4. Existing problems in the transformation and application of Hainan's intangible cultural heritage visual symbols in modern aesthetic education

Although the integration of Hainan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) visual symbols into modern aesthetic

education has achieved initial results in some regions, a review from the perspective of province-wide promotion reveals several prominent problems.

First, the integration is formalized and superficial. Most primary and secondary schools at the grassroots level only engage in simple pattern copying and image display, lacking in-depth interpretation of Li ethnic culture and island connotations. In teaching, emphasis is placed on skill imitation while neglecting humanistic infiltration, resulting in students only recognizing the “form” of symbols without understanding their “meaning”, greatly reducing the actual effect of aesthetic education.

Second, there is insufficient transformation and innovation. Some courses directly replicate traditional symbol prototypes without optimization based on modern aesthetics and teenagers’ needs. The outdated content and single form fail to stimulate the learning interest of the “digital native” generation.

Third, there is a shortage of professional teachers. Grassroots aesthetic education teachers lack systematic knowledge of Li ethnic ICH, and their understanding of the historical origins, aesthetic characteristics, and cultural connotations of various symbols is insufficient, making it difficult to carry out high-quality teaching. The participation of ICH inheritors in campus activities is mostly short-term, with a lack of long-term cooperation mechanisms.

Fourth, the curriculum system is incomplete. A hierarchical and progressive curriculum system covering primary schools, secondary schools, and universities has not been formed. The development of school-based courses is fragmented, and there are obvious gaps in resources between urban and rural areas, with rural schools suffering from a shortage of high-quality resources.

Fifth, the evaluation system is absent. Student works are mostly used as the sole evaluation criterion, while the comprehensive assessment of aesthetic perception, cultural identity, and innovative ability is ignored. This makes it impossible to accurately measure the educational effect and difficult to continuously optimize teaching through evaluation feedback.

5. Optimization strategies for the transformation and application of Hainan’s intangible cultural heritage visual symbols in modern aesthetic education

First, deeply explore the connotations of local symbols and eliminate formalized integration. Establish a special teaching and research team composed of aesthetic education experts, ICH inheritors, and ethnic culture scholars to systematically sort out the historical origins and aesthetic characteristics of local symbols and extract core aesthetic education value points. Teaching should adhere to the principle of “integrating form with meaning and carrying meaning through form”: first explain the cultural implications and aesthetic logic of symbols, then carry out practical creation, and simultaneously connect Li ethnic history and folk beliefs. This realizes the in-depth integration of aesthetic education and local cultural education, abandoning the superficial model of mere skill imitation.

Second, strengthen innovative transformation to meet the aesthetic needs of the times. Based on the aesthetic characteristics of Hainan’s teenagers, carry out modernized and lightweight reconstruction of local ICH visual symbols: simplify the complex totem lines of Li brocade, optimize color matching, extract core element symbols, and integrate them into diverse forms such as modern design, digital illustration, and cultural and creative products. This creates aesthetic education content that combines island charm with contemporary vibes.

Third, strengthen the cultivation of local teachers and build a professional teaching team. Establish a special training system for Hainan’s ICH aesthetic education teachers: relying on university and inheritor resources, regularly conduct thematic training on symbol interpretation, practical skill operation, and teaching design for aesthetic education teachers across the province to systematically improve their local ICH literacy and teaching

capabilities. Establish a long-term mechanism for ICH inheritors to work as part-time teachers: include inheritors at all levels in the school's part-time aesthetic education teacher database, and carry out regular teaching cooperation through curriculum co-construction, workshop guidance, and other forms. Encourage universities to set up professional directions related to ICH aesthetic education to cultivate local professional talents in a targeted manner, fundamentally addressing the shortage of teachers. Regularly collect opinions and suggestions from multiple parties, and continuously optimize teaching content and methods based on feedback to ensure that ICH aesthetic education achieves its educational goals and highlights regional characteristics.

6. Conclusion

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) visual symbols serve as high-quality core resources for modern aesthetic education. Local ICH visual symbols in Hainan, such as those derived from Li brocade, Li pottery, and coconut carving, are unique treasures for constructing localized aesthetic education. Their transformation and application in aesthetic education are not only a key pathway for the dynamic inheritance of Hainan's ICH but also an inevitable requirement for the reform of island-based aesthetic education in the new era. The aesthetic, cultural, and humanistic values embodied in these symbols can effectively address the problems of insufficient localization and weak connotation in modern aesthetic education, contributing to the cultivation of teenagers' aesthetic literacy and local cultural confidence, and establishing an aesthetic education paradigm with distinct Hainan characteristics.

From a current perspective, the integration of Hainan's ICH visual symbols into aesthetic education still faces dilemmas, including formalization, insufficient innovation, a shortage of professional teachers, and an incomplete system. Only by adhering to regional authenticity, strengthening innovative transformation, improving curriculum and teacher resources, and perfecting the evaluation mechanism can we promote the transition of local ICH from static display to dynamic inheritance through aesthetic education, and from superficial integration to in-depth education empowerment. Looking to the future, with the continuous advancement of cultural construction and aesthetic education reform in Hainan Free Trade Port, local ICH visual symbols will enter campuses and integrate into society in an all-round way through systematic and innovative practices, realizing the mutual advancement of ICH inheritance, local aesthetic education, and the goal of "fostering virtue through education"^[5]. This will enable Hainan's teenagers to grow into a new generation with both aesthetic literacy and cultural confidence while perceiving the beauty of their hometown's ICH and inheriting the context of local culture, thereby injecting lasting impetus into the enhancement of cultural soft power and the inheritance of traditional culture in Hainan Free Trade Port.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Zhang L, 2025, Innovative Application of Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements in Visual Design of Cultural and Creative Products. *Art Panorama*, 2025(32): 22–24.
- [2] Diao T, 2024, Youth Issues in Chinese Modern Aesthetic Education Thought and Their Contemporary Enlightenment. *Dongyue Trib*, 45(8): 90–95.
- [3] Du W, 2023, Enlightenment of Modern Aesthetic Education Concept on Chinese Education. *Res High Educ Eng*, 2023(6): 105–110.

- [4] Chen K, 2025, Protection and Dissemination of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Traditional Crafts in Hainan Under Free Trade Port Background. *Cult Ind*, 2025(24): 157–159.
- [5] Zhou J, Wang X, Qiu H, et al., 2025, Digital Technology Empowering Intergenerational Inheritance and Innovation of Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of Hainan Li Brocade. *West Leather*, 47(15): 35–38.

Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.