

# Review of the “New Crafts” International Exhibition of Arts and Crafts: Focusing on an Integrated Innovation Perspective

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**Abstract:** This article explores the transformative process of the philosophical concepts in new craft arts, along with the interactive relationship between technological logic and cultural expression, within the context of digital intelligence empowerment. Through an analysis of specific artworks, it aims to reveal the potential value of digital intelligence technologies in shaping contemporary craft arts, particularly in terms of artistic expression, cultural heritage, and social responsibility.

**Keywords:** Traditional craft innovation; Academic exhibition; Integrated innovation

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## 1. Introduction

Under the impact of globalization and technological revolution, the survival of traditional crafts faces dual challenges: (1) industrialized production has squeezed the living space of handicrafts; (2) cultural homogenization has dissolved the local knowledge behind the crafts. How to realize the contemporary transformation of traditional crafts has become a core issue in the field of cultural heritage protection and innovative design. As an experimental field of cultural practice, academic exhibitions have provided a path for the transformation of traditional crafts from “heritage protection” to “knowledge production” through the integration of innovative concepts in recent years. This article takes the “New Crafts” International Exhibition of Arts and Crafts as the research object and conducts case analysis based on the theory of craft innovation, exploring how academic exhibitions can promote the reconstruction of traditional craft values and the innovation of communication paradigms through the triple paths of regional ethnic integration, industry-university-research integration, and sustainable integration.

## 2. Overview of the exhibition

The “New Crafts” International Youth Arts and Crafts Exhibition and Academic Seminar was initiated by young teachers from the Department of Arts and Crafts, Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, in collaboration with 42 art institutions around the world in 2015. It is committed to inheriting and innovating traditional crafts, respecting the diversity of arts from various countries, showcasing the contemporary youth style, and promoting the development of modern cultural heritage. So far, it has successfully held seven editions, covering more than ten cities, including Beijing, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Dhaka, and has become a high-end academic platform connecting global young craft creators. Participants include teachers and students from universities, senior arts and crafts masters, and freelance artists. The works cover ceramics, metals, fibers, lacquer arts, glass, and other categories. The exhibition has attracted more than 15,000 participants from dozens of countries and has established a lasting influence in the field of international arts and crafts. The sustainable development of the exhibition benefits from scientific research support and funding from multiple sources. From 2018 to 2024, it received funding support of over 2.15 million yuan from the National Art Fund, Beijing Art Fund, Jilin Art Academy, and other institutions. These resources not only guarantee the academic quality of the exhibition but also promote the transformation of scientific research achievements. For example, four volumes of the *International Arts and Crafts Exhibition Collection* have been published, systematically documenting cases of youth innovation and practice, providing important references for the academic community. The core value of “New Crafts” lies in providing a cross-disciplinary growth platform for young talents. It invites scholars from universities, inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, and representatives of technology enterprises to discuss the modernization transformation path of traditional skills. Through seven years of practice, “New Crafts” has not only become an important brand in the field of arts and crafts but also provided a replicable model for enhancing the international voice of Chinese traditional culture. In the new era, both global development trends and domestic construction needs pose unprecedented challenges to our art education and discipline construction, and reform is unavoidable <sup>[1]</sup>.

## 3. Analysis of integrated innovation practice paths driven by the exhibition

### 3.1. Cross-regional integrated innovation

Research on the impact of geographical distance on the performance of scientific research collaboration. Scientific research collaboration has always tended to occur between organizations or individuals in close geographical proximity, which facilitates effective communication and promotes more frequent information exchange and the dissemination of tacit knowledge during the interaction process <sup>[2]</sup>. In the environment of traditional craft innovation and development, integrated innovation through joint research, learning, and practice across different regions can not only enhance mutual understanding and respect among various cultures, stimulate unique traditional craft innovation and development, but also give birth to new paradigms of innovation through collisions between traditional crafts of different countries. This allows traditional crafts from various countries to gain new vitality in a new environment, thus achieving better inheritance and development. As Hang <sup>[3]</sup> stated in *The Idea of Craftsmanship*, “The contemporary transformation of traditional crafts requires the reconstruction of their cultural subjectivity in the context of globalization.”

Since 2015, “New Crafts” has organized international seminars and exhibitions, gathering exquisite works from young arts and crafts creators from various countries around the world. It advocates respecting the diversity of arts from different countries, showcasing the contemporary youth style, and promoting the development of modern cultural heritage. Through the display of innovative craft works from China and abroad,

international academic seminars, and talent cultivation practices, it stimulates innovative thinking in traditional Chinese crafts and explores suitable forms and methods of innovation for China.

From July 21 to July 29, 2016, the “Intangible Cultural Heritage into Tsinghua”—“New Crafts” overseas study tour (Tokyo, Kyoto, Nara), hosted by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Department of the Ministry of Culture and organized by Tsinghua University’s Academy of Arts & Design, focused on exchanging intangible cultural heritage aesthetics through skill exchanges. Selected Chinese intangible cultural heritage scholars interacted with Japanese masters of arts and crafts such as ceramics, lacquer arts, dyeing, metal casting, Buddhist statues, and colored glaze. Activities included visits to university craft laboratories, lectures and exchanges, traditional craft seminars and exhibitions, and museum studies. These activities enabled a new generation of Chinese intangible cultural heritage masters to expand their international horizons while promoting the unique characteristics of Chinese intangible cultural heritage. They also learned traditional skills from foreign intangible cultural heritage, overcame some technical problems, served the inheritance and development of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, and deepened their understanding of the ethnic characteristics of Chinese intangible cultural heritage. The program aimed to cultivate future Chinese intangible cultural heritage masters with a contemporary perspective and universal values. As Chinese intangible cultural heritage continues to develop domestically, further enhancing the accomplishments and international perspectives of high-end talents in this field has become an important and indispensable aspect. “New Crafts” actively carries out exchanges and cooperation with foreign intangible cultural heritage education and research institutions, encouraging traditional craft practitioners to engage in exchanges and cooperation with artists and designers from other countries to explore the possibilities of cross-cultural integration.

### **3.2. Integration of industry, education, and research for innovation**

The contemporary transformation of traditional crafts provides broader ideas and solutions for traditional craft innovation by bringing together perspectives, aesthetics, and resources from different fields. This promotes the injection of modern elements and functionality into traditional crafts, breaking down cultural, regional, and industrial barriers and enabling the wider dissemination and promotion of traditional crafts, thus providing more development opportunities and resources.

The integration of industry and education is an important mechanism in the new era to promote cooperation between universities and enterprises in educating and collaborating on innovation <sup>[4]</sup>. In the field of intangible cultural heritage research, universities, governments, and other research institutions bear an unshirkable responsibility. This includes establishing scientific laboratories for traditional craft intangible cultural heritage to address theoretical and practical issues in traditional craft protection, focusing on emerging and cutting-edge issues to deepen intangible cultural heritage research and enhance the status of Chinese intangible cultural heritage studies, conducting restoration research on traditional handicrafts of intangible cultural heritage, materials and skills research, preservation and restoration techniques research, and other specific basic scientific research on intangible cultural heritage to extend Chinese intangible cultural heritage traditional handicraft research into specific details. It is also recommended that China promptly revise intangible cultural heritage laws and regulations, re-examine the methodology for classifying intangible cultural heritage in China, and redefine and reasonably classify it to facilitate understanding, promotion, and practice <sup>[5]</sup>. The “New Crafts” exhibition upholds the concept of passing on the torch and emphasizes how young people understand traditional innovation as one of its characteristics. The youth brings vitality, creativity, and passion to traditional crafts, introducing new ideas, technologies, and market opportunities. Additionally, they often possess strong cross-

border integration abilities, enabling them to combine traditional crafts with other fields, expanding application areas, and enhancing practicality and marketability. The exhibition establishes a high-end international academic platform for universities, senior technicians, and freelance artists, expanding the international horizons of youth. It encourages them to deeply study traditional crafts and master core techniques and essences, and it facilitates communication and collaboration among them, promoting innovation and development. Furthermore, the exhibition platform fosters cooperation among different fields, creating products that align with modern aesthetic and usage preferences, thus advancing the contemporary transformation of traditional crafts. “The traditional handicraft industry is a crucial component of Chinese traditional culture and a significant resource for modern innovative industries. As social and economic development and consumer demand diversify, the handicraft industry faces challenges and opportunities for transformation and upgrading. To adapt to market changes, the handicraft industry needs to explore new development models and create higher added value and social benefits. The ‘New Crafts’ exhibition provides a vital platform connecting academics, industry, and market development”<sup>[6]</sup>.

### 3.3. Integration of sustainable ideas with innovation

Article 1 of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage clearly states: “The purposes of this Convention are: (1) To protect the intangible cultural heritage; (2) To respect the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups, and individuals concerned; (3) To raise awareness at the local, national, and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of mutual appreciation thereof; (4) To provide international cooperation and assistance”<sup>[7]</sup>. Since the Industrial Revolution, the development view that only focuses on economic growth has led to a situation of “high input, high consumption, and high pollution,” squandering a large amount of natural resources and causing severe damage to the ecological balance. In response to this environmental situation, the World Commission on Environment and Development proposed “sustainable development” in its 1987 report *Our Common Future*, and defined it as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”<sup>[8]</sup>. As global environmental issues become increasingly severe, environmental protection and sustainable development have become the focus of attention in various fields of society. Traditional crafts represent the diversity and uniqueness of human culture and need to be protected and inherited through various means. However, these methods of protection and inheritance may sometimes conflict with contemporary sustainable concepts and practices.

Wood-fired ceramic art is considered one of the typical traditional crafts that contradict contemporary environmental sustainability concepts. Wood-fired ceramic art is a dialogue between humans and the kiln, a dance between fire and clay. The success of wood-fired ceramics depends on the relationship between clay, fire, wood, and the kiln, which requires multiple firing tests and continuous adjustments. Using this wood-fired technique to fire ceramics, the surface of the work can feel the kiss of the flame flowing over the body and the ash glaze produced by the ash of burned wood. Each piece is unique and cannot be replicated, possessing high artistic value<sup>[9]</sup>. However, in the traditional wood-fired process, the burning efficiency of wood is low, which may lead to energy waste. Wood burning releases a large amount of carbon dioxide, exacerbating the greenhouse effect. The use of large amounts of wood for firing may lead to deforestation and affect ecological balance. Incomplete combustion of wood may produce harmful substances, such as particulate matter and carbon monoxide, affecting air quality. Therefore, the “New Crafts” curation team planned the “Wood-fired Ceramics and Environmental Protection” intangible cultural heritage talent training project. This project, funded



by the Beijing Culture and Art Fund in 2018, is hosted by the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University. It brings together more than 20 experts in the field of wood-fired ceramics from China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea and convenes 20 wood-fired ceramic artists from across the country. Through innovative research on traditional ceramic wood-fired techniques, academic seminars, practical exploration, international exchanges, creative exhibitions, and other methods, it builds a platform for outstanding wood-fired ceramic talents, creates conditions, and provides services to promote the cultivation of ceramic talents, shape ceramic wood-fired brands, and comprehensively promote the cultivation of artistic talents.

The project integrates multidimensional and three-dimensional thinking in materials science, thermal engineering, fine arts, design, and cultural heritage studies, building a contemporary, high-end wood-fired art platform. It promotes the contemporary innovative ecological transformation concept of traditional wood-fired ceramics and explores a scientific improvement path for smoke-free wood firing through the recirculating firing of biomass particles with smoke and dust reduction. This practice echoes the “technology empowerment” path, which breaks through the technical bottlenecks of process innovation through cross-field collaboration<sup>[10]</sup>. It provides a practical case reference for the theory and practice of sustainable development of contemporary Chinese wood-fired art.

## 4. Conclusion

The study found that academic exhibitions, through integration and innovation, not only promote the technological upgrading of the craft itself but also reconstruct the dual identity of traditional crafts as “cultural media” and “knowledge systems” in the context of globalization and localization. This conclusion fills the research gap of the “exhibition-driven integration and innovation path of traditional crafts”; in practice, it provides an operable framework for curators, craftsmen, and policymakers. Future research can further track the long-term cultural impact of integration and innovation and explore the deep coupling path of craft education systems and digital technology.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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