

Teaching Reform Practice of Integrating Western Jiangxi Intangible Cultural Heritage into Aesthetic Education in Local Universities: A Case Study of Yichun University

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Abstract: In the new era, the reform of aesthetic education in local colleges and universities is confronted with practical dilemmas such as insufficient integration of regional culture, rigid practice paths, and a single evaluation system. Relying on the abundant intangible cultural heritage (ICH) resources in Western Jiangxi, Yichun University has carried out a two-year curriculum practice through a “four-in-one” teaching reform initiative, which includes integrating resources to optimize courses, innovating practical carriers, building digital platforms, and improving diversified evaluations. Empirical data show that after the reform, students’ course satisfaction rate increased from 63.8% to 92.6%, and the accuracy rate of ICH cognition rose from 11.3% to 76.8%. This practice provides an operable practical model and theoretical support for local colleges and universities to address aesthetic education challenges by leveraging regional ICH resources.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage in Western Jiangxi; Local universities; Aesthetic education immersion; Teaching reform; Practical pathways

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1. Problem presentation and literature review

1.1. Problem presentation

Aesthetic education is a key link in implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and holds an important position in the “five-education integration” system of higher education. Relevant documents issued by the Ministry of Education clearly require the organic integration of excellent traditional Chinese culture into the entire process of aesthetic education, promoting in-depth integration between aesthetic education and regional cultural inheritance ^[1]. Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) resources in Western Jiangxi, such as

Yichun lacquerware, Pingxiang Nuo dance, and Wanzai summer cloth, embody a profound craftsmanship spirit and cultural genes, serving as high-quality local materials for aesthetic education in local universities.

However, previous teaching practices at Yichun University have exposed three prominent problems in aesthetic education of local universities: first, homogenized teaching content, with less than 4% of aesthetic education courses involving Western Jiangxi ICH, leading to students' insufficient cognition of local culture; second, a teaching mode dominated by theoretical indoctrination, with practical sessions accounting for only 15% of total class hours, lacking immersive experiences in real scenarios; third, an evaluation system focusing on theoretical assessments, neglecting the measurement of practical abilities and value recognition, which makes it difficult to fully reflect educational outcomes. In response, the university has taken the integration of Western Jiangxi ICH as a breakthrough to carry out targeted teaching reforms and construct a regionally distinctive aesthetic education model.

1.2. Literature review

Current academic research on the integration of ICH and aesthetic education in universities mainly focuses on three aspects: at the level of value interpretation, scholars generally acknowledge the intrinsic unity between the aesthetic connotations of ICH and the goals of aesthetic education ^[2,3]; at the level of path exploration, existing studies have proposed directions such as curriculum integration and practical experience, but lack specific empirical analyses and operable plans tailored to universities ^[4,5]; at the level of problem reflection, relevant research has pointed out issues including insufficient resource integration and weak teaching staff, but the exploration of solutions remains inadequate ^[6,7]. Existing studies lack a systematic presentation of “teaching problems–reform plans–empirical effects.” This paper takes Yichun University as a case study to make up for this deficiency.

2. Theoretical support and core ideas for teaching reform

2.1. Theoretical support

This study is supported by three core theories: constructivist learning theory, situational teaching theory, and cultural inheritance theory. Constructivist learning theory emphasizes the initiative and constructiveness of learning, providing a basis for experiential teaching of ICH skills ^[8]; situational teaching theory focuses on the creation of real scenarios, offering methodological guidance for field practice and virtual simulation teaching of ICH; cultural inheritance theory emphasizes the dynamic inheritance and creative transformation of traditional culture, providing theoretical support for the value orientation of integrating ICH into aesthetic education. These three theories form a logical chain of “knowledge construction–situational experience–cultural inheritance,” constructing a systematic theoretical framework.

2.2. Core ideas

The teaching reform adheres to the core logic of “problem orientation–goal guidance–path innovation–effect verification”: it precisely addresses the three major problems in teaching content, teaching mode, and evaluation system; takes enhancing students' aesthetic literacy, strengthening cultural identity, and cultivating practical innovation capabilities as core goals; constructs a “four-in-one” reform path to achieve in-depth integration of ICH resources and aesthetic education; verifies effects through a combination of quantitative data and qualitative feedback, forming a closed-loop mechanism of “practice–reflection–optimization.”

3. Specific practical pathways for teaching reform

3.1. Curriculum system reconstruction: Consolidating the content foundation of aesthetic education immersion

Integrating 12 representative ICH projects in Western Jiangxi, the university compiled the school-based textbook *Appreciation and Practice of Western Jiangxi Intangible Cultural Heritage*, covering four modules: “Historical Origin–Craft Process–Aesthetic Connotation–Innovative Application.” Courses such as “Aesthetic Research on Western Jiangxi Intangible Cultural Heritage” were launched, among which “Appreciation of Western Jiangxi ICH Art” was rated as an excellent school-level course. In 2023, 486 students enrolled in this course, a 213% increase compared with before the reform. Adopting a three-stage structure of “theoretical cognition–skill experience–cultural innovation,” the course adjusted the ratio of theoretical to practical class hours to 5:5, ensuring the integration of learning and application.

The university promoted in-depth integration of ICH elements with 8 professional courses to form characteristic resource packages: the art design major incorporated Nuo dance mask patterns into Cultural and Creative Design; the Chinese language and literature major added a module on “Collection and Research of Western Jiangxi ICH Stories”; the music major introduced resources such as Wanzai Desheng Drum. Meanwhile, an integrated online-offline digital resource package was developed, including 28 microlecture videos and 15 virtual simulation projects, with a cumulative online visit volume of 12,000 person-times.

Strategic cooperation was established with 13 local institutions to co-build 5 ICH inheritance and training bases. The “dual-teacher” teaching model was implemented, with 18 ICH inheritors invited as off-campus mentors to teach jointly with on-campus teachers. In 2023, 46 university-local joint teaching sessions were held, covering over 2,300 students, achieving seamless connection of “classroom teaching–base practice–cultural inheritance.”

3.2. Innovation in practical paths: Broadening the dimensions of aesthetic education immersion experience

Three types of immersive practical activities were carried out: for skill experience, students completed practices such as summer cloth weaving in ICH workshops, producing 126 works in 2023; for field investigation, 28 research reports were formed based on folk activities; for creative practice, the integration of ICH elements with modern design was promoted, and the “Nuo Dance Theme Cultural and Creative Gift Box” developed by the art design major was commercialized, achieving sales of 150,000 yuan.

Six ICH-themed clubs were established, attracting over 800 members and regularly organizing skill exchange activities. The “Western Jiangxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival” is held annually. In 2023, 328 cultural and creative works were collected, among which 12 were selected for municipal exhibitions, and 3 won provincial awards. Students independently arranged 16 shadow puppet performances on campus, covering over 800 teachers and students.

In collaboration with local departments, the “ICH into Campus” series of activities was launched, innovating a closed-loop model of “exhibition–experience–creation.” In 2023, 23 special lectures and 38 workshop practices were held, with a student participation rate of 91.2%. A volunteer service mechanism was established, with students accumulating over 3,000 hours of service, enhancing their awareness of cultural protection and social responsibility.

3.3. Technology empowerment upgrade: Innovation in the form of aesthetic education immersion dissemination

Relying on AR technology, the “Western Jiangxi ICH Digital Aesthetic Education Platform” was built, integrating 156 ICH resources and setting up three functional modules. Students can conduct interactive learning through a mobile app. The platform has accumulated over 3,800 registered users, with an average daily visit volume of more than 200 person-times.

The “Western Jiangxi ICH Virtual Experience Hall” was constructed to restore multiple ICH scenes. Over 1,200 students participated in the experience, with 92.3% of them believing it enhanced their learning interest and 87.5% stating it provided a more intuitive understanding of the essence of ICH skills.

A digital resource sharing library was established, integrating and classifying over 2,300 ICH-related pictures, more than 150 videos, and over 800,000 words of text materials into six categories. In 2023, teachers accessed these materials 186 times, and students accumulated over 5,000 hours of self-study.

3.4. Ensuring evaluation optimization: Strengthening the support for ICH-infused aesthetic education practices

The integration of ICH into aesthetic education was included in the university’s development plan, and a special implementation plan was issued. In 2023, a special fund of 280,000 yuan was invested. A university-local collaboration mechanism was established, and cooperation agreements were signed to ensure resource sharing and achievement transformation.

A professional team was built through the model of “training + recruitment + external employment”: 36 teachers participated in training, 4 professional talents were recruited, and 18 ICH inheritors were employed externally. In 2023, teachers published 12 related papers, applied for 7 teaching reform projects at various levels, and won 1 provincial teaching achievement award.

A four-dimensional evaluation system of “knowledge + skills + innovation + value” was established (Table 1), involving multiple evaluation subjects and combining formative and summative evaluations. In 2023, the average score of students’ ICH knowledge increased from 65 to 82, the qualification rate of skill practice reached 95%, and cultural innovation achievements increased by 187%.

Table 1. A multidimensional evaluation system for integrating Ganxi intangible cultural heritage into aesthetic education

Evaluation Dimension	Core evaluation indicators	Weight percentage	Evaluation subject combination
Knowledge mastery	Historical origin, cultural and aesthetic characteristics of intangible cultural heritage	20%	In-campus teachers
Skill practice	Proficiency in craft operation and quality of work completion	30%	In-campus teachers + inheritors of intangible cultural heritage
Cultural innovation	Cultural and creative design, performance compilation, and communication practice	30%	Teachers + enterprise representatives + cultural department specialists
Value identification	Cultural protection awareness, patriotism, and social responsibility	20%	Teacher-student mutual evaluation + feedback from practice units

4. Teaching reform achievements

4.1. Reform achievements

The reform has achieved remarkable results: The final assessment at the end of 2023 showed that the average scores of students' aesthetic perception, judgment, and creation abilities reached 85.3, 83.7, and 81.2, respectively, increasing by 16–22 points compared with before the reform. The accuracy rate of ICH cognition rose from 11.3% to 76.8%, and 89.2% of students loved local ICH culture. Over 3,200 students participated in practical activities throughout the year, producing 568 cultural and creative works, 18 of which were commercialized.

A three-dimensional resource system including 12 characteristic courses and 8 professional resource packages was formed. The course satisfaction rate increased from 63.8% to 92.6%, breaking the traditional aesthetic education dilemma of “emphasizing theory over practice.” Relevant activities received 16 media reports, students' works won 8 provincial awards, and the university-local co-built training base received over 5,000 visitors annually, realizing the unification of multiple values.

4.2. Reflections and prospects

The reform still has shortcomings: insufficient in-depth digital transformation of ICH resources, the need to improve the long-term university-local collaboration mechanism, and relatively shallow integration of ICH with some professional courses. In the future, more investment will be made in digital resource construction, the win-win university-local collaboration model will be improved, the integration with professional courses will be deepened, and the evaluation system will be continuously optimized to provide replicable and promotable experiences for similar universities.

5. Conclusion

As a regional treasure of excellent traditional Chinese culture, Western Jiangxi ICH has injected rich cultural and ideological and political elements into the aesthetic education of local universities. Integrating it into the teaching reform of aesthetic education is not only an important measure to inherit regional cultural context and promote the creative transformation of traditional culture, but also an innovative path for universities to implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and advance the “five-education integration.”

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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