Systematic Protection and High-Quality Development of Traditional Craft Intangible Cultural Heritage in Southeast Chongqing from a Tourism Revitalization Perspective

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Abstract: Taking the ethnic minority inhabited areas in southeastern Chongqing as the research object, this paper, based on a systematic review of the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) lists at or above the county level and their spatial distribution, draws on cases such as Zhuoshui Pottery and the ethnic minority "Thirteen Villages" and uses comparative and path analysis methods to summarize three models of tourism revitalization of ICH (primitive inheritance, initial revitalization, and external-force revitalization). It also identifies four current problems: decentralization regional brands, unbalanced protection and utilization, shortcomings in digital intelligence, and a lack of management scene. Accordingly, this study proposes a "four-dimensional integrated" systematic countermeasure: reconstructing the "content-scene-communication-transaction" system through brand + IP and one ticket; converting "invisible processes" into immersive experiences, and implementing the "authenticity preservation list + innovation list"; forming an institutional closed loop of "joint investment-composite profit sharing-reward instead of subsidy-direct factor allocation-third-party evaluation" with platform-based governance and compound talents; and achieve commercial sustainability through the "core-corridor-site" spatial network and the "light asset + strong content" model. The study contributes by operationalizing "dynamic authenticity" and integrating it with brand, technology, governance, and space, proposing practical indicators and phased pathways, thus providing a replicable paradigm and policy reference for the integration of ICH and cultural tourism in ethnic areas.

Keywords: Digital-intelligent cultural tourism; Dynamic authenticity; Intangible cultural heritage (ICH); Southeast Chongqing; Tourism revitalization; Traditional crafts

1. Research background and problem awareness

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) carries regional memories and ethnic identity, serves as a vital vehicle for advancing the creative transformation and innovative development of fine traditional Chinese culture. Nationwide, traditional craft projects have consistently accounted for a prominent proportion in successive batches of national ICH lists. In Chongqing, there are 53 national-level ICH items, 14 of which are located in the Southeast Chongqing region. County-level and higher statistics show that Southeast Chongqing is home to approximately 644 ICH projects in total, with 222 belonging to traditional crafts, accounting for 34.47%. This reflects the structural feature of "large scale and remarkable craftsmanship" in the region.

Guided by the principle of "protection first, rescue foremost, rational utilization, and inheritance with development", the enhancement of vitality and public visibility of ICH through tourism revitalization has become a core issue in responding to the integration of culture and tourism as well as rural revitalization.

2. ICH stock and typical cases

At the national, municipal (Chongqing), and southeastern Chongqing levels, categories such as traditional craftsmanship, traditional music, and traditional dance are all distributed in southeastern Chongqing, showing a structure characterized by "comprehensive categories and robust craftsmanship". Statistics show that there are 629 national-level traditional craftsmanship items, 7 at the Chongqing municipal level, and 1 in southeastern Chongqing; 431 national-level traditional music items, 14 at the Chongqing municipal level, and 4 in southeastern Chongqing; and 356 national-level traditional dance items, 4 at the Chongqing municipal level, and 3 in southeastern Chongqing.

This indicates that southeastern Chongqing has representativeness and distinctiveness at the municipal level. Spatially, most projects are embedded within ethnic minority rural settlements, coupled with mountain landscapes, ritual spaces, and livelihood patterns, forming a local "culture-ecology-livelihood" integrated system which provides a solid foundation for the living inheritance mediated by tourism. Within this framework, Zhuoshui Ancient Town and the stoneware pottery-making craftsmanship of Shijietuo have transformed from producing daily utensils to a composite supply model of "experience + products + cultural and creative works" relying on educational tours and hands-on workshop experiences, initially forming a closed loop of "craftsmanship-product-experience-communication".

Qianjiang's "Thirteen Villages" has achieved a scene leap from "visible" to "usable" through costume rental and handicraft retail, but still lacks brand building and large-scale development. In general, southeastern Chongqing has the practical conditions to cultivate an "experience-product-brand" chain. However, to move towards high-quality development, it still needs to make up for deficiencies in regional brand integration and digital intelligence capacity building.

3. Three types of tourism revitalization models for ICH in Southeast Chongqing

3.1. Primitive inheritance

This model is mainly observed in pristine villages not yet engaged in tourism development. Intangible cultural heritage is maintained through the daily cycle of production, life, and rituals, with complete processes, utensil shapes, and cultural contexts, and the community identity and moral order are sustained. Its prominent advantages lie in the integrity of the cultural ecology and high "authenticity," making it suitable as a living archive and a field

for teaching. However, it has shortcomings, such as low public visibility and weak market conversion, and the outmigration of youth and rising material costs easily leads to the risk of heritage discontinuity.

In terms of governance, it is advisable to adhere to the principle of "low-disturbance protection + light-intervention recording," document oral histories, process imagery, and stylistic genealogies, supplemented by small-scale, appointment-based academic visits and oriented-study tourism. This approach not only avoids occupying production time but also establishes connections with external knowledge systems, reserving flexible space for subsequent gentle revitalization.

3.2. Initial revitalization

This model is commonly seen in tourism sites such as Qianjiang's "Thirteen Villages" and Zhuoshui Ancient Town. Operators or inheritors, based on market intuition, introduce supplies such as costume rental, craft retail, and hands-on experience activities, achieving a leap from "viewable" to "participatory/purchasable". Its advantages include low start-up costs, quick response, and ease of generating cash flow and word-of-mouth spread. However, common issues exist, such as product homogenization, fragmented product portfolios, and lack of standardized scripts and service processes, which lead to fluctuations in the quality of individual experiences and make it difficult to accumulate brand equity. It is recommended to advance along the ladder of "projectization-productization-branding." For instance, set standard units for experience courses in terms of duration, difficulty, and materials, and establish price ranges and crowd portraits; simultaneously improve the closed loop of reservation-verification-evaluation to form a repurchase and recommendation mechanism; make minor innovations in utensil forms and packaging upgrades without touching the authenticity-preserving elements, so as to enhance premium and differentiation.

3.3. External-driven revitalization

Relying on heritage list protection, database construction, and special funds, this model clarifies the identity of inheritors and support methods, integrating craftsmanship into study tour courses, open workshops, and nighttime performances. It can significantly increase exposure and income in the short term, with a typical example being the "workshop-study tour-market" combination of Zhuoshui pottery. Nevertheless, external intervention may easily induce side effects such as "performance replacing workshops" and " festivalization that crowds out production," and even lead to an imbalance where scenic area routes override the logic of craftsmanship processes. To address this, "dynamic authenticity" should be taken as the red line, supported by authenticity assessment, community consultation, and carrying capacity control. Appointment-based visitor restrictions and time-phased teaching should be applied to ensure that production rhythms and ritual contexts are not distorted. Meanwhile, a mechanism linking performance, profit sharing, and reinvestment should be established to bind quality, promoting a shift from "policy-driven exposure growth" to "system-guaranteed endogenous development."

4. Main problem: Crux and causes
4.1. Decentralization regional brands and insufficient marketing coordination

The external communication of ICH in Southeast Chongqing has long relied on county-level or single-project approaches, lacking a cross-regional parent brand and unified narrative. This has led to a situation where "visuals are fragmented and narratives fail to converge." In terms of channels, there is no unified placement plan or content calendar among scenic spots, workshops, travel agencies, and platforms. Online short videos, live broadcasts,

and e-commerce conversions form separate chains, failing to create synergy in the "interest cultivation-visit-repurchase" cycle. Inconsistent pricing and benefit systems have also weakened. Media cooperation relies heavily on personal connections and opportunism, lacking refined placement models based on audience portraits and user journeys. These issues result in high unit promotion costs, fragmented brand perception, and weak cross-county collaboration, making it difficult to form a recognizable overall "Southeast Chongqing ICH" IP nationwide.

4.2. Structural tension between protection and utilization

After ICH enters tourism scenes, some developments prioritize "spectacle and festivalization," emphasizing performance intensity and sales conversion while downplaying the daily nature of skill inheritance and ritual contexts. This has led to a tendency where "stages replace workshops, and scripts replace processes." To cater to fast-paced consumption, some projects excessively simplify materials, utensil shapes, and procedures. While this enhances visibility, it weakens "verifiable authentic elements," triggering value divergences and cultural alienation within communities. Additionally, scenic routes and reception capacity are mismatched with carrying capacity; high-intensity performances during festivals squeeze inheritors' production time and physical limits. The lack of institutionalized guidelines for "dynamic authenticity" and community negotiation mechanisms makes it difficult to resolve the tension between protection and utilization through open, transparent standards and processes.

4.3. Inadequate digital-intelligent capabilities and new form supply

On the supply side, immersive and interactive experiences mostly remain at the level of "external display" and simple hands-on activities, lacking granular designs that use MR/AR to present "invisible processes," which makes it difficult to support high customer unit prices and in-depth learning needs. In terms of content production, there is a lack of a unified knowledge graph and material middle platform; oral histories, process genealogies, and teaching scripts are decentralization among individuals, hindering large-scale iteration.

On the marketing side, data on reservations, verification, traceability, and evaluations are not integrated, leading to a broken chain of "view-book-arrive-learn-purchase-review-repurchase" and insufficient repurchases and user referrals. Technologically, the understanding of live-streaming e-commerce, UGC incentives, membership points, and private domain operations is still limited to "tool usage," failing to form an operation model centered on the user lifecycle. Furthermore, there is a lack of capacity to feed data back into product design and course difficulty grading.

4.4. Lack of management and inadequate supporting measures

Cross-county collaboration has not yet formed platform-based governance in terms of organization, finance, and rules. For example, project approval and budget allocation are dominated by administrative boundaries, lacking institutionalized division of labor and profit-sharing mechanisms for combined tickets, joint routes, and co-promotion. This easily triggers homogeneous competition and redundant resource development. Industry standards, talent certification, and safety regulations are implemented inconsistently across counties, where third-party evaluation and social supervision are absent, leaving unresolved issues such as "who certifies authenticity and who evaluates experiences." The intellectual property protection chain is weak: registration, usage, and rights protection for collective trademarks, geographical indications, and utensil designs lack unified coordination. Inheritors' social security and apprenticeship support have not formed normalized list management. These institutional and supporting shortcomings collectively restrict the possibility of regional collaboration, capital

entry, and long-term operations.

5. Countermeasures and implementation paths

5.1. Integration of regional brand and product system

With "Southeast Chongqing ICH-Wujiang Civilization Corridor" as the parent brand to lead the restructuring of supply focus, a unified identification system and narrative manual (VI/PI/BI and story database) will ensure consistent visual and value expression across counties. IP will be developed around pottery, weaving and dyeing, silverware, etc., forming an isomorphic chain from content to transactions.

On the product side, "workshops, courses, cultural and creative products, performances, oriented-study tourism, and night tours" will be integrated into three tiers: entry-level, classic, and flagship, matching different crowd portraits, experience durations, and price gradients to avoid excessive expansion of SKUs and improve repurchase efficiency. On the operation side, an "ICH-themed annual calendar" will be used to organize four core seasonal activities: spring kiln opening, summer oriented-study tourism, autumn rituals, and winter fireside talks. Festivals, markets, and study tour activities will be concentrated in high-memory windows, facilitating package deals by travel agencies and media focus.

In terms of rights mechanism, a regional one ticket and points system will be launched, allowing redemption across scenic spots, workshops, and performances. Combined with "credit-based oriented-study tourism" and "apprentice badges", "experiences" will be converted into "assets". On the communication front, a matrix of "regional main site-city sub-sites-IP account groups" will be built, with a content ladder of "documentaries/oral histories-courses/columns-short videos/live broadcasts-transaction pages" to achieve "visibility-to-conversion" directly. Annual effectiveness will be comprehensively evaluated using indicators such as brand awareness, NPS (Net Promoter Score), one ticket penetration rate, cross-county mobility rate, the structure of the three-tier products, repurchase rate, and average customer spending.

5.2. Digital-intelligent supply and knowledge middle platform

With the goal of integrating "authenticity preservation-innovation-operation", a knowledge graph and process archives will be constructed. A "list of authenticity-preserving elements + list of innovation boundaries" will be defined to anchor immutable and variable factors, while inheritor profiles (genealogy, representative works, teaching capabilities, and bookable time slots) will be consolidated as a shared foundation for backend scheduling and frontend display. Based on this, a content middle platform will be built to standardize the production of digital products such as "cloud workshops, online master-apprentice classes, and immersive ICH theaters". MR/AR technologies will be used to transform invisible processes into perceptible interactions.

At the site and channel level, interaction points and mobile workshop vehicles will be deployed in ancient towns, schools, and communities, uniformly connected to reservation, verification, traceability, and evaluation systems. Data from e-commerce platforms, OTAs, and the main site will be integrated to achieve full tracking of the "view-learn-purchase-review-repurchase" cycle. A strategy will be adopted, whereby basic historical information and procedural terminology will be open to the public, while commercial formulas and know-how will be managed through authorization, balancing public education and the dignity of craftsmanship. A three-dimensional indicator dashboard for "authenticity-experience quality-brand equity" will be launched. The effectiveness of digital intelligence will be measured by indicators such as interaction completion rate, work

retention rate, online course conversion rate, UGC activity, authenticity compliance rate.

5.3. Collaborative governance and talent mechanism

Through platform-based governance, decentralization entities are organized into a collaborative community. The "Alliance for the Integration of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Culture-Tourism in Southeast Chongqing" will be established, with four specialized teams for brand communication, product research and development, talent cultivation, and evaluation & monitoring. A permanent secretariat will coordinate joint tickets and interconnected products. In terms of supporting systems, "joint investment + composite profit sharing" will be implemented, linking performance and quality via "customer contribution - service completion rate." The "reward-based subsidy" mechanism will provide gradient subsidies and priority listing rights for original courses and high-reputation workshops. "Direct factor allocation" will precisely allocate equipment, venues, and apprenticeship quotas to the frontline through list management. For talent development, inheritors will receive allowances, project support, and social security.

Joint training programs covering " craftsmanship-narration-pedagogy-operations-digital-intelligence tools" will be launched to cultivate interdisciplinary teams capable of "clarifying techniques, teaching skills, motivating participation, and managing finances". In legal terms, efforts will be made to protect regional collective trademarks, geographical indications, utensil designs, and pattern copyrights. Meanwhile, authorization thresholds for AI-generated content will be established to improve evidence collection and rights protection. Universities and academic societies will act as third parties to conduct annual evaluations and rankings, linking results related to authenticity, experience, and brand equity to resource allocation, thus forming a closed loop of "incentive-restraint-correction". Annual assessments will focus on the completion rate of alliance projects, cross-county joint products and tourist flow contributions, the scale of apprenticeship training, intellectual property registration, and dispute settlement rates.

5.4. Spatial network and commercial sustainability

A stable operation and risk hedging mechanism will be achieved through the "core-corridor-site" spatial structure and the "light asset + strong content" business model. With the Wujiang Civilization Corridor as the main axis, a three-level network consisting of core distribution hubs, cultural corridors, and themed workshops/markets will be built. Themed 1–3 day routes such as "Pottery and Fire", "Threads and Dyeing", and "Silver and Light" will be organized, which can be either combined or separated. Priority will be given to developing standardized courses and mobile workshops to reduce reliance on heavy assets, while steady cash flow will be maintained through joint tickets and study tour packages. At the capital and cycle level, cultural tourism/industrial funds will be introduced, with "quantifiable indicators + authenticity commitments" as the post-investment baseline. An " off-season stabilization fund" will be established to use peak-season profits to subsidize off-season training and salaries, ensuring team stability and continuous supply. For external collaboration, urban customer sources will be tapped through "mobile exhibition vehicles, urban pop-up events, and museum nights". Cross-border products such as "outdoor sports-ICH workshops" and "ecological farming-ritual experience" will be co-created with destinations in the Wuling Mountain area.

6. Conclusion

The intangible cultural heritage in Southeast Chongqing exhibits a pattern characterized by "comprehensive

categories, strong craftsmanship, and distinctive locality." Cases such as Zhuoshui pottery and the ethnic minority" and Thirteen Villages" demonstrate the potential for upgrading from "viewable" to "participatory-consumable-communicable". The main constraining factors are decentralization branding, unbalanced protection and utilization, shortcomings in digital intelligence, and lack of management. To address these, this paper proposes a "four-dimensional integrated" path: reconstructing the "content-scene-communication-transaction" system through a parent brand + IP framework and one ticket; transforming "invisible processes" into immersive experiences, while implementing the "authenticity preservation list + innovation list"; establishing an operational mechanism "joint investment-composite profit sharing-reward-based subsidies-direct allocation-third-party evaluation" supported by platform-based governance and interdisciplinary talents; and stabilizing cash flow and mitigating cyclical risks through the "core-corridor-site" spatial network and the "light asset + strong content" model. This framework balances authenticity, experiential quality, and brand equity, demonstrating both operability and replicability. Its limitation lies in the absence of long-term quantitative tracking data. Future research can verify the causal chain of "oriented-study tourism-employment-community identity" through the multi-stakeholder data, and conduct cross-regional comparisons to expand the applicability of the "Southeast Chongqing solution".

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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