Research on the Activation Path of Weifang Kite Intangible Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of Multiple Stakeholders

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Abstract: Based on grounded theory, this study uses NVivo 14 to conduct in-depth interview coding analysis on five types of stakeholders (government, inheritors, enterprises, residents, and tourists) in the activation of Weifang Kite intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The research finds that each subject shows significant differentiation and collaborative potential in dimensions such as policy and fund dependence, adherence to craftsmanship authenticity, cultural tourism experience design, market-oriented transformation, and cultural identity reconstruction. Inheritors face resource dilemmas and intergenerational gaps; enterprises lead industrialization transformation but have tensions with authenticity; government support shows structural misalignment; communities and tourists assume the functions of cultural communication and consumption respectively. The study constructs a multi-stakeholder collaborative framework of "government guidance — inheritor adherence — enterprise transformation — community empowerment — tourist feedback", providing theoretical support and practical paths for the sustainable activation of ICH.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage; Multiple stakeholders; Collaborative governance; Weifang Kite; Grounded theory

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Global ICH protection faces a structural contradiction between the sustainability of "living heritage" and modern transformation. Under the wave of commercialization, the core value of ICH is simplified into easily consumable symbolic labels, ritual significance and community functions are weakened, and the social dimension and spiritual core of culture are marginalized [1]. Excessive intervention of digital tools severs the "bodily practicality" of craftsmanship inheritance, triggering a crisis of cultural authenticity [2]. China's ICH protection has long been placed in a dual structure of "government-market". Government intervention shows misalignment between policy supply and community needs, with resources concentrated in the front-end of "application-certification" and lacking subsequent dynamic evaluation [3]. Market intervention stimulates economic value but weakens cultural

depth. As a craft-based ICH, Weifang Kite, relying on its material attributes and implicit knowledge, imposes more complex requirements on activation methods. As a national-level ICH project, Weifang Kite's ternary symbiotic structure of "craftsmanship - festival - community" demonstrates deep local embedding characteristics. However, existing research focuses on static craftsmanship analysis, lacking systematic analysis of the role paths of multiple subjects such as government, enterprises, and tourists. It is necessary to sort out the real context of ICH inheritance as a social process of multi-party game from the practice site.

1.2. Research Issues

When the government entrusts cultural continuity to the application competition for lists, ICH is separated from its original context and becomes a certified object. The market simplifies living inheritance into consumption symbols but does not bear inheritance costs. Communities are marginalized into the end of consumption under the influence of policies and capital. The rupture of subjectivity suspends ICH outside real life. Technology-empowered "perpetual preservation" is actually cultural deconstruction: virtual reality replaces the warmth of handcrafts, making ICH separated from bodily experience; blockchain rights confirmation transforms collective memory into tradable fragments, severing intergenerational inheritance; algorithm-driven approaches strip away the original context, and technology replaces the flowing and growing nature of ICH with standardized digital templates [4]. Cultural genes based on bodily practice are encapsulated as static digital objects, and the "immortality" of ICH supported by technology actually loses its living nature and inherent soul [5].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Multi-Dimensional Challenges in ICH Activation

From the perspective of inheritors, authenticity is a holistic concept integrating traditional customs, inherited meanings, and practitioners' identities [6]. However, studies have found that inheritors face multi-dimensional dilemmas such as powerlessness, loss of meaning, lack of norms, isolation, self-alienation, and cultural alienation in the process of tourism commercialization [7]. This alienation not only affects inheritors' attitudes towards tourism development but also threatens the sustainable inheritance of ICH. Tourists' perceptions of ICH are also complex, with their experiences including multiple dimensions such as information services, experience authenticity, price value, and environmental atmosphere. Tourists with different demographic characteristics have significant differences in evaluating these dimensions [8].

Wider practices show that ICH activation paths are generally limited by the dissolution of original contexts and insufficient institutional support. The weakening of folk rituals and loss of living scenes make ICH gradually decoupled from daily life. The deepening involvement of market forces leads to symbolization and homogenization tendencies, and some projects are alienated driven by consumption logic [9]. Urbanization and tourism development squeeze cultural space, weaken community agency, and make the subject role increasingly marginal [10]. Protection mechanisms have problems such as difficulty in policy implementation, insufficient fund investment, and fragmented execution [11]. Some crafts are difficult to respond to contemporary contexts due to insufficient innovation capacity and rigid expression forms. Although digital paths have been developed, in-depth integration remains limited.

2.2. Research Progress on Stakeholder Collaboration

The collaborative relationship among multiple subjects in ICH activation is facing structural tensions. Problems

such as uneven interest distribution, vague rights and responsibilities boundaries, and lack of participation mechanisms are widespread. Communities and inheritors are often in marginal positions, and the one-way governance model led by the government compresses the expression space of local subjects. Market logic promotes commercial interpretation, which is likely to trigger changes in cultural authenticity. Intergenerational gaps weaken endogenous inheritance motivation, and insufficient institutional support leads to resource fragmentation and ineffective execution. Studies call for building a three-dimensional collaborative mechanism of institution, market, and community to achieve a multi-governance pattern with clear rights and responsibilities, effective incentives, and balanced participation [12].

The application of stakeholder theory in cultural heritage management has received increasing attention. Pioneering research by Aas et al. emphasizes the key role of stakeholder collaboration in heritage management and tourism development, pointing out that effective collaboration requires establishing communication channels, generating income for heritage protection, and promoting community participation in decision-making [13]. Recent studies further reveal that policy changes will drive the reconstruction of relationships among stakeholders, and their strategic evolution presents phased characteristics of "open confrontation - implicit game - dynamic balance" [14]. A systematic review shows that the main themes in ICH tourism research include ICH protection and inheritance, tourism impacts, planning and management and sustainability, and community participation. Different types of stakeholders play differentiated but interdependent roles in these themes [15].

3. Research Methods

This study adopts qualitative research methods, using NVivo 14 for data coding and analysis, and constructs a theoretical framework of multi-stakeholder collaborative participation based on procedural grounded theory. Weifang Kite was selected for its typicality: as a national-level ICH project, the Weifang International Kite Festival has been held for more than 40 sessions. The core bearing area of Yangjiabu gathers a large number of inheritors, enterprises, and residents, forming a complex interest network. The study uses purposive sampling to select five core stakeholder groups: government cultural management departments, ICH inheritors, kite production enterprises, community residents, and tourists.

Data collection was conducted in three phases from April to August 2025. The pre-survey phase involved on-site observation and relationship building; the formal interview phase adopted semi-structured in-depth interviews. Interviewees included 5 government staff, 5 ICH inheritors, 5 kite enterprise managers, 4 community residents, and 5 tourists. Each interview lasted about 10-15 minutes, and recordings were transcribed with consent. A total of 24 in-depth interviews were completed, forming approximately 36,000 words of interview texts.

Data analysis adopted the three-level coding procedure proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) [16]. The open coding phase formed 678 valid conceptual nodes; the axial coding phase generated 7, 6, 6, 7, and 6 secondary categories for the five subjects respectively; the selective coding phase identified the core categories of each group. Coding saturation test showed that theoretical saturation was achieved. The study used matrix coding query analysis: the row dimension was set as the five stakeholder groups, and the column dimension was refined into five core themes (policy and fund support, inheritor training and craftsmanship authenticity, cultural tourism integration and experience design, market-oriented and innovative transformation, community participation and cultural identity). By calculating the coding frequency of each group under different themes, a stakeholder-activation theme matrix was formed, providing empirical support for constructing a closed-loop mechanism of

"government policy guidance - inheritor craftsmanship adherence - enterprise market transformation - community participation empowerment - tourist experience feedback".

4. Research Results

The dependence of various stakeholders on policies and funds is significantly differentiated. The coding frequency of inheritors in seeking external support resources is as high as 26, highlighting their strong dependence on funds, venues, and market resources; enterprises have a coding frequency of 15, showing certain initiative in resource integration; residents have a coding frequency of 17, reflecting expectations for government-enterprise collaborative support; tourists have a coding frequency of 0, focusing on consumption experience. Some funds flow to cultural and creative enterprises rather than craftsmanship inheritance. Traditional kite making involves complex processes, and inheritors' monthly income is lower than that of ordinary workers. The imbalance between input and output restricts innovation and inheritance. Inheritors demand targeted support and venue construction; enterprises obtain support through government training and expositions; communities expect publicity support and infrastructure improvement.

The coding frequency for craftsmanship authenticity is the highest (28). Inheritors emphasize that every link from frame making, paper pasting to painting is irreplaceable, criticizing formalistic inheritance in training that "values form over connotation". The government has a coding frequency of 26 in addressing the crisis of intergenerational inheritance, as young people have low willingness to inherit due to insufficient economic attractiveness. Enterprises have formed a model of "inheritor leadership + enterprise production", where inheritors are responsible for design creativity and quality control, and enterprises produce simplified tourist versions. Tourists' perceptions are differentiated: some recognize the value of handcrafts and are willing to pay a premium, while others prioritize portability and practicality.

Inheritors have the highest coding frequency (46) in balancing the depth and breadth of experience. The core contradiction lies in the long time required for traditional production while tourists' experience only lasts 1-2 hours. Inheritors design hierarchical experience programs, opening simple links: minors are limited to painting and pasting, while adults can try bamboo strip splitting. At the same time, they explain historical culture, balancing time constraints and cultural transmission. Enterprises launch innovative products such as customized orders and DIY material packages. Tourists particularly emphasize the cultural symbolic value of kite flying experiences. The government promotes kite culture in schools through a reimbursement system and builds museums and digital display systems to expand communication depth.

Enterprises lead industrialization transformation, using hierarchical supply to realize mechanized production of consumer kites to improve efficiency and reduce prices, while high-quality collection-level kites ensure traditional craftsmanship under the guidance of inheritors. They expand markets through multiple channels such as e-commerce, live streaming, and scenic spot cooperation. Inheritors have limited market-oriented capabilities and generally face economic difficulties. Some adopt a hierarchical strategy of collection-level high-quality products and mass-market goods to balance authenticity and market survival, but they are still a vulnerable group overall. Residents have witnessed the shrinkage of the market from widespread village production to a few workshops, with population loss and cultural gaps coexisting.

The coding frequencies for cultural identity reconstruction and subject consciousness activation are 17 and 15 respectively. Veteran artisans have transformed from "livelihood means" to "guardians of craftsmanship

authenticity", realizing cultural awareness from instrumental rationality to value rationality. However, young people's sense of identity is significantly weakened, influenced by electronic products and preferring jobs with quick returns, highlighting the necessity of differentiated incentive mechanisms. During the peak period of kite tourism, participating residents earned over 10,000 yuan per month. Income and welfare sharing enhanced their sense of belonging, and some young people working outside returned to start businesses. Residents demand publicity support and facility improvement but lack digital marketing skills, revealing a new digital divide problem. Tourists recognize kite craftsmanship and spread it through social media, with cultural resonance among non-local tourists crossing regional boundaries.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Multi-Stakeholder Collaborative Mechanism and Innovation of Activation Paths

The five types of subjects (government, inheritors, enterprises, communities, and tourists) form an interdependent relationship network, but each subject faces role dilemmas: the government has low resource allocation efficiency and misaligned policy supply with grassroots needs; inheritors and enterprises are caught in a dilemma between adhering to authenticity and market survival; community residents have superficial cognition and insufficient emotional identity; tourists' demands show experiential and emotional trends. The predicament of ICH activation is structural and systematic. Kite making was originally embedded in seasonal customs and social interactions, and modernization has fragmented its cultural ecology. The breakthrough path lies in institutional innovation and mechanism design: establishing a classified and hierarchical support system; innovating inheritance mechanisms integrating master-apprentice system with modern educational concepts; stimulating endogenous motivation through empowerment. The core of path innovation is to realize the organic integration of tradition and modernity: maintaining the authenticity of core craftsmanship while introducing modern tools at the craftsmanship level; developing new cultural and creative products to expand consumption scenarios at the product level; using digital technology to expand influence while retaining offline experiences at the communication level; promoting enterprise-oriented mechanisms to maintain traditional cultural characteristics at the organizational level.

5.2. Theoretical Contributions and Practical Value

This study proposes an analytical framework for multi-stakeholder collaborative participation in ICH activation, breaking through traditional dualistic thinking. It understands ICH activation as a complex system involving multiple subjects, elements, and goals, integrating the forces of government, market, and society, and covering the entire chain of cultural production and consumption. The practical value lies in providing action guidelines for different subjects: the government should transform from a manager to a service provider and establish a precise policy system; inheritors should improve their capabilities and strengthen joint training of successors; enterprises should balance economic and cultural responsibilities to promote innovation and assume social responsibilities. The research findings have universal reference significance. The concept of multi-stakeholder collaboration can be extended to different types of ICH. Stimulating endogenous motivation is the key; market mechanisms need to be used cautiously; technological application should be moderate. ICH protection and activation require realizing the contemporary expression of traditional culture through creative transformation, promoting excellent culture to radiate vitality.

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