

Research on the Inheritance and Protection of Xiabu Embroidery in the Context of Intangible Cultural Heritage-Assisted Disability Economy

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Abstract: This paper examines the inheritance and protection of Xiabu embroidery within the intangible cultural heritage-assisted disability economy, highlighting its value in supporting deaf-mute embroiderers and cultural transmission. The paper addresses challenges, proposes innovative strategies for inheritance, and analyzes the social and economic benefits, emphasizing sustainable development.

Keywords: Xiabu embroidery; Economy; Deaf-mute embroiderers

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1. Introduction

Amid globalization and modernization, protecting and inheriting intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has become increasingly important, especially as ICH faces challenges like transmission gaps and skill loss. This paper focuses on the inheritance and protection of Xiabu embroidery within the ICH-assisted disability economy, offering new strategies by analyzing relevant policies, economic models, and sociological significance.

2. Theoretical foundation and current status of intangible cultural heritage disability-assistance economy

2.1. Policy framework for ICH protection and employment of people with disabilities

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is vital to cultural diversity, and its protection has been prioritized by governments and international organizations. As societal focus on people with disabilities grows, integrating ICH protection with disability employment has become a key policy focus. Globally, frameworks have emerged, including legislation to safeguard ICH, policies encouraging disabled participation in ICH activities, coordination mechanisms to foster collaboration among stakeholders, and increased funding and technical support ^[1].

In China, the policy framework for ICH protection and the employment of people with disabilities has also

been increasingly improved, with a series of policy measures such as the “Intangible Cultural Heritage Law” and the “Regulations on the Employment of People with Disabilities” being implemented ^[2]. These measures provide legal guarantees for ICH protection and disability employment. Additionally, governments have actively promoted the ICH disability-assistance economy by establishing transmission bases, organizing skills training, and providing entrepreneurial support. These policies revitalize ICH transmission while expanding employment opportunities and life choices for people with disabilities.

2.2. The ICH disability-assistance model from an economic perspective

The ICH disability-assistance model is an innovative economic approach that transforms ICH resources into economic value, merging ICH protection with disability employment via market mechanisms. This model includes several types as follows. Industrialization model: Large-scale ICH production forms an industrial chain, enhancing economic benefits and involving disabled individuals in design, production, and sales, thereby boosting their income ^[3]. Cultural tourism integration model: Combines ICH with tourism, developing routes that attract visitors and allow disabled individuals to engage in performances and handicraft demonstrations, increasing their income. E-commerce platform sales model: Utilizes online platforms to expand sales channels, enabling disabled individuals to open stores or participate in live-streaming, distributing ICH products both domestically and globally ^[4]. Brand operation model: Enhances product value through brand building, allowing disabled individuals to contribute to brand planning, marketing, and promotion, shaping ICH brand images.

2.3. The significance of ICH disability-assistance from a sociological perspective

From a sociological perspective, the ICH disability-assistance economy holds both economic and profound social significance. It promotes social integration and self-worth for people with disabilities by enabling them to acquire new skills, expand social networks, and better integrate into society ^[5]. This model also supports traditional culture, enhances national cultural confidence, and fosters social harmony by alleviating employment pressure, improving living conditions for the disabled, and promoting social justice. Additionally, it encourages the integration of cultural and tourism industries, driving sustainable local economic development ^[6]. Ultimately, the ICH disability-assistance economy is a crucial tool for advancing social progress and cultural preservation.

3. The current state of Xiabu embroidery inheritance and the practice of deaf-mute embroiderers

3.1. The historical origins and technical characteristics of Xiabu embroidery

Xiabu embroidery, deeply rooted in the rich historical and cultural soil of ancient China, is a form of intangible cultural heritage with its origins tracing back to traditional hand-weaving and embroidery arts. Xiabu, as the base material for embroidery, provides a rich medium for artistic expression due to its unique texture and grain. The art of Xiabu embroidery, built on this foundation, showcases a distinctive artistic charm and aesthetic value through meticulous stitching techniques and rich color combinations. Xiabu’s properties, such as breathability, strong moisture absorption, and durability, make it an ideal base for embroidery, endowing Xiabu embroidery with a unique texture and visual effect ^[7]. However, these properties also impose higher demands on the embroidery technique, requiring embroiderers to flexibly use stitching methods following the fabric’s texture and characteristics to achieve the best results.

The technical characteristics of Xiabu embroidery are also reflected in its pattern design and use of color. The patterns in Xiabu embroidery often draw inspiration from natural and cultural landscapes, such as mountains, rivers, flowers, birds, and figures, capturing a unique artistic essence through delicate lines and

rich colors ^[8]. The use of color in Xiabu embroidery is particularly distinctive, as it does not strictly adhere to traditional embroidery color conventions but instead embraces bold innovations by skillfully blending various colors to create striking contrasts and harmonious unity, offering a strong visual impact.

Another key feature of Xiabu embroidery lies in its diverse stitching techniques. The craft encompasses a wide range of methods, including flat stitching, chain stitching, and seed stitching, among others ^[9]. Embroiderers must adapt their techniques to suit the design and material characteristics, employing different stitching methods as needed to achieve the best possible outcome. The attention to detail in the stitching process, such as the smoothness of lines and the transition of colors, reflects the embroiderers' exceptional skills and profound artistic sensibilities.

3.2. Contributions of deaf-mute embroiderers to Xiabu embroidery inheritance

In the inheritance and development of Xiabu embroidery, deaf-mute embroiderers, as a unique group, have infused new vitality and meaning into the tradition through their distinct identities and experiences. These embroiderers, through their dedication and perseverance, have overcome the challenges posed by language and hearing impairments to master the intricate techniques of Xiabu embroidery. They communicate through their hands rather than words and pass down the craft with their hearts. Through long-term practice and learning, they have developed their own distinctive embroidery styles and technical characteristics ^[10]. As a bridge between intangible cultural heritage inheritors and the general public, deaf-mute embroiderers help raise awareness and appreciation for this cultural heritage by demonstrating and teaching Xiabu embroidery techniques. They actively participate in various cultural exchange and exhibition activities, bringing Xiabu embroidery to a broader audience and increasing its social recognition and influence. While preserving traditional techniques, these embroiderers also bravely experiment with new materials and methods, continuously exploring new horizons in Xiabu embroidery art. This spirit of innovation not only revitalizes the inheritance of Xiabu embroidery but also opens up more possibilities and opportunities for its future development.

3.3. Challenges facing the inheritance of Xiabu embroidery

The inheritance of Xiabu embroidery faces significant challenges, particularly the issue of a talent gap. As the older generation of embroiderers gradually ages and passes away, the transmission of Xiabu embroidery faces the predicament of a lack of successors. The complexity of the craft, the long learning period, and the low economic returns have led many young people to lose interest and enthusiasm for learning Xiabu embroidery, resulting in a shortage of skilled practitioners. Furthermore, changes in modern lifestyles and the diversification of aesthetic values have led to a decline in market demand for traditional handicrafts like Xiabu embroidery. Combined with intense market competition and limited sales channels, the sales and prices of Xiabu embroidery products are difficult to sustain. This shrinking market demand not only affects the economic income and living standards of embroiderers but also diminishes their motivation and confidence in passing down the craft.

Due to the constraints of a talent shortage and declining market demand, many Xiabu embroidery techniques are at risk of being lost. Should these techniques disappear, it would result in an irreparable loss and regret for the inheritance and development of Xiabu embroidery.

4. Strategies for the inheritance of Xiabu embroidery in the context of the intangible cultural heritage-assisted disability economy

4.1. Innovating inheritance models to unlock the potential of deaf-mute embroiderers

In response to the dual pressures of a talent gap in Xiabu embroidery transmission and shrinking market

demand, innovating transmission models is key to unlocking the potential of deaf-mute embroiderers and driving the development of Xiabu embroidery. By combining the traditional apprenticeship system with modern education, professional courses and skills training can enhance the professional qualities and creativity of deaf-mute embroiderers. A systematic evaluation and incentive mechanism should be established to encourage embroiderers to learn new techniques and explore new styles, forming a positive cycle in the transmission process. Additionally, modern information technology can be utilized to create a digital platform for Xiabu embroidery transmission, integrating functions such as instructional videos, online communication, and work displays. This platform can overcome geographical limitations, enable resource sharing, and attract more participants in the transmission of Xiabu embroidery. Promoting cross-industry collaboration and integration with fields like fashion design and cultural tourism can introduce new design elements and market vitality into Xiabu embroidery, enhancing its brand value and market competitiveness. This integration also provides more employment opportunities and income sources for deaf-mute embroiderers, further stimulating their enthusiasm and creativity in the transmission process.

4.2. Expanding market channels and enhancing the brand influence of Xiabu embroidery

To cater to different consumer groups and market demands, Xiabu embroidery products should be diversified in their market positioning. High-end customized products can be developed to meet the needs of the collection and gift markets, while practical and fashionable daily consumer goods can be introduced to meet the needs of the general public. This diversified market positioning can effectively expand the sales channels and market space for Xiabu embroidery. Fully utilizing the advantages of the internet and e-commerce platforms, online and offline integrated marketing should be conducted. Establishing official websites, joining e-commerce platforms, and expanding online sales channels, as well as setting up display and sales areas in physical stores and cultural tourism sites, can increase offline exposure and sales. Integrated marketing not only enhances the market coverage and influence of Xiabu embroidery products but also provides consumers with a more convenient and comprehensive shopping experience. Hosting exhibitions, seminars, and cultural exchange activities can raise the visibility and reputation of Xiabu embroidery. Leveraging media resources and communication channels to widely promote the cultural content and artistic value of Xiabu embroidery can attract more consumer interest and affection. Brand building and cultural promotion not only enhance the brand influence and market competitiveness of Xiabu embroidery but also foster the transmission and development of Xiabu embroidery culture.

4.3. Strengthening policy support to protect the rights of deaf-mute embroiderers

A comprehensive legal and regulatory framework for ICH protection and the employment of people with disabilities should be established, clarifying the legal status and rights protection measures for ICH transmitters. Strengthening supervision and guidance of ICH disability-assistance economic activities ensures they operate within legal and regulatory parameters. Increasing financial investment and funding support for ICH disability-assistance economic projects provide essential financial backing for the transmission of Xiabu embroidery. Establishing a special fund to support the training of transmission talents, technical research and development, and market promotion is crucial. Additionally, tax incentives and subsidized loans can reduce the costs of entrepreneurship and employment for deaf-mute embroiderers, boosting their enthusiasm and initiative in the transmission and development process. A comprehensive social security and service system tailored to deaf-mute embroiderers should be established, with strengthened employment services and training guidance to provide them with career planning, skills training, and employment recommendations. Ensuring basic living security and rights protection during their transmission and development process is also important. Moreover,

attention should be paid to the psychological well-being and social integration of deaf-mute embroiderers, with necessary psychological counseling and support services provided to help them better integrate into society and realize their self-worth.

5. Analysis of the social benefits of Xiabu embroidery protection in the context of the intangible cultural heritage-assisted disability economy

5.1. Economic benefit analysis

As an essential part of intangible cultural heritage, the protection and transmission of Xiabu embroidery directly promote the development of related industrial chains, thereby driving economic benefits. Through diversified market strategies and the integration of online and offline marketing, Xiabu embroidery products are gradually opening up both domestic and international markets, enhancing product value, and increasing the income of producers and sellers. In the context of the ICH disability-assistance economy, deaf-mute embroiderers and other disabled groups have become crucial forces in the transmission of Xiabu embroidery. Through professional skills training and entrepreneurial support, they not only master the craft but also achieve increased income through self-employment or participation in cooperatives, thus unlocking their potential and creativity, and injecting new momentum into economic development. The transmission of Xiabu embroidery also drives the development of related industries, such as raw material production and processing, embroidery tool manufacturing, and cultural tourism product development, bringing more vitality to the local economy.

5.2. Social benefit analysis

The transmission and protection of Xiabu embroidery are of great significance for maintaining cultural diversity and promoting traditional culture. Through the dissemination of Xiabu embroidery, national cultural confidence and identity can be enhanced, while also promoting cultural exchange and integration. In the context of the ICH disability-assistance economy, disabled groups participating in the production of Xiabu embroidery not only gain economic independence but also achieve a sense of accomplishment and belonging psychologically, which helps them better integrate into society. The transmission of Xiabu embroidery also facilitates communication and mutual assistance among people with disabilities, forming a strong social network. The materials used in Xiabu embroidery are primarily derived from natural plant fibers, and their environmentally friendly attributes promote green consumption, contribute to the development of the rural economy, and increase farmers' income, thereby supporting environmental protection and sustainable development.

5.3. Prospects for sustainable development

In the context of the ICH disability-assistance economy, the protection and transmission of Xiabu embroidery require continuous exploration and innovation. By strengthening policy guidance and support, promoting technological innovation and industrial upgrading, and using modern information technology to enhance product design and production efficiency, a professional team of transmission talents can be built. Expanding market channels and brand building, enhancing market competitiveness and brand influence, as well as strengthening cultural exchange and cooperation, will enable Xiabu embroidery to shine even brighter and have a profound impact on society.

6. Conclusion

This paper explores the inheritance and protection of Xiabu embroidery within the ICH-assisted disability

economy, highlighting its role in supporting deaf-mute embroiderers and cultural transmission. The paper addresses challenges like skill loss and market shifts, proposing strategies such as innovative inheritance models, market expansion, and policy support. The paper also analyzes the economic, social, and sustainable benefits, underscoring the importance of integrating ICH protection with disability employment.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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