

A Study on the Application of Hainan Intangible Cultural Heritage in Curriculum Construction of Art and Design Majors in Vocational Undergraduate Institutions

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Abstract: Currently, the living transmission of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Hainan faces challenges such as a generational gap in transmission, a shortage of young talent, and insufficient industrialization. As the primary vehicle for cultivating high-level technical and skilled professionals, vocational undergraduate education bears the dual mission of preserving ICH and promoting its innovative application. This paper examines the current challenges in integrating ICH into curriculum development in light of the positioning and practical realities of vocational undergraduate education in Hainan. It proposes a curriculum system that balances heritage preservation, practical application, and vocational relevance, and outlines pathways for the deep integration of ICH preservation with course instruction. By enriching the substance of the curriculum, this approach aims to enhance the cultural soft power of the Hainan Free Trade Port and foster the industrialization of ICH, thereby achieving mutual empowerment through the dynamic transmission of ICH and the enhancement of vocational education quality.

Keywords: Hainan Intangible Cultural Heritage, intangible cultural heritage inheritance, vocational undergraduate education, curriculum construction, integration of industry and education

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the ongoing deepening of strategies for building a culturally strong nation and for the protection and transmission of intangible cultural heritage, vocational undergraduate programs should actively integrate local cultural characteristics, establish a distinctive applied curriculum system, and strengthen their educational role by combining cultural heritage transmission with innovative design.

With the rapid development of Hainan Free Trade Port in areas such as the integration of culture and tourism, the development of cultural and creative products, and brand visual design, the market's demand for professional design talent who possess both a foundation in intangible cultural heritage and modern design capabilities is growing increasingly urgent. Intangible cultural heritage has become a vital source of core competitiveness for the art and design industry^[1]. However, currently, vocational undergraduate art and design programs in Hainan largely replicate the teaching models of design programs in general universities. Course homogenization is prominent, the integration of ICH elements is fragmented and superficial, and there is a lack of targeted instruction in design transformation. Consequently, these programs struggle to effectively support the goal of cultivating high-level, application-oriented design talent for vocational undergraduate education, and they fail to align with the needs of local industrial

development.

2. The current situation and problems of integrating hainan intangible cultural heritage into art design professional courses

2.1 The adaptability of hainan intangible cultural heritage to art and design specialized courses

As of June 2025, Hainan Province has a total of 32 national-level intangible cultural heritage items, 103 provincial-level items, and 398 items at the municipal and county levels or above^[2]. These encompass ten major categories, including folk literature, traditional crafts, traditional music, traditional dance, traditional theater, traditional fine arts, and traditional medicine. Among them, the Li ethnic group's traditional spinning, dyeing, weaving, and embroidery techniques were transferred from UNESCO's "List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding" to the "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" in 2024. This marks a significant achievement in the protection and transmission of Hainan's intangible cultural heritage. The art and design programs encompass specific disciplines such as visual communication design, environmental design, product design, and digital media art. The aim is to cultivate high-caliber design professionals equipped with modern design concepts, creative abilities, and practical skills who can serve industries such as the cultural and creative sector, manufacturing, and the internet. This aligns perfectly with the specific measures outlined in the "Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage," issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council in 2021, which call for integrating the protection of intangible cultural heritage into the national education system.

2.2 Existing problems in the integration of intangible cultural heritage into curriculum construction

Looking at the actual situation of art and design programs in Hainan, many institutions have introduced courses related to intangible cultural heritage (ICH), but there is a widespread tendency to prioritize form over substance. For the most part, Hainan's ICH elements are merely used as classroom embellishments or extracurricular activities, without delving deeply into the cultural essence and design value of the region's indigenous ICH^[3]. There is a lack of systematic instruction on extracting visual symbols from ICH and transforming them into innovative designs, and ICH preservation has not been integrated with the cultivation of core professional competencies. The curriculum system suffers from a pronounced lack of coherence and fragmentation. ICH content has not been genuinely integrated into the core curriculum of programs such as visual communication design and product design. Instead, it often exists in the form of scattered elective courses, short-term thematic lectures, or one-off field trips to study ICH, failing to establish a progressive teaching chain that progresses from foundational understanding to practical skills, then to innovative transformation, and finally to industrial application. Furthermore, the curriculum lags behind the demands of Hainan Free Trade Port's cultural and creative industries. It emphasizes the replication and imitation of traditional crafts while neglecting modern design innovation and digital applications. This creates a severe disconnect from the practical needs of local cultural tourism, cultural and creative industries, brand design, and derivative product development, making it difficult to highlight Hainan's regional characteristics and the distinctive features of vocational undergraduate education.

Regarding faculty, the team structure is homogeneous and professional capabilities are weak. On-campus design faculty lack systematic knowledge of intangible cultural heritage and practical skills in traditional crafts, while ICH inheritors, though possessing exquisite skills, lack modern design concepts and experience in university-level course instruction. A mechanism for collaborative teaching between professional faculty and ICH inheritors has yet to be established; Practical training is inadequate, with insufficient facilities and equipment for ICH design workshops. Instruction largely remains at the level of hand-drawing and software design, and industry-university collaboration is largely superficial, making it difficult for student design works to be successfully commercialized and implemented in the industry.

Regarding the course evaluation system, the approach is rigid and one-dimensional, relying primarily on classroom assignments and final exams while neglecting key dimensions such as understanding of ICH culture, innovative design capabilities, industry applicability, and the effectiveness of project implementation. Evaluation is conducted solely by in-house faculty, without involving ICH inheritors, industry designers, or corporate experts to ensure a diverse assessment process, making it impossible to comprehensively and objectively measure teaching effectiveness and the quality of talent cultivation.

3. Approaches to integrating hainan’s intangible cultural heritage into art and design curricula

3.1 Developing a progressive, integrated curriculum system construction

3.1.1 Foundational knowledge module (freshman year)

Introductory courses such as “Hainan Intangible Cultural Heritage and Aesthetics” and “Traditional Crafts and Modern Design” are offered to first-year students. As a foundational module for integrating intangible cultural heritage into the curriculum, this initiative aims to address the fragmented and superficial understanding that many freshmen have of local intangible cultural heritage. From an educational perspective, it systematically introduces students to the historical context, cultural significance, ethnic value, and visual aesthetics of core intangible cultural heritage projects such as Hainan Li brocade, Li Pottery, and coconut carving. This addresses the previous issue where students were only familiar with the superficial aspects of ICH without understanding its cultural essence, thereby solidifying the foundation of their understanding of ICH. It fosters a deep sense of identity, pride, and cultural confidence in Hainan’s local culture, and cultivates a basic awareness of ICH protection and transmission. From the perspective of academic progression, this course familiarizes students early on with core design elements such as visual symbols, color systems, and stylistic characteristics of ICH, cultivating foundational aesthetic appreciation and cultural sensitivity. This lays the groundwork for the extraction of ICH elements and the transformation of innovative designs in the core curriculum of the second and third-year core courses, laying the groundwork for the extraction of ICH elements and their innovative design transformation. This approach addresses the common challenges of disconnect between ICH and design, as well as superficial integration in subsequent professional studies, ensuring a smooth transition from cultural understanding to professional application. It aligns with the progressive educational principles of vocational undergraduate art and design programs.

3.1.2 Core integration module (sophomore and junior years)

Customized specialized courses are offered by major, such as “Innovative Design of Li Brocade Patterns” and “Visual Design for Intangible Cultural Heritage Brands” in Visual Communication Design; “Development of Hainan Intangible Cultural Heritage Cultural and Creative Products” in Product Design; “Interior Soft Furnishing Design Incorporating Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements” and “Applications of Traditional Li Architecture Aesthetics” in Environmental Design; and “Digital Visual Design for Intangible Cultural Heritage” in Digital Media Art.

Aligned with the mission of cultivating applied undergraduate professionals, the program breaks away from the homogenization and lack of regional distinctiveness found in art and design curricula at Hainan’s universities. It deeply integrates core elements of Hainan’s intangible cultural heritage with the core skills of each specialization, focusing on developing students’ core competencies in extracting, reconstructing, and innovatively transforming visual symbols of intangible cultural heritage. Students will gain the ability to independently complete design projects centered on intangible cultural heritage themes, while also meeting the practical skill requirements for positions in Hainan Free Trade Port’s cultural tourism, cultural and creative industries, brand design, and rural cultural tourism development. By balancing the dual enhancement of students’ professional skills and cultural literacy, the program cultivates versatile professionals who are proficient in both modern design techniques and local intangible cultural heritage. This addresses the industry’s pain point in Hainan’s cultural and creative sector—where there is an abundance of design talent but a scarcity of designers with expertise in intangible cultural heritage. Furthermore, it propels Hainan’s intangible cultural heritage from static preservation toward dynamic innovation,

ensuring that traditional cultural heritage aligns with modern design aesthetics and market demands.

3.1.3 Practical innovation module (junior and senior years)

Offer courses including *Intangible Cultural Heritage Design Project Training*, *Industrialization of Cultural and Creative Products*, and *Intangible Cultural Heritage Design Competitions and Achievement Transformation*, supported by practical sessions in intangible cultural heritage master workshops, joint enterprise-university project practices, and field research at intangible cultural heritage inheritance bases.

This bridges the final gap between classroom design and industrial implementation, addressing the weaknesses in practical teaching of art and design majors in Hainan universities and the difficulty in commercializing student works. Relying on intangible cultural heritage master studios and university-enterprise cooperation platforms, students can gain full-process hands-on experience in real projects, from creative conception and scheme design to physical production and product launch. They will proficiently master the integration of intangible cultural heritage craftsmanship and modern design tools, improve the industrial adaptability and market feasibility of design outcomes, accumulate professional practical experience, and align with employment demands.

3.2 Optimizing instruction and developing a diverse assessment system

Abandon the traditional teaching model of one-way knowledge delivery by teachers, integrate four modules: intangible cultural heritage theory, design skills, craft practice, and industrial operation, and jointly compile teaching materials that reflect local characteristics^[4]. Implement a collaborative teaching mechanism between teachers and inheritors, carry out regular field research and project-based teaching, and adopt blended learning combined with online resources to effectively improve teaching effectiveness.

Establish a diversified evaluation system and implement a three-in-one evaluation mechanism featuring process evaluation, outcome evaluation, and industrial adaptability evaluation. Introduce inheritors, enterprise experts, and industry mentors to participate in the assessment together. Comprehensively evaluate students' comprehensive abilities in classroom performance, work quality, market adaptability and other aspects, eliminate formalistic assessment, and effectively meet the objectives and requirements of applied talent cultivation.

4. Conclusion

Hainan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and vocational undergraduate art and design programs are highly compatible and hold significant potential for integrated development. However, their current integration still faces core challenges, including misalignment in curriculum objectives, a fragmented system, insufficient faculty resources, a lack of practical training, and a one-dimensional evaluation system. Vocational undergraduate institutions must establish a progressive, integrated ICH curriculum system to achieve a deep integration of ICH preservation, professional education, and the supply of industry talent, thereby supporting the high-quality development of Hainan Free Trade Port's cultural and creative industries and the long-term advancement of the living transmission of ICH.

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