

## **Craftsmanship Revitalized: Revival path of intangible heritage in modern life and cultural sustainability**

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### **Abstract**

In the age of globalisation and rapid fashion, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) crafts need help preserving their significance. This research looks at China's Linqi Thirty-Six Courtyards project. It shows how new designs that combine tradition and modernity can bring old crafts like blue calico back to life. Research indicates that incorporating Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) into contemporary society promotes cultural sustainability, aids rural revitalisation, and satisfies consumer desires for distinctive, culturally enriched experiences. The study emphasises ICH's function in preserving diversity and fostering community-oriented economic development, providing a framework for integrating cultural heritage into modern lives and global markets.

**Keywords:** Intangible Heritage; Rural Revitalization; Cultural Sustainability; Traditional Crafts

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### **1.0 Introduction**

In the context of globalization and the proliferation of rapid fashion, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is of immense importance in preserving cultural diversity, promoting social cohesion, and supporting economic development. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) includes traditional crafts, rituals, performing arts, and indigenous knowledge systems, crucial in preserving cultural identity (Zain et al., 2023). Contemporary consumer culture and worldwide markets have engendered homogenization trends undermining ICH's importance in modern society. Fast fashion, characterized by its cost-effectiveness, rapid manufacturing methods, and minimalist design, has emerged as a substantial disruptor to traditional artisan sectors. The export value of traditional handwoven textiles in India declined from \$3.7 billion in 2014 to \$2.8 billion in 2018, reflecting the growing impact of quick fashion (Handloom et al.). A noticeable reduction in demand for Suzhou and Hunan embroidery in China has resulted in a 40% decrease in sales over the past decade.

The marginalization of traditional crafts is not limited to Asia. Moroccan handmade rugs have experienced a 30% decline in their international market share due to competition from fast-fashion furniture. Kenyan jewellery artisans have experienced a 50% decline in income due to the prevalence of fast-fashion accessories in consumer preferences (Morocco et al.). These trends underscore the

necessity of preserving ICH, which is fundamental to cultural sustainability, by countering cultural homogenization and maintaining identity continuity (Mahin Sohrabi, 2017).

Despite the current challenges, the potential to revitalize traditional crafts is high when creative approaches incorporating ICH into contemporary development frameworks, such as sustainable tourism and modern design, are implemented. These methods improve visibility, economic sustainability, and cultural pride (Zhao, 2024; Zain et al., 2023).

In addition to economic benefits, ICH significantly improves the quality of life for communities and individuals. Participation in cultural activities, such as traditional crafts and festivals, fosters community members' sense of belonging and cultural identity, enhancing life satisfaction and emotional well-being (Rusu, 2011). Reestablishing connections between younger generations and their cultural heritage strengthens community resilience and individual identity (Celi & Moore, 2015).

This paper investigates the Linqi Thirty-Six Courtyards project in Dongyang, Zhejiang Province, as a case study for incorporating intangible cultural heritage into modern life. The initiative, initiated as part of rural revitalization, aims to preserve and foster traditional crafts, such as bamboo weaving, blue calico, and natural dyeing. Linqi Thirty-Six Courtyards exemplifies the amalgamation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) with contemporary consumer demands via seminars, exhibitions, and sustainable tourism, rejuvenating cultural practices and enhancing economic opportunities and quality of life. The initiative links cultural history with current lifestyles by merging traditional crafts with contemporary designs, providing a relevant case for exploring cultural sustainability and rural development.

### *1.1 Problem Statement*

Despite the recognized significance of ICH, preserving and revitalizing these traditions faces challenges in globalization and fast fashion. Traditional crafts struggle against mass-produced, low-cost goods, leading to reduced demand and cultural relevance, which erodes economic opportunities and cultural identity. Younger generations' detachment from traditional practices further threatens ICH's sustainability. To address this gap, this study investigates how innovative strategies can integrate ICH into modern consumer markets, enhancing cultural pride, economic resilience, and community well-being.

The Linqi Thirty-Six Courtyards project presents an opportunity to examine how ICH practices can drive cultural sustainability and rural development. By exploring the relationship between ICH practices and community well-being, this study seeks to reveal the broader significance of ICH in modern society.

### *1.2 Objective of the Study*

This research explores integrating and revitalising ICH practices to promote cultural sustainability and community development. The specific objectives are:

RO1: To identify innovative design approaches that enable traditional crafts to resonate with contemporary lifestyles.

RO2: To determine the social and economic contributions of ICH-based initiatives to community development, including enhancing cultural identity and economic empowerment.

RO3: To explore key factors driving the sustainable integration of ICH into modern lifestyles, addressing the dual goals of cultural preservation and improved quality of life.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

This section reviews previous research on the three core aspects of intangible cultural heritage (ICH): its role in cultural sustainability, contributions to rural economic development, and integration into modern consumer contexts.

### *2.1 The Role of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Cultural Sustainability*

ICH is fundamental in fostering cultural identity and preserving social cohesion (Zain et al., 2023). As Wang (2023) emphasizes, ICH embodies the "roots" and "soul" of Chinese culture, ensuring its relevance through integrated protection and community transmission methods. UNESCO's 2003 Convention highlights the significance of community involvement in safeguarding ICH through legal frameworks, cultural spaces, and participatory practices (Ubertazzi, 2022). However, globalization and cultural homogenization pose critical challenges to ICH preservation (Blake, 2018). The research underscores the irreplaceable role of ICH in enhancing cultural identity and diversity (Zain et al., 2023). For example, Gao (2022) demonstrated that National Cultural Ecosystem Conservation Areas (NCECA) promote collective cultural identity and strengthen community ties. Nevertheless, Roy et al. (2013) argue that existing studies must address ICH as a tool for conveying social identity.

While extensive literature explores the role of ICH in cultural sustainability, more research must be done on how innovative design and cultural dissemination integrate ICH into modern lifestyles to improve individual and community quality of life. This gap highlights the importance of exploring innovative approaches to design and dissemination, forming the basis for Research Objective 1 (RO1) of this study.

### *2.2 Intangible Cultural Heritage and Rural Economic Development*

The contributions of ICH to rural economic development are well-documented. By leveraging cultural tourism and the marketization of crafts, ICH demonstrates significant potential in promoting economic growth and strengthening cultural identity (Wasela, 2023). For instance, Kamal(2019) found that integrating cultural traditions into tourism, as seen in Egypt's Siwa Oasis Date Festival, enhances community belonging while delivering substantial socio-economic benefits. However, Shen (2024) notes that inadequate legal frameworks and evaluation mechanisms hinder the economic realization of ICH. In China's rural revitalization practices, ICH fosters local economic recovery through cultural festivals and marketized crafts. J. Liu and Qi (2024) highlight that a balanced approach to

preservation and commercialization enables a win-win outcome for cultural protection and economic development. However, Yamina et al. (2024) caution against over-commercialization, which may dilute ICH's cultural essence.

While prior research establishes the economic significance of ICH, it often overlooks innovative marketization strategies and community-driven initiatives that simultaneously ensure cultural sustainability and economic empowerment. This gap highlights the need to explore the social and economic contributions of ICH-based initiatives, forming the basis for this study's Research Objective 2 (RO2).

### 2.3 Intangible Cultural Heritage in Modern Consumer Contexts

ICH crafts are increasingly incorporated into daily life in modern consumer contexts through collaborations with slow fashion, contemporary design, and digital marketing, revealing immense potential as cultural consumer goods (Liu & Ma, 2024). For example, traditional crafts such as blue calico and bamboo weaving resonate with consumers by offering unique aesthetic experiences and cultural identity (Zain et al., 2023). Nonetheless, challenges persist in promoting ICH products in contemporary markets. Stojanović (2024) highlights the tension between economic benefits and cultural preservation, which may undermine authenticity. Similarly, Loach et al. (2017) warn that excessive emphasis on instrumental value can overshadow intrinsic cultural significance.

To address these challenges, researchers advocate for design innovation and consumer education as critical strategies (Wasela, 2023). By focusing on emotional engagement and cultural narratives, ICH products can meet modern consumer demands for personalization and cultural depth (Liu & Ma, 2024). However, further exploration is needed to understand how ICH crafts can sustainably integrate into contemporary consumer lifestyles while preserving their cultural essence. This gap underscores the importance of identifying sustainable integration factors, forming the basis for this study's Research Objective 3 (RO3).

## 3.0 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research method combining semi-structured interviews and field observations to explore the role of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) techniques in cultural revival and community economic revitalization through the Linxi 36 Courtyards project. Linxi 36 Courtyards was chosen as a single case study due to its integration of ICH protection, market applications, and modern lifestyle practices. It offers a rich context for examining traditional crafts in contemporary settings.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data source, designed and reviewed for clarity, and conducted face-to-face in Chinese. Each session lasted 30 to 50 minutes, recorded and transcribed with participant consent. Ten stakeholders were purposively selected, including ICH inheritors (2), village representatives (3), project leaders (2), local government representatives (1), and tourists or experiencers (2). Interview questions addressed design innovation, socio-economic impact, cultural identity, and sustainability.

Field observations supplemented interviews, documenting ICH demonstrations, tourist engagement, and community interactions. Observations also included key spaces like the Indigo Museum, enhancing the study's context and reliability. Thematic analysis of transcripts identified core themes, such as "community participation" and "market-oriented applications." Despite single-case limitations, multi-source data strengthened findings, offering valuable insights into integrating ICH into modern life, fostering cultural revival, and enhancing community quality of life.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Information

No	Gender	Age	Identity/Role	Project
1	Female	45	ICH Inheritor	Blue Calico Craftsmanship Inheritor
2	Male	50	ICH Inheritor	Split-Weaving Craftsmanship Inheritor
3	Female	38	Village Representative	Artisan Participant in "She Workshop"
4	Male	29	Village Representative	Returning Entrepreneur, Manager of Coffee Art Gallery
5	Female	60	Village Representative	Producer of Agricultural Products (e.g., Honey, Pickled Vegetables)
6	Female	50	Project Leader	Founder of Linxi 36 Courtyards
7	Male	48	Project Leader	Director of Shengmentan Museum
8	Male	35	Local Government Representative	Rural Revitalization and Cultural Preservation Project Lead
9	Female	27	Tourist/Experiencer	Participant in Blue Calico Tie-Dye Experience
10	Male	30	Tourist/Experiencer	Buyer of Cultural Products (Participated in Blue Dye Workshop)

## 4.0 Findings

This section presents the research findings derived from the thematic analysis, addressing the study's objectives. The thematic analysis identified four main themes: design innovation, socio-economic impact, cultural identity, and sustainability. Among the 10 respondents, design innovation was the most frequently mentioned theme, highlighted by 8 participants. Socio-economic impact and cultural identity were noted by 7 and 6 respondents, respectively, while 5 respondents discussed sustainability. This frequency distribution underscores the diverse but interconnected dimensions of the Linxi 36 Courtyards project (see Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency of Themes Mentioned by Respondents

No	Design Approaches and Consumer Resonance	Economic and Social Impact	Sustainability and Long-term Development
1	Innovative tassel bags, canvas totes	Employment opportunities for women artisans	Eco-friendly plant-based dyes

2	Nature-inspired blue calico patterns	Community pride through ICH projects	Bluegrass cultivation for ecological benefits
3	Artistic designs enhancing consumer engagement	Cultural identity enhancement	Sustainable tea mats
4	Modernized bamboo weaving designs	Returning youth creating local businesses	
5		Employment and community cohesion	
6	Traditional silverware with modern appeal	Economic empowerment through ICH crafts	
7	Community-driven ICH product innovations	Community engagement in museum activities	Sustainability in museum operations
8		Social identity strengthening	Closed-loop bluegrass eco-chain
9	Personalized consumer-focused designs		
10		Women's financial independence	
Total Frequency	Design 7 mentions	8 mentions	

#### 4.1 Design Approaches and Consumer Resonance

The revitalization of ICH techniques at the Linxi 36 Courtyards showcases notable modern design innovations that enhance the market appeal of traditional crafts while deeply resonating with consumers' emotional needs. Techniques such as blue calico dyeing, bamboo weaving, and natural dyeing have been infused with contemporary aesthetics and trends, imbuing them with new cultural vitality. (See Fig. 1) As the blue-dye craft curator Feng Qianli observed, "The charm of blue-dye lies in its unpredictability. This unanticipated beauty is highly appealing to young consumers. By incorporating trendy elements like tassel bags and canvas totes into designs, online orders have significantly increased" (Participant 1). This approach transforms blue dyeing from a traditional craft into a fashionable product favoured by younger generations, expanding its dissemination channels and driving sales.

Similarly, Indigo Museum curator Yang Xiaoxu remarked, "I enjoy observing flowers in nature; each has unique shapes and charm. Designing patterns based on these flowers for blue calico meets consumers' pursuit of natural aesthetics while fostering cultural appreciation" (Participant 2). This philosophy imbues products with artistic appeal and aligns with modern values of sustainability, nature, and heritage, seamlessly blending tradition with modern living. Natural dyeing workshop curator He Xiamu also highlighted the sustainability focus of her designs: "The core of natural dyeing is using plant-based dyes, which are eco-friendly and gentler on the skin. Like tea mats and home textiles, our products emphasize harmony between humans and nature, offering practicality with cultural value" (Participant 3). This illustrates how ICH integrates eco-conscious principles to meet contemporary lifestyle demands. Linxi 36 Courtyards effectively addresses consumers' desires for personalization, cultural depth, and sustainability by reimagining traditional crafts with fashion, artistry, and practical elements. These innovations translate cultural values into modern applications, fostering emotional connection and cultural pride among consumers.



(Fig. 1 The blue-dye products and the Linxi 36 Courtyards environment)

(Source: Field observations, Linxi 36 Courtyards.)

#### 4.2 Economic and Social Impact on Local Communities

The Linxi 36 Courtyards project has significantly contributed to local community development by creating employment opportunities, fostering community participation, and enhancing cultural identity. Project founder Linxi highlighted that reviving ICH techniques generated new job opportunities for local women and returning youth. For example, the "She Workshop" initiative in the Blue Calico craft studio employed over 300 women artisans, enabling them to earn an average annual income increase of 20,000 RMB, injecting economic vitality into rural revitalization. (See Fig. 2.)

Beyond economic gains, the project has instilled a renewed sense of purpose and achievement among villagers, improving their quality of life. Shengmentan Museum director Liu Huiming emphasized the cultural impact of ICH revitalization: "The story of the lotus quilt is not just about craftsmanship but a collective memory of local culture. Villagers now take pride in participating in ICH projects and feel a profound cultural pride when showcasing their skills to others. This has greatly strengthened community cohesion" (Participant 5).

On an individual level, the transformation has been profound. Silver workshop curator Shi Chuanhui shared, "Previously, I crafted silverware solely for a livelihood. Now, I realize the cultural significance behind these crafts. They are not merely products but extensions of our village's history. This awareness gives me a stronger sense of purpose and pride in being part of cultural preservation" (Participant 6).

Linxi 36 Courtyards has improved community living standards through economic empowerment and cultural revitalization. These achievements are reflected in increased incomes, enhanced psychological fulfilment, and strengthened cultural identity among residents. The project serves as a model for rural revitalization and quality-of-life improvement by demonstrating how ICH can foster community participation, happiness, and cohesion.



Fig. 2 "She Workshop" Field observations, Linxi 36 Courtyards.

#### 4.3 Sustainability and Long-term Development

The Linxi 36 Courtyards project integrates eco-friendly practices with cultural preservation, establishing a sustainable development model. Natural dyeing workshop curator He Xiamu stated, "We use fresh local plants like persimmons, tallow leaves, and osmanthus as natural dyes. This reduces chemical dye pollution and utilizes local resources, making our craft more eco-friendly. Tourists appreciate its blend of tradition and sustainability" (Participant 7). This approach conveys sustainability values while enhancing ICH's modern relevance.

The experimental blue-dye planting base exemplifies sustainable practice. Linxi remarked, "Replanting bluegrass restores this ancient craft and supports ecological preservation. No pesticides are used, preserving soil vitality. Harvesting, extraction, and processing create a closed-loop ecological chain, generating economic benefits while promoting sustainable agriculture" (Participant 8). Bluegrass cultivation revitalizes rural resources while providing a win-win model for ecological protection and economic growth.

Efforts to promote blue calico and similar crafts emphasize sustainable design, incorporating recycled materials into products like split-weave textiles. This reduces waste and opens new consumer markets, extending ICH longevity.

Linxi 36 Courtyards integrates environmental conservation with cultural heritage through these initiatives, delivering sustainable values to communities and tourists. This model enhances ICH's economic value while injecting lasting momentum into its development, making Linxi 36 Courtyards a successful example of ICH sustainability.

## 5.0 Discussion

The study highlights the transformative impact of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) revitalization at Linxi 36 Courtyards on cultural preservation, economic revitalization, and quality of life, aligning with prior research on cultural sustainability (Zain El Shandidy, 2023). By embedding traditional crafts such as blue calico dyeing and bamboo weaving into modern designs, the project counters cultural homogenization, which threatens heritage preservation in globalization (Blake, 2018). This dual focus on sustaining cultural identity and achieving market relevance demonstrates how ICH can resonate with contemporary lifestyles while retaining its heritage value (Ubertazzi, 2022).

The adoption of sustainable practices, including eco-friendly dyeing methods and resource-efficient production processes, aligns with contemporary values of environmental responsibility and supports Stojanović's (2024) findings on the subject of sustainability in cultural heritage. The project serves as a prime example of environmentally responsible ICH revitalization through the cultivation of bluegrass and the implementation of closed-loop systems while concurrently achieving market relevance. As emphasized by Zhao (2024), sustainable tourism and production are of paramount importance for the long-term relevance of cultural heritage.

The emphasis on sustainable practices, such as eco-friendly dyeing and resource-efficient production, aligns with modern values of environmental responsibility and supports Stojanović's (2024) work on sustainability in cultural heritage. Through bluegrass cultivation and closed-loop systems, the project exemplifies environmentally responsible ICH revitalization while expanding market relevance. As Zhao (2024) highlighted, sustainable tourism and production are crucial for the long-term relevance of cultural heritage.

Linxi 36 Courtyards serves as a replicable model for regions facing similar challenges. By addressing economic viability and cultural preservation, the project positions ICH as a tool for achieving cultural and social sustainability, bridging heritage and modernity. Further research could explore the role of policy frameworks in amplifying ICH's impact and integrating it into global markets, addressing gaps identified by Wang and Aoki (2017).

## 6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study explores the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) techniques at Linxi 36 Courtyards, emphasizing their role in cultural sustainability, community economic development, and quality of life improvement. The findings show that crafts like blue calico, natural dyeing, and bamboo weaving, through innovative design and market-oriented applications, meet modern consumers'

demands for cultural depth and personalization while providing a practical model for rural revitalization by enhancing economic benefits and cultural identity.

The study highlights two primary contributions of ICH to modern applications. First, these techniques counter-cultural homogenization through "fashionable" and "functional" design innovations, strengthening cultural identity and community belonging. Second, the project contributes to economic revitalization by creating stable jobs for left-behind women and returning youth while boosting the cultural tourism industry. However, as a single-case study with a small sample size, the generalizability of these findings could be improved.

To advance ICH development, recommendations include expanding community participation through policy support and training, leveraging digital platforms to grow markets, and exploring international opportunities for sustainable, culturally rich products. Future research should examine ICH's impact on diverse demographic groups, analyze cultural policy's role in fostering revival, and explore global marketing strategies to enhance its cultural and economic relevance.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study underscores the transformative potential of ICH as a bridge between tradition and modernity, offering innovative pathways for cultural preservation and socioeconomic progress.

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