

The Mechanisms and Path Optimization of Intangible Cultural Heritage Industrialization for Economic Revitalization in Western Ethnic Regions

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Abstract: This research focuses on the mechanisms through which the industrialization of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) contributes to economic revitalization in western ethnic regions, as well as on the optimization of related development paths. Through theoretical correlation analysis, it reveals that the industrialization of intangible cultural heritage activates regional economic vitality through four major mechanisms: direct economic contribution, employment promotion, industrial structure optimization, and cultural capital transformation. In response to prominent problems such as low degree of industrialization and insufficient innovation capacity, it proposes four-dimensional optimization paths of policy guarantee, industrial integration, talent and brand building, and sustainable development. The research provides a practical guide for realizing the win-win situation of economic revitalization and cultural protection in western ethnic regions and has important significance for enhancing regional cultural soft power and sustainable development.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Significance

1.1.1. Research Background

With the acceleration of the globalization process and the continuous adjustment of the economic structure, the economic development of the western ethnic areas needs to confront multiple challenges and opportunities. As a unique cultural resource, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) not only serves as a crucial carrier of ethnic cultural identity but also constitutes a potential driver of economic growth. In recent years, the state has attached growing importance to ICH protection and transmission, introducing a series of supportive policies to promote its development. Compared with the eastern regions, however, the western ethnic areas still suffer from a low degree of industrialization and limited market recognition. Against this backdrop, studying the mechanisms and paths optimization of ICH industrialization to foster economic revitalization has become an important research issue. This topic is not only relevant to economic restructuring and industrial upgrading, but also closely related to cultural inheritance and regional sustainable development.

1.1.2. Research Significance

Studying the mechanism of the industrialization of intangible cultural heritage and the path optimization for economic revitalization in western ethnic regions not only has theoretical value, but also has significant practical significance. From a theoretical perspective, this research deepens our understanding of the economic attributes and cultural values of ICH, while expanding the application boundaries of theories on industrial integration and cultural capital. From a practical standpoint, optimizing the pathways of ICH industrialization is expected to enhance economic vitality, improve local living standards, and foster social harmony in these regions. The study also provides policymakers with targeted policy recommendations to promote both the protection and rational utilization of ICH, ultimately achieving a win-win outcome for culture and economy. In this

process, the comprehensive revitalization of western ethnic regions can be advanced, thereby strengthening the nation's cultural soft power.

1.2. Definition of Core Concepts

1.2.1 The Scope of ICH in Western Ethnic Regions

Intangible cultural heritage in western ethnic regions encompasses diverse cultural expressions, including folk literature, traditional music, dance, drama, handicrafts, and distinctive customs. These heritages not only reflect the historical and cultural roots of various ethnic groups but also serve as vital sources of cultural identity and social cohesion. Geographically, the western ethnic regions mainly include Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu, Qinghai, Tibet, Ningxia, and Xinjiang. Due to geographical, historical, and social factors, these regions have preserved relatively complete ethnic cultures, thus possessing abundant intangible cultural heritage resources. These resources not only have significant cultural value but also contain certain economic potential, providing a foundation for promoting regional tourism and related industries development.

1.2.2. The Connotation of ICH Industrialization

ICH industrialization refers to the process of transforming intangible cultural heritage resources into economically valuable products and services through market-oriented and industrialized approaches, thereby incorporating them into the modern economic system ^[1]. Its connotation involves cultural creativity and design, product packaging, market promotion, and integration with related industries to realize the economic value of ICH. Industrialization of ICH is not merely the commercialization of traditional crafts and cultural forms; it also emphasizes the preservation and transmission of cultural connotations, enabling sustainable development in modern society. Thus, ICH industrialization represents not only a new trajectory for economic growth but also an innovative pathway for cultural protection and inheritance. It requires a careful balance between commercial profit and cultural preservation, aiming to achieve a win-win outcome for both economic and cultural development.

2. Theoretical Correlation between Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Industrialization and Economic Revitalization in Western Ethnic Regions

2.1. Core Objectives of Economic Revitalization

The core objectives of economic revitalization are to achieve sustainable development and social harmony while comprehensively enhancing regional economic strength. This includes raising income levels, creating job opportunities, optimizing industrial structures, and promoting the integrated development of science, technology, and culture ^[2]. In western ethnic regions, by fully exploring and utilizing the rich resources of intangible cultural heritage, diversified economic revitalization objectives can be achieved. These objectives include transforming ICH resources into economic advantages, promoting the development of characteristic industries, enhancing product added value, increasing employment opportunities, and improving people's livelihoods and well-being. At the same time, by promoting the industrialization of ICH, it helps to strengthen cultural confidence of ethnic groups, safeguard cultural diversity, and enhance the domestic and international visibility and influence of the region, thereby realizing the joint revitalization of economy, culture, and society through comprehensive development.

2.2. Economic Attributes of ICH Industrialization

ICH industrialization has unique economic attributes. It mainly reflected in its ability to transform cultural resources into economic resources. The ICH industry can directly generate economic benefits through tourism development, cultural product sales, and brand building, thereby realizing the creation of market value. The integration of ICH with other industries can bring about new economic growth points and form good industrial linkage effects. The cultural capital value of ICH in the process of industrialization can continuously empower the regional economy, thus

promoting the long-term growth of the regional economy. ICH industrialization emphasizes the balance between protection and development, realizing the sustainable utilization of ICH resources through rational development and scientific management to ensure the long-term and sustainable nature of its economic benefits. ICH industrialization is not only a new highlight of economic development but also an important approach to cultural protection.

2.3. Theoretical Foundations

2.3.1. Theory of Industrial Integration

The theory of industrial integration emphasizes the penetration, combination, and resource sharing among different industries to create new economic growth points. For western ethnic regions, the theory of industrial integration is particularly important in the process of ICH industrialization. ICH itself contains rich cultural value, and by combining with industries such as tourism, technology, and modern services, it can expand market boundaries and form diversified industrial chains. In this process, ICH not only exists as an independent cultural industry unit but can also increase in value through integration. For example, through integration with the tourism industry, ICH cultural resources can be transformed into tourism products, thereby increasing tourist experience value. Or, through integration with digital media, entirely new cultural products can be developed to meet the needs of modern consumers. Industrial integration provides a brand-new perspective for the development of ICH and promotes multidimensional economic growth.

2.3.2. Theory of Cultural Capital

The theory of cultural capital was proposed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, referring to the comprehensive application of accumulated cultural knowledge, skills, and education, and its long-term influence on social and economic activities^[3]. In the industrialization of ICH, ICH as an important form of cultural capital can have a profound impact on the regional economy. Through the protection, inheritance, and innovation of ICH, these cultural elements are transformed into economic resources, which not only promote economic growth but also enhance regional cultural identity and the dissemination of values. For western ethnic regions, the accumulation and application of cultural capital through educational facilities, the cultivation of inheritors, and cultural activities can enhance the cultural attractiveness and competitiveness of the region, thereby achieving sustainable economic development. The transformation of cultural capital provides a solid foundation for promoting economic diversification and strengthening independent innovation capabilities, becoming an important pillar for driving regional economic revitalization.

3. Mechanisms of the Role of ICH Industrialization in Economic Revitalization of Western Ethnic Regions

3.1. Direct Economic Contribution Mechanism

ICH industrialization directly creates economic benefits through ICH tourism, handicraft production, and cultural performances. For example, western ethnic regions attract tourist consumption by developing ICH-themed tourism routes, directly increasing regional GDP^[4]. The sales of ICH products such as embroidery, silver ornaments, and ethnic costumes form stable sources of income and improve local fiscal tax revenue. This mechanism is market-oriented, transforming ICH resources into quantifiable economic value, becoming the direct engine of economic revitalization. Especially for underdeveloped regions, it is an effective path to rapidly activate economic vitality.

3.2. Employment and Livelihood-Driven Mechanism

ICH industrialization creates a large number of employment opportunities through skill training, production workshops, and sales networks, absorbing surplus rural labor, returning youth, and vulnerable groups^[5]. For example, ICH handicraft production can provide flexible jobs, solve the problem of aging inheritors, and at the same time improve residents' income levels. This

mechanism not only improves livelihoods but also enhances residents' economic autonomy through endogenous employment, forming a virtuous cycle of employment, income growth, and consumption, and helps achieve the goals of regional poverty reduction and common prosperity.

3.3. Industrial Structure Optimization Mechanism

ICH industrialization promotes the transformation of western ethnic regions from traditional agriculture and resource-dependent industries to cultural creativity and tourism services with high added value. Through the integration of ICH with tourism, cultural creativity, and digital technology, industrial chains such as ICH tourism and ICH e-commerce are formed, promoting the coordinated development of the primary, secondary, and tertiary industries. This mechanism optimizes the regional industrial structure, enhances economic risk resistance, while cultivating new economic growth points, and strengthens the endogenous momentum and sustainability of economic development.

3.4. Cultural Capital Transformation Mechanism

ICH, as cultural capital, realizes the transformation of economic value through branding, intellectual property protection, and digital development. For example, through ICH IP building and cultural and creative product design, cultural symbols are transformed into market-recognized commodities; through digital archiving and virtual performances, the scope of dissemination is expanded, and cultural influence is enhanced. This mechanism transforms the cultural value of ICH into long-term economic capital, forming a positive ecology of mutual empowerment of culture and economy. It not only protects cultural genes but also realizes economic value-added, injecting cultural soft power into economic revitalization.

4. Current Situation and Problems of ICH Industrialization in Western Ethnic Regions

4.1. Overview of Development Status

Western ethnic regions are rich in ICH resources, covering traditional crafts, folk customs, music, and dance, such as embroidery, silver ornaments, and ethnic singing and dancing. In recent years, ICH industrialization has made initial progress, forming major models such as ICH tourism, handicraft production, and cultural performances. Some regions attract tourist consumption by developing ICH-themed routes, building ICH workshops, and holding cultural festivals, thereby driving the local economy. ICH products are sold through both online and offline channels, forming stable income, improving residents' income levels, promoting the release of regional economic vitality, and laying the foundation for economic revitalization.

4.2. Analysis of Prominent Problems

4.2.1. Low Degree of Industrialization

ICH production in western ethnic regions is mostly based on family workshops, small in scale and scattered, lacking standardized production processes and quality control systems^[6]. Handicrafts such as embroidery and silver ornaments rely on manual production, with low production efficiency and inconsistent product specifications, making it difficult to meet bulk order demands. The lack of standardization leads to weak market competitiveness, making it impossible to form economies of scale, restricting ICH products from expanding to high-end markets, and affecting the sustainable development capability of the industry.

4.2.2. Insufficient Innovation Capacity

ICH products suffer from serious homogenization, and design concepts lag behind modern consumer demand. Many handicrafts only replicate traditional styles, lacking innovative integration with contemporary aesthetics and functional needs. Ethnic costumes mostly retain original patterns and have not been developed into daily wear products combined with fashion elements; cultural and creative product development remains at the level of superficial symbol replication, without deeply

exploring cultural connotations for secondary creation. This leads to insufficient market attractiveness, making it difficult to form differentiated competitive advantages.

4.2.3. Talent and Funding Bottlenecks

ICH inheritors are severely aging, with a generational gap among young inheritors, and the inheritance of skills faces the risk of being lost [7]. Financing channels are narrow, relying on government subsidies and limited social capital, lacking market-oriented financing mechanisms. Most ICH workshops have limited funds and are unable to invest in technology research and development, brand promotion, or equipment upgrading, restricting industrial upgrading and large-scale development, forming a vicious cycle of talent shortage, insufficient funds, and restricted development.

4.2.4. Contradictions between Protection and Development

In the process of commercialization, some ICH projects simplify traditional craft procedures in pursuit of economic interests, leading to the loss of cultural connotations. Certain ICH performances shorten ritual durations and simplify core steps to cater to tourists, losing their original cultural meaning; handicrafts use machines to replace manual labor in order to reduce costs, weakening the uniqueness and cultural value of ICH. Overdevelopment may also trigger homogenized competition, damaging the original ecology and authenticity of ICH.

4.2.5. Weak Infrastructure

The infrastructure for logistics and e-commerce in the western ethnic areas is lagging behind, which hinders the expansion of the market for intangible cultural heritage products. Remote areas' logistics costs are high, and delivery efficiency is low, it affects online sales experience; rural e-commerce service systems are incomplete, lacking professional operation personnel and digital platform support, making it difficult for ICH products to reach broader markets. Infrastructure shortcomings are also reflected in warehousing and exhibition links, limiting the extension of the ICH industrial chain and the space for value enhancement.

5. Path Optimization of ICH Industrialization Driving Economic Revitalization

5.1. Policy and Institutional Guarantee Path

It is necessary to construct a systematic policy system for ICH industrialization, clarifying the boundaries of rights and responsibilities among government, enterprises, and inheritors [8]. The government should play a role in top-level design and introduce special support policies, such as establishing ICH protection and development funds, integrating fiscal and social capital through multiple channels, and providing financial support such as tax reductions and loan interest subsidies. At the same time, a standardized production and quality certification system for ICH should be established, with detailed regulations covering process flow, product quality, and safety standards, to regulate market order. Intellectual property protection should be strengthened, and rights of ICH innovation achievements should be safeguarded through patents, trademarks, and copyrights, while combating infringement. A positive policy cycle of protection, development, and feedback should be constructed, for example, by encouraging enterprises to invest in ICH research and development through tax incentives, enhancing product market competitiveness through quality certification, and ultimately realizing the mutual empowerment of cultural and economic values of ICH, thereby providing a solid institutional foundation and long-term guarantee for ICH industrialization in western ethnic regions.

5.2. Industrial Integration and Innovative Development Path

It is necessary to promote the deep integration of ICH with tourism, cultural creativity, and digital technology, and construct a full-industry-chain ecosystem for ICH [9]. In the tourism field, ICH-themed study tours and immersive performance projects can be developed, such as live ethnic song and dance performances and ICH skill experience workshops, to enhance tourists'

participation and cultural experience. In terms of digital technology, 3D printing and VR/AR technologies can be used to achieve digital display and virtual interaction of ICH, such as ICH digital museums and virtual skill restoration displays, broadening communication channels. By combining modern design concepts, ICH products can be innovated, traditional patterns can be integrated into fashion clothing and household items, and functional cultural and creative commodities can be developed to enhance product added value. Through industrial integration, industrial chains such as ICH tourism, ICH e-commerce, and ICH cultural creativity can be formed, promoting the coordinated development of the primary, secondary, and tertiary industries, enhancing market competitiveness, and realizing the dual improvement of the economic and cultural values of ICH.

5.3. Talent and Brand Building Path

It is necessary to construct a multi-level ICH talent cultivation system. Through the traditional master-apprentice system, skill inheritance can be strengthened; combined with universities offering ICH-related courses and establishing training bases, compound talents who understand both skills and markets can be cultivated. Regular skill training should be carried out, covering traditional craft innovation and digital technology application, to improve the comprehensive ability of inheritors. In terms of brand building, the historical origins and cultural stories of ICH projects should be deeply explored, unique symbols refined, and regional public brands created. Enterprises should be supported to enhance brand recognition through brand storytelling marketing and cross-industry collaborations. Online and offline sales channels should be expanded, making use of e-commerce platforms, live-streaming sales, and ICH fairs, to promote the upgrading of ICH products from traditional handicrafts to cultural commodities with cultural added value, thereby enhancing market influence and consumer recognition.

5.4. Sustainable Development and Cultural Protection Path

The principle of protection first should be upheld, and a negative list for ICH industrialization should be formulated to explicitly prohibit excessive commercialization behaviors, such as simplifying core craft processes and abusing cultural symbols. Living heritage inheritance bases should be established, realizing the living inheritance of skills through recording traditional craft processes and cultivating inheritance ecology. Green production technologies should be promoted, with the adoption of environmentally friendly materials and energy-saving processes, to reduce resource consumption and environmental pollution^[10]. Digital technology should be used for ICH archiving, with the establishment of digital archives and virtual exhibition halls, to achieve permanent preservation and wide dissemination of cultural resources. Community participation in ICH protection and development should be encouraged, through community workshops and cultural festivals, to enhance residents' cultural identity and ensure the mutual empowerment and sustainable development of cultural and economic values of ICH.

6. Conclusion

This study systematically explores the mechanisms and path optimization of ICH industrialization for economic revitalization in western ethnic regions. ICH industrialization effectively activates regional economic vitality through four mechanisms: direct economic contribution, employment and livelihood-driven, industrial structure optimization, and cultural capital transformation, promoting the transformation of the economic structure toward high added value, and realizing the mutual empowerment of cultural and economic values.

Although ICH industrialization in western ethnic regions has made initial progress, it still faces prominent problems such as a low degree of industrialization, insufficient innovation capacity, shortage of talent and funds, contradictions between protection and development, and weak infrastructure. In response to these bottlenecks, path optimization should be carried out in four aspects: policy and institutional guarantees, industrial integration and innovation, talent and brand building, and sustainable development. Specifically, it is necessary to improve the special policy

system and clarify the division of responsibilities; promote the deep integration of ICH with tourism, cultural creativity, and digital technology to cultivate new economic growth points; establish an echelon training system for inheritors and create regional public brands; adhere to the principle of protection first, formulate a negative list, avoid excessive commercialization, and ensure living inheritance and ecological protection of ICH.

This study not only enriches the application scenarios of industrial integration theory and cultural capital theory but also provides a practical guide for western ethnic regions to achieve a win-win situation of economic revitalization and cultural protection. It has important significance for enhancing regional cultural soft power, promoting social harmony, and achieving sustainable development. In the future, it is necessary to continue to explore the dynamic balance mechanism of ICH industrialization and promote the comprehensive revitalization of western ethnic regions.

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