

Research on the Current Status and Cultivation Paths of High-Quality Rural Talents Specializing in Intangible Cultural Heritage

Qi Huifang^{1,*}, Jiang Hao², Li Chuanjie¹

¹Guangzhou Vocational College of Technology & Business, Guangzhou, China

²Zhanjiang Preschool Education College, Zhanjiang, China

*Corresponding author: 316287571@qq.com

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Abstract: Under the backdrop of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, high-quality rural ICH talents—critical to the continuity of traditional culture and the advancement of rural economies—have increasingly become a focus of attention. As a living gene pool of Chinese civilization and a unique aesthetic symbol, ICH's deep integration with rural talent cultivation is an inevitable path to rural cultural revitalization. However, current rural ICH talent cultivation faces practical challenges: insufficient precision in policy support, low operational efficiency of inheritance platforms, and weak endogenous motivation among talents. Additionally, its development is constrained by unimpeded urban-rural resource flow and inadequate integration with the modern education system. To address these issues, this study proposes three key measures: constructing a stratified and precision-oriented cultivation mechanism, building a smart empowerment platform for ICH inheritance, and improving a full-chain incentive policy for talents. These efforts aim to facilitate the transformation of rural ICH talents from traditional artisans to compound talents through practices of "skill inheritance—cultural understanding—innovative transformation," thereby achieving the goal of rural talent revitalization via "talent-driven industry development and industry-facilitated cultural inheritance."

1. Introduction

The Rural Revitalization Strategy, proposed by Comrade Chair Xi National Congress of the Communist of China, emphasizes the leading role of culture in rural development. The report of the 20th CPC National Congress further calls for "comprehensively advancing rural revitalization" and "solidly promoting the revitalization of rural industries, talents, culture, ecology, and organizations" [1]. In December 2022, the CPC Guangdong Provincial Committee launched the "High-Quality Development Project for 100 Counties, 1,000 Towns, and 10,000 Villages," identifying rural ICH talent cultivation as a pivotal measure for sustaining traditional culture and advancing rural revitalization. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) carries the genes and bloodline of the Chinese nation. Currently, approximately 73% of ICH projects are preserved in rural areas, while talents

remain the primary resource for rural socio-economic development. In 2021, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council jointly issued Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which explicitly mandates "intensifying the training of ICH teaching staff" and "supporting representative inheritors to participate in school teaching and research" [2]. Nevertheless, rural ICH talent cultivation faces systemic obstacles: imprecise policy support, inefficient platform operations, weak talent motivation, unsmooth urban-rural resource circulation, and insufficient integration with modern education systems. How to reverse the current fragmented state of rural ICH talent cultivation, establish stratified, technology-empowered pathways, and form a new cultivation paradigm centered on precision training, platform support, and incentive-driven mechanisms is the core question addressed in this study.

2. High-Quality Rural ICH Talents: A Core Force for Rural Revitalization

The inheritance of ICH and the cultivation of rural talents share an inherent, organic connection. As "living cultural genes," ICH emerges from people's daily lives and embodies the Chinese nation's aesthetic values, value orientations, and spiritual pursuits. Rural areas are the original birthplaces of ICH, and ICH inheritors and rural talents exhibit a high degree of identity. From a cultural inheritance perspective, rural ICH talents are not only custodians of skills but also guardians of cultural memory. Through oral transmission and master-apprentice mentorship, they sustain the continuity of the Chinese cultural context. From an industrial development perspective, rural ICH talents are the core drivers of rural cultural industries: by integrating traditional craftsmanship with modern aesthetics through innovative transformation, they infuse rural culture with new vitality and economic value. Thus, the deep integration of ICH inheritance and rural talent cultivation is an inevitable choice rooted in the continuity of cultural heritage, the synergy of industrial development, and the regularity of talent growth [3]. Currently, rural ICH talent cultivation faces severe challenges. On one hand, rural hollowing and aging have led to a shortage of successors, putting many traditional skills at risk of "disappearing with their practitioners." On the other hand, existing rural ICH talents often lack innovation despite their exquisite craftsmanship and have weak market awareness despite rich experience, making them ill-suited to modern market demands. Furthermore, cultivation efforts lack systematic planning: training content is disconnected from talent needs, and rigid training methods fail to address the personalized demands of talents at different levels and types. Cultivating high-quality rural ICH talents is thus both an urgent need for ICH protection and inheritance and an inevitable requirement for rural industrial revitalization—demanding a shift from the traditional "skill protection" mindset to a "talent development" mindset. Traditionally, rural ICH talents were primarily regarded as "craftsmen" or "artisans," with core competence centered on mastering traditional skills. In the digital economy era, however, their role is undergoing a profound transformation: they must not only master traditional craftsmanship but also possess composite literacy, including cultural interpretation, innovative design, market operation, and digital application capabilities. Specifically, rural ICH talents need to achieve three key transitions: from "skill inheritors" to "cultural interpreters," from "traditional artisans" to "innovative designers," and from "individual producers" to "industrial operators." This role transformation places higher demands on talent cultivation and underscores the urgency of exploring systematic, precision-oriented cultivation paths.

3. Cultivating Talent to Revitalize Industries: The Value Implications of Training Rural Intangible Cultural Heritage Talents

Under the wave of rural revitalization, the training of rural talents is undergoing multi-dimensional changes including technological empowerment, paradigm innovation, and cultural reconstruction. Digital intelligence technology can serve as an important support for the innovative development of rural intangible cultural heritage talent training. Empowering rural intangible cultural heritage talent training with digital intelligence technology not only enables the activation of training forms through digital intelligence technology and the leveraging of its educational empowerment advantages, but also fills the educational gap of embodied transmission and cultivates the future-oriented compound creativity of rural talents. The introduction of digital intelligence technologies such as virtual simulation and digital archiving will reconstruct the resources for intangible cultural heritage talent training, providing dynamic and perceptible training resources for the cultivation of comprehensive qualities of talents. For instance, teachers and students from Wenshan University in Yunnan Province, taking the national intangible cultural heritage "Aewen Xinzhai Zhuang Ethnic Printmaking" as the entry point, used digital means to complete pattern collection and image recording, and achieved digital transmission of intangible cultural heritage skills through animation demonstrations. Hunan Normal University, in collaboration with the Hunan Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center, has established a digital resource library covering 23 types of intangible cultural heritage projects including Xiang embroidery and Miao silverware. Through the intervention of digital intelligence technology, the resources for intangible cultural heritage talent training have been comprehensively reformed, effectively enhancing the comprehensive qualities of rural talents.

Digital intelligence technology has also fundamentally activated the educational effectiveness of intangible cultural heritage talent training. From the perspective of cultivating innovative thinking, AI-assisted design can guide talents to gradually form an innovative thinking mode based on traditional culture in the process of intangible cultural heritage creation. For example, students at Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, under the guidance of their teachers, used AI visual models to classify traditional lantern patterns and convert lotus and cloud patterns into vector materials for 3D modeling [5]. Teachers and students from Jiangnan University, starting from the national intangible cultural heritage Yixing purple clay's inlaid clay technique, developed an inlaid clay pattern AI generation system, designed the "Clay Robe" series of clothing, and presented them on the stage of the 2025 Silicon Valley Fashion Week [6]. At the same time, digital intelligence technology, by reconstructing the dissemination path and breaking the boundaries of the field, promotes the extension and expansion of the intangible cultural heritage talent training network, and strengthens the cultural identity of talents. Hubei University of Automotive Technology, in collaboration with local cultural and tourism departments, established a database of intangible cultural heritage texts, shot 36 episodes of the "Rediscovery" documentary series, and developed a VR technology-based intangible cultural heritage display platform, achieving visualized dissemination and interactive learning of intangible cultural heritage. Rural talents, in the process of embodied practice and dissemination, have transformed from "passive receivers" of knowledge to "active disseminators", enhancing their sense of social responsibility and cultural identity in inheriting intangible cultural heritage [4].

4. Current Situation and Dilemmas of Rural Intangible Cultural Heritage Talent Cultivation

At present, rural intangible cultural heritage (ICH) talent cultivation confronts multiple predicaments at the practical level. These challenges do not exist in isolation; rather, they are intricately intertwined and mutually reinforcing, constituting systemic barriers that constrain talent

development. From a policy perspective, insufficient precision in support mechanisms leads to resource misallocation, rendering it difficult to accurately address the practical demands of talent cultivation. From a platform perspective, suboptimal operational efficacy impedes the effective integration of cultivation resources, preventing high-quality educational resources from reaching rural areas smoothly [5]. From a talent perspective, weak endogenous motivation results in a lack of willingness and capacity for active learning among trainees, substantially diminishing cultivation outcomes. These three predicaments are interlocked in a vicious cycle: inadequate policy support constrains platform construction; low platform efficacy undermines talent motivation; and insufficient talent motivation, in turn, compromises the manifestation of policy effects and the sustainable operation of platforms, creating a self-perpetuating cycle that is difficult to rupture. Specifically, these challenges manifest primarily in the following three dimensions.

4.1 Insufficient Precision in Policy Support

Policy support serves as a critical safeguard for rural intangible cultural heritage (ICH) talent cultivation; however, it currently suffers from a lack of precision. This deficiency manifests in four interconnected dimensions. First, structural imbalances in funding allocation. The proportion of ICH protection earmarked funds actually allocated to talent cultivation remains notably low, with limited financial resources proving inadequate to meet the demands of systematic and targeted talent development. For instance, in a mountainous county of a certain province, ICH protection special funds have exhibited a year-on-year decline over the past three years, with the actual proportion directed toward talent cultivation accounting for less than 15%. With nearly 300 registered ICH inheritors and practitioners in the county, the annual training coverage rate falls below 15%. A bamboo weaving inheritor reflected: "I have taken on several apprentices, yet none persevered; the longest stayed merely half a year before leaving." Second, inadequate precision in training provision. Existing training programs predominantly adopt short-term, centralized theoretical formats, lacking sustained, systematic practical guidance. Consequently, a substantial gap persists between training content and the actual needs of trainees. For example, in an ICH inheritor training program conducted in an urban-rural fringe area of a certain municipality, over 70% of inheritors indicated that "the training content overemphasized theoretical knowledge, with insufficient hands-on instruction." An olive pit carving inheritor noted: "The instructors elaborated extensively on theory, yet devoted minimal attention to how to market olive pit carvings or develop new products." Third, aging demographic structure. The age composition of rural ICH inheritor teams reveals a pronounced aging trend, with a disproportionately low representation of young inheritors. Specifically, among county-level or above ICH inheritors in Conghua District of a certain municipality, youth inheritors under 35 years of age constitute less than 12%, whereas those over 50 years exceed 55%. A bamboo weaving inheritor lamented: "Nowadays, few young people are willing to learn this craft." Fourth, cognitive deviations at the grassroots level. Certain grassroots officials maintain outdated conceptualizations of ICH protection, perceiving it merely as "antiquated relics" or "traditional handicrafts," thereby neglecting systematic cultivation of ICH talent.

4.2 Suboptimal Operational Efficacy of Cultivation Platforms

Talent cultivation platforms constitute pivotal vehicles for the development of rural intangible cultural heritage (ICH) talent; nevertheless, they currently exhibit suboptimal operational efficacy. This deficiency manifests in three interconnected dimensions. First, infrastructural disparities. Rural ICH transmission sites are predominantly scattered across individual villages, lacking unified, high-level training bases and normalized exchange platforms. Numerous transmission sites suffer

from the absence of fixed venues for practice and instruction, coupled with insufficient deployment of digital equipment. For instance, among five principal ICH transmission sites in Panyu District of a certain municipality, merely two were equipped with basic digital instructional facilities, with less than 30% capable of conducting online teaching. A Canton enamel (Guangcai) inheritor remarked: "We aspire to develop online instruction, yet our equipment is inadequate and the network connectivity is also problematic." Second, underdeveloped industry-education integration mechanisms. Collaborations between rural areas and external stakeholders such as universities and enterprises predominantly assume the form of temporary projects, devoid of sustained operational mechanisms, thereby impeding the formation of sustainable talent cultivation systems. For example, Zhenjiang District of a certain municipality established an ICH research and innovation center in collaboration with a local university; however, due to the absence of long-term operational mechanisms, the partnership typically resulted in "project-based cooperation for a limited duration, with talent cultivation proving difficult to sustain." Continuous participants across two or more training cycles accounted for less than 25%. A university faculty member involved in the collaboration candidly observed: "Guiding students to produce several cultural creative works is straightforward; yet establishing sustainable talent cultivation mechanisms necessitates stable personnel and financial commitments from the university, government, and enterprises alike." Third, institutional voids in management systems. Numerous rural areas have failed to establish learning archives or credit-based management systems for ICH talent, resulting in the absence of sustained technical support and follow-up guidance upon training completion. Consequently, learning outcomes prove difficult to effectively monitor and evaluate. For instance, in Sanshui District of a certain municipality, over 70% of respondents indicated that their villages or townships "had not established learning archives or credit-based management systems for ICH talent." A lion dance inheritor pointed out: "Once the training concludes, it simply ends; no one tracks how well we have learned or how effectively we apply the skills."

4.3 Weak Endogenous Motivation among Talent

Endogenous motivation constitutes the fundamental impetus for rural intangible cultural heritage (ICH) talent cultivation; however, it currently exhibits marked weakness. This deficiency manifests in three interconnected dimensions. First, inadequate self-directed learning consciousness. Influenced by the rural environment and regional context, numerous rural ICH talent maintain antiquated developmental perspectives, relying upon traditional transmission philosophies and pedagogical models, with minimal initiative to acquire novel knowledge or competencies. For instance, in Zengcheng District of a certain municipality, self-assessment scores regarding "proactive acquisition of new knowledge and skills" (on a 5-point scale) averaged below 2.5 among inheritors over 50 years of age. An olive pit carving inheritor candidly acknowledged: "In the past, one learned the craft by working alongside the master daily. Nowadays, young people must carve out dedicated time for training; upon returning, they remain preoccupied with other obligations—where can they find time for intensive study?" Second, constrained temporal and energetic resources. Rural ICH talent frequently must reconcile agricultural production or supplementary employment with their craft, leaving limited availability for self-directed learning and impeding sustained educational investment. For example, questionnaire surveys conducted in Conghua District of a certain municipality revealed that over 60% of rural ICH talent needed to concurrently manage agricultural production, while over 40% engaged in additional part-time employment, with average daily time available for self-directed learning falling below one hour. Third, insufficient innovation and commercialization capacities. Due to educational background limitations, substantial proportions of rural ICH talent have rarely or never completed coursework

in modern design or related disciplines, focusing predominantly upon traditional skill acquisition while exhibiting underdeveloped innovative design consciousness and market transformation capabilities. For instance, in Huadu District of a certain municipality, over 80% of ICH practitioners indicated that they "encountered difficulties in innovative transformation of ICH products and lacked capacity to convert traditional techniques into marketable commodities." A lime sculpture (huisu) inheritor observed: "Our craftsmanship has been transmitted through generations, yet we genuinely do not comprehend how to fashion it into products appealing to younger consumers. Design, packaging, marketing—these domains remain entirely foreign to us."

5. Path Optimization for Cultivating High-Quality Rural ICH Talent

Resolving the systemic predicaments confronting rural intangible cultural heritage (ICH) talent cultivation necessitates a paradigmatic shift from fragmented, symptomatic approaches—characterized by "treating the head when it aches and the foot when it hurts"—toward holistic thinking that addresses both root causes and manifestations through systematic policy intervention. The aforementioned threefold dilemma—insufficient precision in policy support, suboptimal operational efficacy of cultivation platforms, and weak endogenous motivation among talent—does not exist in isolation; rather, these dimensions are interrelated and mutually constitutive: inadequate policy support deprives platform construction of resource guarantees; deficient platform efficacy undermines talent development; and weak talent motivation, in turn, attenuates policy effectiveness and platform utility. Consequently, rupturing this self-reinforcing vicious cycle demands concerted efforts across four dimensions—policy, platform, talent, and mechanism—to construct an integrated "four-in-one" systemic cultivation pathway [6].

5.1 Establishing a Stratified and Precision-Oriented Cultivation Mechanism

A differentiated and hierarchical cultivation system should be established to accommodate diverse categories and levels of rural intangible cultural heritage (ICH) talent. Rural ICH talent may be classified into three cohorts: inheritors, practitioners, and administrators, with each cohort stratified into four tiers—elementary, intermediate, advanced, and master—each corresponding to tailored cultivation protocols. The elementary tier emphasizes foundational skill dissemination; the intermediate tier prioritizes innovation capacity enhancement; the advanced tier focuses on brand operation and management; and the master tier concentrates on cultural heritage transmission research. Concurrently, a "one person, one policy" precision-oriented cultivation archive system should be instituted, employing questionnaire surveys, skill assessments, and developmental aspiration interviews to formulate individualized cultivation plans for each ICH talent. These plans should encompass modules covering skill refinement, innovative design, market operation, and digital application. At the practical level, a district in Guangdong Province has significantly enhanced talent training enthusiasm by establishing a "green channel for ICH talent professional title application," facilitating the successful application of elementary and intermediate professional titles for multiple rural ICH talents.

5.2 Developing Smart Heritage Empowerment Platforms

To address infrastructural disparities and underdeveloped industry-education integration mechanisms, smart heritage empowerment platforms integrating online and offline modalities should be constructed. Regarding physical infrastructure, standardized "ICH maker spaces" should be established in agriculture-involved districts, equipped with digital creation facilities, exhibition and exchange venues, and live-streaming infrastructure, providing ICH talent with complimentary

creative workspaces, technical support, and market docking services. Regarding digital infrastructure, an integrated "ICH talent cloud platform" should be developed, encompassing online courses, remote mentoring, portfolio exhibition, and market docking functionalities. This platform should comprise three modules: a "cloud classroom" module inviting university faculty and master inheritors to produce premium courses; a "remote workshop" module enabling real-time interactive mentoring between experts and trainees; and a "creative marketplace" module providing exhibition and sales channels for ICH talent. At the practical level, the "ICH Maker Initiative" launched by a municipality in Guangdong Province has, over two years of implementation, cumulatively trained nearly 200 ICH talents and cultivated dozens of "ICH makers" capable of independent creation.

5.3 Refining Whole-Chain Incentive Policies for Talent

To address weak endogenous motivation among talent, comprehensive whole-chain incentive policies should be refined. First, the professional title evaluation system should be improved by incorporating technical proficiency, apprentice training efficacy, innovative outputs, and market transformation performance into evaluation criteria, while establishing expedited channels for rural ICH talent professional title application. Second, a credit-based management system should be instituted, quantifying and crediting learning and training participation, technical transmission, creative production, and market sales activities; accumulated credits should be redeemable for training resources, equipment support, and project funding. Third, a revenue-sharing mechanism should be established wherein government departments or collaborative enterprises provide sales channels, with ICH talent receiving predominant revenue shares. Fourth, an entrepreneurship incubation fund should be established, providing start-up capital, venue rental subsidies, and other forms of support for talent establishing ICH cultural creative studios, ICH-themed homestays, and ICH experience workshops. At the practical level, a district in Guangdong Province has successfully assisted multiple ICH inheritors in commercializing their works through a "work listing–revenue sharing" mechanism, with one inheritor reporting income several multiples of previous years' earnings.

5.4 Establishing Sustainable Collaborative Cultivation Mechanisms

To address underdeveloped industry-education integration mechanisms and the lack of sustainability in talent cultivation, sustainable collaborative cultivation mechanisms should be established. First, a "university-locality partnership" action plan should be implemented, organizing universities and rural areas to establish stable paired relationships: universities provide intellectual support, including faculty dispatch, curriculum development, and creative guidance; rural areas provide practice bases, including transmission venues, practical projects, and employment positions. Second, a joint conference system should be instituted, convening regular university-locality partnership advancement meetings to ensure sustained and stable collaboration. Third, a "dual-mentorship system" should be implemented, assigning each young ICH talent both a technical mentor and an innovation mentor: technical mentors, comprising senior ICH inheritors, are responsible for transmitting traditional techniques and interpreting cultural connotations; innovation mentors, comprising university faculty or enterprise designers, are responsible for guiding innovative conceptualization and market transformation. Dual mentors conduct regular joint instruction, with at least one face-to-face mentoring session monthly, cultivating composite professionals possessing both traditional foundation and modern vision through the integration of technique and innovation [7].

6. Conclusion

The cultivation of high-quality rural intangible cultural heritage (ICH) talent constitutes a critical underpinning for implementing rural revitalization strategies and a contemporary imperative for perpetuating the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation. At present, rural ICH talent cultivation confronts tangible predicaments: insufficient precision in policy support, suboptimal operational efficacy of cultivation platforms, and weak endogenous motivation among talent. Resolving these challenges necessitates constructing stratified and precision-oriented cultivation mechanisms, developing smart heritage empowerment platforms, refining whole-chain incentive policies for talent, and establishing sustainable collaborative cultivation mechanisms. At the practical level, various localities have explored effective approaches: "expedited channels for ICH talent professional title application" have enhanced training participation enthusiasm; "ICH maker space" initiatives have provided creative platforms for ICH talent; "work listing–revenue sharing" mechanisms have augmented talent economic returns; and "ICH + homestay" integrated development models have attracted youth returning to rural areas for entrepreneurship. These practical experiences demonstrate that through systematic and precision-oriented talent cultivation, the effective transformation of rural ICH talent from traditional artisans to composite professionals can be facilitated, achieving a virtuous cycle of "talent invigorating industry, industry promoting transmission" and infusing rural revitalization with enduring cultural momentum and talent support [8].

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