

Research on Pathways for Integrating Intangible Cultural Heritage and Traditional Culture into Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions

Meng Guo

Anhui Normal University, Wuhu 241002, Anhui, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

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Abstract

As a vital component of China's fine traditional culture, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) contains rich educational resources. Integrating ICH into ideological and political education in higher education institutions is essential for implementing the "second integration," which serves as a key pathway to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of China's fine traditional culture, addressing the practical need to fulfill the fundamental task of fostering virtue and cultivating talent. Currently, the integration faces several practical challenges, including insufficient exploration of ICH's cultural connotations, inadequate recognition among stakeholders, and a lack of appeal in educational carriers. In response, guided by the fundamental mission of fostering virtue, universities should explore and establish a sustainable "ICH Plus" educational mechanism with ICH as the core carrier. This approach will enable ICH to become a profound force for nurturing character, enriching moral education, enhancing ideological and political teaching, and ultimately contributing to the development of a strong socialist culture.

Keywords

Intangible heritage traditional culture; Ideological and political education in universities; Chinese traditional culture; Merge

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1. Introduction

General Secretary Xi has emphasized the need to "focus on continuing the lineage of Chinese culture and promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of China's fine traditional culture"^[1]. As a vital component of this cultural heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and traditional culture play a

key role in sustaining China's historical and cultural continuity and in building a strong socialist culture. They serve as invaluable "living resources" for ideological and political education in higher education. In the new era, it is therefore essential for universities to deeply recognize the value of ICH in such education, analyze effective integration pathways, and drive the high-quality

development of ideological and political work.

2. The significance of integrating ICH and traditional culture into ideological and political education in higher education

Integrating ICH into ideological and political education is a crucial measure for universities to enhance value guidance and student development. This holds significant importance for implementing the “Two Integrations,” advancing cultural innovation, and fulfilling the mission of fostering virtue and talent.

2.1. An inherent requirement for thoroughly implementing the “Second Integration”

The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China states: “Only by integrating the basic tenets of Marxism with China’s specific realities and with China’s fine traditional culture can we provide correct answers to the major questions posed by the times and by practice, and can Marxism always retain its vigor and vitality”^[2]. ICH and traditional culture can not only enrich the content of the ideological and political education system in universities but also fulfill the objectives of educating through history, inspiring through emotion, and cultivating through culture, thereby awakening students’ patriotic sentiments and national consciousness. In the post-pandemic era, while the overall ideological state of university students remains positive, nascent and latent issues persist to varying degrees in areas such as ideological identification, value choices, and social interactions^[3]. Containing profound moral, idealistic, and emotional connotations, ICH serves as essential “nourishment” for this education. Universities must therefore deepen their understanding of ICH’s importance, explore its inherent values, strengthen heritage education, effectively implement the “second integration,” and guide youth in making sound value judgments, thereby solidifying cultural and historical confidence.

2.2. An important pathway for promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of China’s fine traditional culture

ICH and traditional culture are rich in moral and political

“nutrients,” providing fertile ground for cultivating fine character. They are of great significance for maintaining cultural diversity, enhancing national cultural soft power, and strengthening cultural confidence and self-reliance. Facing challenges in inheritance and development in the new era, deeply exploring the educational elements within ICH and integrating them into both the theoretical and practical teaching of ideological and political courses represents an effective pathway to promote its creative transformation and innovative development. Promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of ICH and traditional culture is both an advantage and a responsibility of higher education institutions^[4]. Universities should profoundly recognize the significant importance of advancing cultural confidence and self-reliance. Taking the inheritance and innovation of ICH as an entry point, they should actively explore ways to integrate China’s fine traditional culture throughout the entire process of ideological and political education, enhancing the cultural confidence of young students, and “ensuring that fine cultural genes are compatible with contemporary culture and harmonize with modern society”^[5].

2.3. A practical necessity for fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue and cultivating talent in higher education

The fundamental mission of colleges and universities is to foster virtue and nurture talents. Only those institutions that cultivate top-tier talent can become world-class universities^[6]. ICH and traditional culture demonstrate the unique creativity and value concepts of Chinese culture, containing abundant resources for ideological and political education. They serve not only as a unique vehicle for such education but also as high-quality educational material for implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue and cultivating talent^[7]. Deeply exploring and elucidating the cultural connotations of ICH is essential for universities to effectively advance “curriculum-based ideological and political education,” enhance the overall quality of talent cultivation, and fulfill their fundamental educational mission. By integrating their own institutional characteristics and regional cultural contexts, universities should fully leverage the value-guiding role of China’s fine traditional culture. This will stimulate students’ interest in exploring, understanding,

and appreciating the rich connotations of ICH, thereby strengthening cultural confidence and reinforcing the sense of community for the Chinese nation.

3. Practical challenges in integrating ICH and traditional culture into ideological and political education in higher education

ICH and traditional culture contain rich educational resources that can substantially enrich university ideological and political education, yet their full potential remains underutilized due to persistent practical challenges in the integration process.

3.1. Insufficient exploration of connotations

Ideological and political education in higher education inherently carries cultural attributes and bears the mission of inheriting and promoting China's fine traditional culture. It must rely on specific ideological concepts and ethical norms to enlighten and guide students^[8]. Although ICH possesses educational elements aligned with the socialist core value system and can provide diverse teaching cases, its deeper cultural concepts remain underexplored. While initiatives like "ICH Experience Days" have introduced intangible heritage to campuses, these activities often remain at the level of introductory performances and exhibitions, focusing on knowledge dissemination and skill experience rather than achieving true curricular integration. Most universities lack systematic ICH-based curriculum systems, resulting in a disconnect between heritage education and the broader mission of fostering virtue.

3.2. Insufficient awareness among key stakeholders

Integrating ICH is crucial for enhancing the quality of ideological and political education and for the professional development of educators. However, awareness and emphasis are often lacking. Institutionally, many universities have not prioritized this integration, leading to minimal inclusion of ICH in course content and campus culture, thus underutilizing its educational potential. For students, particularly the "post-00s" generation, exposure to and comprehension of ICH

is often superficial amidst diverse cultural influences. Furthermore, many instructors of ideological and political theory lack sufficient knowledge of ICH and related pedagogical research, hindering their ability to effectively guide student engagement^[9]. This often results in a disconnect between ICH content and the core curriculum, diminishing the courses' appeal and theoretical depth.

3.3. Lack of appeal in educational carriers

Effective integration relies on engaging pedagogical carriers. While classroom instruction, practical activities, and digital technology hold potential, significant shortcomings persist. Classroom teaching, the primary channel, often fails to creatively incorporate ICH in a way that reflects disciplinary, professional, or local characteristics, relying on conventional and uninspired methods^[10]. Furthermore, the principle of unifying knowledge and action is not fully realized, as off-campus practical activities related to ICH are scarce or poorly designed, leading to a theory-practice gap and low student engagement. In the digital age, most institutions have also failed to leverage technologies like short videos, VR, or the metaverse, tools well-suited to "digital native" students, to enhance ICH education, missing key opportunities for innovative pedagogical formats^[11].

4. Practical pathways for integrating ICH and traditional culture into ideological and political education in higher education

The "ICH Plus" model is an important approach to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of intangible cultural heritage. Universities should base their efforts on the fundamental task of fostering virtue and cultivating talent, identify the convergence points between China's fine traditional culture and ideological and political education, continuously innovate "ICH Plus" educational carriers, explore effective integration pathways, and lay a solid foundation for building a strong socialist culture.

4.1. Exploring the "ICH + Curriculum" educational system

Classroom teaching is the main front for ideological

and political education and also key to promoting the integration of ICH. Universities should focus on the convergence points between the two, deeply explore the connotations of ICH, enhance the cultural literacy of ideological and political educators, enrich teaching content, and build a systematic curriculum-based educational system. For instance:

- (1) Utilize ICH resources to enrich curriculum content: Teachers of ideological and political courses should closely follow contemporary demands and core textbook content, effectively integrate the vivid materials and cases inherent in ICH, conduct teaching innovation, and create “gold-standard courses” in ideological and political education that are rich in content and attractive. Simultaneously, it is essential to deeply explore and uncover the humanistic spirit and essence within specialized courses, identify integration points in teaching content and process, and strengthen the cultivation of students’ ideological spirit and values alongside knowledge transmission^[12];
- (2) It is crucial to attach high importance to the urgency of integrating China’s fine traditional culture into ideological and political education. In the process of integrating ICH, teachers play a vital role. Only with a solid foundation in traditional cultural literacy can teachers skillfully employ ICH elements and subtly weave its essence into theoretical instruction. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen faculty development, incorporate traditional culture into mandatory teacher training, encourage teachers to conduct diversified ICH research, innovate teaching models, and increase pedagogical output, thereby practically enhancing their understanding and application ability of fine traditional culture. This will strengthen the effectiveness of ideological and political education and elevate students’ sense of national identity and cultural pride.

4.2. Improving the “ICH + Practice” educational system

In daily teaching practices, universities should focus on regional ICH, deeply explore school-based resources,

innovate educational methods, and promote the deep integration of ICH into the ideological and political education system by creating a “three-dimensional practical classroom” encompassing “daily, holiday, and activity” components, cultivating new-era talents with patriotism, awareness of cultural inheritance, and an understanding of heritage value. For example:

- (1) Enhance practical education bases through regular classroom activities: Through university-community cooperation, build a teaching model comprising “teachers + inheritors,” invite national and provincial-level representative inheritors to give regular lectures, establish ICH teaching studios and laboratories, and promote the entry of ICH into campuses, majors, and classrooms. Relying on cultural clubs both on and off campus, organize ICH exhibitions and display activities, integrating ICH inheritance with aesthetic education, education on revolutionary culture, and patriotism education. Incorporate ICH design experience and artistic creation into second classroom activities, encourage students to integrate original thinking, deepen cultural immersion through practice, and enhance cultural confidence and conservation awareness;
- (2) Deepen practical education through holiday programs: Currently, China has identified over 100,000 representative ICH projects at various levels. Many endangered and highly valuable intangible cultural heritage items have been safeguarded, and increasingly, ICH is deeply embedded in the daily lives of people of all ethnic groups, reflected in tourism landscapes, cultural industries, and rural revitalization, systematically and vividly demonstrating the unique charm and great creativity of China’s fine traditional culture. Universities should leverage winter and summer vacation social practices and professional field trips, organize students to engage in exchange and learning on-site with ICH project protection units and inheritors, guide students to transform abstract traditional culture into tangible and perceptible ICH experiences, creating a rich and varied educational space for

integrating ICH into ideological and political education^[13];

- (3) Enhance the quality and effectiveness of practical education through activity-based learning: Continuously optimize the campus cultural atmosphere, integrate ICH elements into environmental design, create immersive cultural scenes, allowing students to strengthen their identification and feel the charm through personal participation. At the same time, teachers should innovate guidance methods, encourage students to participate in academic competitions, professional contests, and cultural performances incorporating ICH elements, promote “learning through competition and applying through learning,” strengthen the connection between knowledge and action, and guide students to internalize fine traditional culture as a value pursuit and externalize it into conscious action during the learning process.

4.3. Strengthening the “ICH + Digital Network” educational system

Currently, information technologies represented by the internet have profoundly transformed how information is acquired. As digital natives, the digital lifestyle habits of young students influence their perception and attitudes towards knowledge acquisition and cultural inheritance, significantly impacting personality shaping and value formation^[14]. Universities must leverage the advantages of online platforms to expand effective pathways for integrating ICH into ideological and political education as follows:

- (1) Effectively utilize online platforms to broaden integration channels: The internet is an important front influencing the ideology and lives of university students. Universities should actively explore integrated educational models combining “internet + ideological-political education”

and “online + offline,” develop high-quality online courses and educational products that resonate with student preferences, embed them into students’ learning and daily lives, and seize the new strategic ground of online education. Enrich learning resources and extend learning pathways through forms such as micro-lectures and short video exhibitions, allowing students to fully experience the charm of ICH, giving full play to the function of culture in “educating, transforming, and fostering foundational values.” This will guide them to accurately grasp the profound connotations of ICH and enhance their consciousness and initiative in inheriting and promoting fine traditional culture;

- (2) Leverage digital technology to innovate presentation methods: Build an integrated media matrix based on the school’s actual circumstances, innovate the presentation of ICH and traditional culture, guide students to use their professional expertise to activate innovative elements in ICH education through means such as VR, live streaming, and animation, enriching the educational forms of ICH, integrate ideological and political theme elements, produce online cultural products that embody the essence of ICH, the key tenets of ideological and political education, distinctive characteristics of the times, and strong emotional resonance, and disseminate them through the school’s new media matrix^[15]. Increase the frequency of students’ online exposure to fine traditional culture, facilitate immersive experience and perception of ICH connotations, open up new opportunities and dissemination paths for the living inheritance of ICH, further broaden the channels for ICH to enter campuses, and deepen its integration with ideological and political education in higher education.

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