

# **Analysis of Dilemmas and Solutions for Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance under the Vision of Rural Revitalization**

## **-- Taking Xuan Paper in Jing County, Anhui Province as an Example**

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### **Abstract**

The rural revitalization strategy is an important part of promoting the modernization of agriculture and rural areas in the new era. Intangible cultural heritage, as an important carrier of excellent Chinese traditional culture, is of great significance to promoting rural cultural prosperity and diversified economic development. Taking Xuan Paper in Jing County, Anhui Province as an example, this paper systematically discusses the main dilemmas faced by the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the context of rural revitalization through field research and case analysis, and puts forward solutions from multiple dimensions such as the introduction of digital technology, industrial integration, policy support, and talent cultivation. The research shows that the inheritance of Xuan Paper intangible cultural heritage faces challenges such as weak market competitiveness, the discontinuity of skills inheritance, insufficient supply of raw materials, and a lack of innovation mechanisms. It is necessary to achieve innovative development through the construction of a digital inheritance system, the promotion of industrial integration and development, the improvement of policy guarantee mechanisms, and the strengthening of the training of inheritors. This study provides theoretical reference and practical paths for the coordinated promotion of intangible cultural heritage inheritance and rural revitalization, and has practical significance for promoting rural cultural revitalization and economic development.

### **Keywords**

Rural Revitalization; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Xuan Paper Making Skills; Cultural Inheritance; Industrial Integration.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Research Background and Significance**

The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that the rural revitalization strategy should be taken as a major strategic deployment for rural development and a general starting point for doing a good job in agriculture, rural areas, and farmers in the new era [1]. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that "the countryside is the root of Chinese civilization, and the construction of rural culture is the soul of rural revitalization." This important exposition profoundly clarifies the important role of culture in rural revitalization. As an important part of excellent Chinese traditional culture, intangible cultural heritage is the crystallization of the wisdom and civilization of the Chinese nation and a spiritual bond that maintains national emotions [2]. In the process of implementing the rural revitalization strategy, the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage is related to the

maintenance of cultural diversity, and even more related to the revitalization of rural industries and cultural prosperity.

The Xuan Paper making technique in Jing County, Anhui Province is an outstanding representative of traditional Chinese handmade paper making. In 2006, it was included in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage list, and in 2009, it was selected into the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Xuan Paper has the unique quality of "paper longevity for a thousand years, ink rhyme for myriad changes", and is known as the "king of paper", which has an irreplaceable position in the development history of Chinese calligraphy and painting art. However, with the acceleration of the modernization process and the development of the market economy, the inheritance of Xuan Paper making techniques faces severe challenges. Studying the dilemmas and solutions for the inheritance of Xuan Paper intangible cultural heritage in Jing County is not only of great significance for protecting this precious cultural heritage, but also provides a reference for the inheritance and protection of other intangible cultural heritage projects, and can also inject cultural impetus into the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy.

## 1.2. Literature Review

Domestic and foreign scholars have conducted extensive research on the relationship between intangible cultural heritage protection and rural revitalization. Wang Wenzhang (2006) systematically elaborated the theoretical framework and practical paths of intangible cultural heritage protection in "Introduction to Intangible Cultural Heritage", emphasizing the important value of intangible cultural heritage in maintaining cultural diversity. Huang Yonglin (2019) put forward that intangible cultural heritage protection should be combined with rural industrial development from the perspective of rural revitalization strategy, and realize the contemporary value of intangible cultural heritage through revitalization and utilization [4]. Liu Kuili (2004) proposed the principle of holistic protection, emphasizing the need to protect the natural and cultural environment in which intangible cultural heritage is located [5].

In terms of foreign research, Japanese scholar Yutaka Suga (2015) proposed the concept of "creative protection" through the study of Japanese traditional handicraft protection cases, emphasizing innovation in protection and development in innovation [9]. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2003) clearly pointed out in the "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" that intangible cultural heritage protection should ensure the vitality of intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission and revitalization of various aspects of this heritage [10].

Existing research provides important theoretical support for this article, but research on the inheritance dilemma and solutions for specific intangible cultural heritage projects in the context of rural revitalization is still insufficient, especially for intangible cultural heritage projects such as Xuan paper that require specific raw materials and complex processes. This article aims to fill this research gap and provide new ideas for the integrated development of intangible cultural heritage protection and rural revitalization.

## 2. The Realistic Dilemma of Xuan Paper Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance in Jing County

### 2.1. Continuous Decline in Market Competitiveness

The Xuan paper industry has long been characterized by decentralization with "large quantity, wide distribution, and small scale" [3]. According to statistics from the Jing County Xuan Paper Industry Association, there are currently more than 30 Xuan paper calligraphy and painting paper production enterprises in the county, of which only 5 are enterprises above designated

size, and only a few enterprises such as China Xuan Paper Co., Ltd. have an annual output value of more than 50 million yuan. This industrial pattern leads to low industry concentration and makes it difficult to form economies of scale.

With the impact of modern industrial paper products and the popularity of digital office, the market demand structure of Xuan paper has undergone significant changes. The demand for traditional calligraphy and painting paper is growing slowly, while the development of emerging cultural and creative products is insufficient. At the same time, the cost of raw materials and labor continues to rise, leading to a continuous increase in the production cost of handmade Xuan paper. According to a survey, making an authentic Xuan paper requires 108 processes, and apprentices need to practice for more than three years to master the paper-making process alone. This high-cost, long-cycle production model makes the market price of Xuan paper remain high, further weakening its market competitiveness.

More seriously, in order to pursue short-term benefits, some enterprises use mechanized production methods to replace traditional hand-made production. Although this reduces costs, the product quality and traditional cultural connotation are significantly weakened. This practice not only damages the brand image of Xuan paper, but also has a negative impact on the healthy development of the entire industry.

## **2.2. The Inheritance of Skills Faces a Serious Break**

The inheritance of Xuan paper making skills is facing a severe talent crisis. According to our field research, the average age of front-line workers in the Xuan paper industry in Jing County exceeds 45 years old, and the proportion of young employees is less than 20%. This aging trend is still intensifying, and there is a clear break in the inheritance of skills.

There are many reasons for this situation. First of all, the Xuan paper making skills are complex and difficult to learn, including paper making, paper drying, paper cutting and other 108 processes, which are technically difficult and have a long learning cycle. A skilled paper maker needs at least 3-5 years of practical training, while it takes more than ten years to fully master all the processes. This long-cycle learning process is quite different from the expectations of modern young people who want to enter the talent market quickly.

Secondly, the working environment for making Xuan paper is harsh and the salary level is not high. Xuan paper production requires working in a water environment, and workers are exposed to cold water for a long time, which can easily lead to occupational diseases such as rheumatism. Moreover, their income level is not commensurate with the intensity of labor. According to a survey, the monthly income of a skilled paper maker is about 5000-6000 yuan, which is not competitive compared with working outside or engaging in other industries.

In addition, low social recognition is also an important factor affecting young people's willingness to work in the industry. In today's society, the social status of traditional craftsmen is not high, and the career development prospects are unclear, which makes many young people unwilling to devote themselves to this industry.

## **2.3. Prominent Contradictions in Raw Material Supply**

Xuan paper uses green sandalwood bark and Shatin rice straw as raw materials, and its quality is closely related to the origin and process of the raw materials. Green sandalwood bark needs to grow for more than 3 years before it can be used, and Shatin rice straw requires tall stalks with few leaves and soft fibers. This specific requirement for raw materials determines the regional limitations of Xuan paper production.

However, raw material supply has faced serious challenges in recent years. On the one hand, the income from green sandalwood planting is low, with an annual income of less than 2000 yuan per mu, which is far lower than other cash crops. This leads to low enthusiasm among farmers for planting, and the planting area of green sandalwood has decreased year by year.

According to statistics, the area of green sandalwood forest in Jing County has decreased from 5.6 mu in 2010 to 3.8 mu in 2022, a decrease of 32%.

On the other hand, a large number of young and middle-aged rural laborers have migrated out, and the remaining elderly people are unable to bear the heavy work of raw material planting and collection. The planting of Shatin rice straw requires intensive cultivation and is labor-intensive with limited returns, so many farmers prefer to grow other crops or abandon their land.

The shortage of raw material supply directly affects the production scale and quality stability of Xuan paper. Although Xuan paper companies have continuously increased the purchase price of raw materials in recent years, it is still difficult to ensure a stable supply of high-quality raw materials. This situation not only restricts the development of the Xuan paper industry, but also poses a threat to the inheritance and protection of intangible cultural heritage.

### **3. Lack of Communication and Innovation Mechanisms**

Although Xuan paper has the reputation of "paper with a life of a thousand years" and a profound cultural heritage, its communication methods and innovation mechanisms are still insufficient. In terms of communication, it mainly relies on traditional forms such as exhibitions and calligraphy and painting exhibitions, lacking deep integration with modern digital intelligence technology. In the communication pattern of the new media era, the communication volume of Xuan paper culture is obviously insufficient.

In terms of innovation mechanism, the innovative design ability of Xuan paper products is weak, the product type is single, mainly traditional calligraphy and painting paper, and lacks innovative products that meet modern consumer needs. Although individual companies have tried to develop Xuan paper cultural and creative products, on the whole, the product innovation is not strong enough, and the cultural added value has not been fully explored [6].

The lagging brand building is also a prominent problem. In addition to a few time-honored brands such as "Red Star", most Xuan paper companies do not have a strong brand awareness and lack systematic brand building and marketing promotion strategies. This has led to the insufficient overall brand influence of Jing County Xuan paper, making it difficult to stand out in the fierce market competition.

## **4. The Value and Role of Intangible Cultural Heritage Empowering Rural Revitalization**

### **4.1. Cultural Heritage and Identity Construction**

Intangible cultural heritage is an important carrier of rural cultural memory, carrying regional history and collective memory. Xuan paper making technique is not only a production process, but also contains rich cultural connotations and historical information. Through the inheritance of Xuan paper and other intangible cultural heritage projects, it can enhance villagers' cultural identity and pride, and provide spiritual impetus for rural revitalization.

In Jing County, Xuan paper making has become an important symbol of local cultural identity. Many old craftsmen have been engaged in Xuan paper making for generations, and they regard this skill as a family honor and cultural mission. The construction of this cultural identity is of great significance for maintaining the rural cultural ecology and enhancing rural cohesion. At the same time, Xuan paper culture has also become an emotional bond connecting migrant workers and their hometowns, enhancing the centripetal force and attraction of the countryside through cultural identity.

## 4.2. Economic Drive and Industrial Integration Effect

Intangible cultural heritage projects can become important resources for rural tourism, cultural experience, and cultural and creative product development, creating significant economic benefits through industrial integration. According to our research, Jing County attracts more than 500,000 tourists every year through the "Xuan Paper + Tourism" model, driving related income to exceed 2 Billion yuan [8].

Xuan paper intangible cultural heritage can promote economic development in the following ways: First, develop sightseeing factories and experience workshops to allow tourists to experience the Xuan paper making process in person, enhancing the participation and experience of tourism; Second, develop cultural and creative products, integrate Xuan paper elements into daily necessities, artworks, gifts, etc., and enhance product added value; Third, carry out research and study tours to attract student groups to learn traditional culture and cultivate reserve forces for the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage; Fourth, use e-commerce platforms to expand sales channels, break regional restrictions, and expand market coverage.

This industrial integration and development model can not only directly increase economic income, but also drive the development of related industries such as catering, accommodation, and transportation, forming a complete industrial chain and providing continuous impetus for rural revitalization.

## 4.3. Policy Support and Social Participation Mechanism

The Party and the state attach great importance to the protection of intangible cultural heritage and rural revitalization efforts. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party clearly states the need to "intensify the protection of cultural relics and cultural heritage efforts." Various regions have also introduced supporting policies to promote the construction of intangible cultural heritage workshops, traditional craft workstations, and other platforms. Anhui Province has issued the "Intangible

The "Cultural Heritage Protection Regulations" established a special fund for intangible cultural heritage protection, providing institutional guarantees for the protection of intangible cultural heritage projects such as Xuan paper. [7].

In terms of social participation, a protection mechanism has gradually formed with the government as the leading factor, enterprises as the main body, and social participation. China Xuan Paper Co., Ltd. Acts as a leading enterprise, actively fulfilling its social responsibilities and investing a large amount of funds in skill inheritance and talent training. At the same time, various cultural institutions, colleges and universities, and social organizations also actively participate in the protection of Xuan paper, forming a diversified and co-governed protection pattern.

This policy support and social participation mechanism not only provides financial and institutional guarantees for intangible cultural heritage protection, but also injects new vitality into rural revitalization. Through the promotion of intangible cultural heritage projects, many remote rural areas have achieved a virtuous interaction between cultural revitalization and industrial revitalization.

## 5. Countermeasures and Suggestions for Breaking the Dilemma

### 5.1. Promote Digitalization and Technological Integration Innovation

In the digital age, the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage must keep pace with the times and make full use of modern technology. First, a Xuan Paper Intangible Cultural Heritage Digital Museum should be established, using 3D scanning, virtual reality and other technologies to record and display Xuan paper making skills in all directions. This can not only



permanently preserve technical data, but also allow more people to learn about Xuan paper culture through the Internet.

Secondly, use blockchain technology to establish a Xuan paper traceability system to record the production process, raw material sources, and production artists of each sheet of Xuan paper, enhance product credibility and added value. Through digital means, create a "digital ID card" for Xuan paper to enhance brand value.

Third, develop a digital teaching system for Xuan paper making skills, and expand the scope of skill dissemination through video tutorials, online courses, etc.

and lower the learning threshold. This will help attract more young people to understand and learn Xuan paper making skills.

Finally, use e-commerce platforms and social media to carry out precision marketing. Connect directly with consumers through live streaming, short video promotion, etc.

to expand sales channels. At the same time, collect user feedback to promote product innovation and service optimization and upgrades.

## **5.2. Strengthen the Training and Incentive Mechanism for Inheritors**

Talent is the core element of intangible cultural heritage inheritance. A systematic training system for inheritors should be established, including: First, carrying out "Intangible Cultural Heritage Entering Campus" activities, opening Xuan paper culture courses in primary and secondary schools to cultivate young people's interest in traditional culture; Second, cooperating with universities and colleges to offer intangible cultural heritage-related professional curricula to cultivate high-quality professional talents; Third, establishing a modern model of master-apprentice inheritance, encouraging veteran artists to teach apprentices through government subsidies and other means.

In terms of incentive mechanisms, the treatment level and social status of inheritors should be improved. Establish a stipend system for inheritors, providing financial subsidies to artisans who have been engaged in Xuan paper production for a long time and have exquisite skills. At the same time, establish intangible cultural heritage inheritance awards, regularly select outstanding inheritors, and give honors and rewards.

It is also necessary to improve the working environment and conditions, reduce labor intensity through technological transformation, and provide better labor protection. Establish a health security mechanism for inheritors to solve their worries.

## **5.3. Ensuring Raw Material Supply and Ecological Sustainability**

Raw material supply is the material basis for Xuan paper production. To establish a stable raw material supply system, the following measures need to be taken: First, establish raw material planting bases, and sign long-term purchase agreements with farmers through the "company + farmer" model to ensure a stable supply of raw materials. The government can subsidize farmers who plant wingceltis and Shatin rice straw to increase planting benefits.

Secondly, promote ecological planting techniques to ensure the quality and safety of raw materials. Establish organic planting standards, reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizers, and produce high-quality raw materials. This will not only improve the quality of Xuan paper, but also protect the local ecological environment.

Third, carry out research on raw material substitution, and explore other available raw materials while maintaining the characteristics of Xuan paper, reducing dependence on specific raw materials.

At the same time, improve raw material processing technology, improve raw material utilization, and reduce waste.

Finally, establish a raw material reserve system, and reserve a certain amount of raw materials in years of abundant raw material production to cope with possible supply shortages.

#### **5.4. Promoting Industrial Integration and Brand Building**

Industrial integration is an important path for the innovative development of Xuan paper intangible cultural heritage. It is necessary to promote the deep integration of Xuan paper with cultural creativity, tourism experience, art education and other industries: First, develop diversified Xuan paper cultural and creative products, such as Xuan paper notebooks, lamps, clothing, etc., to expand product application fields; Second, build Xuan paper cultural experience parks, integrating production display, experience learning, leisure tourism, and create a new business form of cultural and tourism integration; Third, carry out Xuan paper art creation and exchange activities, attract artists to stay and create, and enhance the artistic value of Xuan paper [11].

In terms of brand building, it is necessary to create the regional public brand of "Jing County Xuan Paper" and formulate unified quality standards and certification systems. Support leading enterprises to grow bigger and stronger, and cultivate a number of brand enterprises with market competitiveness. At the same time, strengthen brand promotion and promotion, and enhance brand awareness and influence by participating in international exhibitions and holding cultural festivals.

It is also necessary to pay attention to intellectual property protection, apply for geographical indication protection, patents and trademark registration to prevent counterfeit and shoddy products from damaging the brand image. Establish

an industry self-discipline mechanism, standardize market order, and maintain the good reputation of Jing County Xuan Paper [12].

#### **5.5. Strengthen Policy Support and Cross-departmental Collaboration**

Government support is an important guarantee for the protection of intangible cultural heritage. It is necessary to improve the policy support system: First, increase financial investment, set up special funds for the protection of intangible cultural heritage, and support the inheritance and innovation of Xuan paper techniques; Second, implement preferential tax policies, give tax reductions and exemptions to Xuan paper production enterprises, and reduce operating costs.

Third, provide financial support, develop financial products suitable for intangible cultural heritage enterprises, and solve the problem of financing difficulties.

Cross-departmental collaboration is also essential. It is necessary to establish a collaborative mechanism involving multiple departments such as culture, tourism, agriculture, and education to form a joint working force. The cultural department is responsible for the protection and inheritance of skills, the tourism department promotes the integration of culture and tourism, the agricultural department supports raw material planting, and the education department participates in talent training. Through departmental collaboration, resource integration and complementary advantages can be achieved [13].

It is also necessary to encourage social forces to participate, give play to the role of industry associations, social organizations, volunteers and other parties, and form a protection pattern led by the government and participated by the society. Establish an expert consultation mechanism to provide intellectual support for Xuan paper protection.

## 6. Conclusion and Prospect

### 6.1. Research Conclusion

This study draws the following conclusions through an in-depth analysis of the inheritance of Xuan paper intangible cultural heritage in Jing County, Anhui Province:

First, the intangible cultural heritage inheritance of Xuan paper faces multiple challenges, including weak market competitiveness, discontinuity in skill inheritance, insufficient raw material supply, and lack of innovation mechanisms. These problems are interrelated and mutually influential, requiring systematic solutions.

Second, intangible cultural heritage protection and rural revitalization have inherent consistency. The inheritance and development of Xuan paper intangible cultural heritage can promote cultural inheritance and identity cons

truction, drive economic development and industrial integration, obtain policy support and social participation, thereby injecting cultural impetus into rural revitalization.

Third, breaking the dilemma of Xuan paper intangible cultural heritage inheritance requires multiple measures. It is necessary to empower inheritance and innovation through digital technology, strengthen the training and encouragement of inheritors, ensure the supply of raw materials and ecological sustainability, promote industrial integration and brand building, and strengthen policy support and cross-departmental collaboration.

### 6.2. Future Outlook

Looking to the future, the integrated development of Xuan paper intangible cultural heritage inheritance and rural revitalization faces new opportunities. On the one hand, with the enhancement of cultural confidence and the trend of consumption upgrading, people's demand for traditional cultural products will continue to grow, which provides market space for the development of the Xuan paper industry. On the other hand, technological progress, especially the development of digital technology, provides new means and paths for the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

In the future, we should focus on the following aspects to continue to deepen our work: First, strengthen basic research, deeply explore the cultural connotation and value of Xuan paper; second, promote innovative transformation, so that Xuan paper intangible cultural heritage can be better integrated into modern life; third, expand international cooperation to promote Xuan paper culture to the world; fourth, improve monitoring and evaluation, and establish a scientific evaluation system for the effectiveness of protection.

Only by developing in protection and innovating in development can we achieve the dual goals of cultural inheritance and economic revitalization, and provide a solid support for comprehensively promoting rural revitalization strategy. The inheritance and development of Xuan paper intangible cultural heritage is not only related to the survival of a traditional skill, but also to the promotion of excellent Chinese traditional culture and the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy. Through the joint efforts of all parties, the millennium Xuan paper will surely rejuvenate and inject lasting cultural impetus into rural revitalization.

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