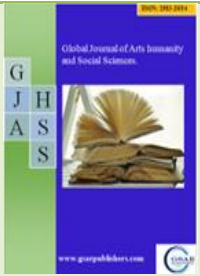
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## The Integration of Intangible Cultural Heritage into College Students' Aesthetic Education: Values, Mechanisms, and Approaches

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### Abstract

As a living gene of China's excellent traditional culture, intangible cultural heritage embodies rich aesthetic resources and educational value. Against the backdrop of contemporary college students' aesthetic education facing challenges such as limited experiential awareness and disconnection between aesthetic activities and real-life contexts, intangible cultural heritage—characterized by its embodied, relational, and everyday nature—provides a vital resource for reforming university aesthetic education. This study employs literature review and logical analysis to systematically elucidate the value of integrating intangible cultural heritage into college students' aesthetic education, revealing its underlying mechanisms across four dimensions: cultural cognition, emotional identification, value guidance, and embodied practice. It proposes an integrated implementation framework comprising curriculum system restructuring, establishment of social collaboration platforms, digital technology empowerment, and stimulation of individual agency. The research demonstrates that incorporating intangible cultural heritage into aesthetic education not only enhances students' aesthetic literacy and cultural identity but also nurtures their subjectivity through a "protective process," facilitating a profound transformation from skill transmission to holistic personality development.

**Keywords:** Intangible cultural heritage; Aesthetic education for college students; Value positioning; Internal mechanisms; Implementation pathways

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary college students have grown up in an era of rapid digital technological advancement, with their aesthetic experiences increasingly characterized by fragmentation, virtuality, and visuality. Traditional aesthetic education in universities primarily focuses on the appreciation of classical artworks and lectures on aesthetic theories—approaches that enhance artistic literacy but fail to address modern students' deficiencies in experiential perception, emotional engagement, and understanding of life meaning. This compartmentalized approach isolates aesthetic activities from real-life contexts, making it difficult for students to translate aesthetic experiences into practical life applications; consequently, aesthetic education becomes reduced to knowledge transmission rather than personal cultivation. Meanwhile, intangible cultural heritage serves as a vital vehicle for the living transmission of Chinese civilization,

with over 70% of its projects related to art. Such collective artistic practices remain rooted in everyday life, exhibiting unique aesthetic qualities of relationality, embodiment, and daily relevance. Integrating intangible cultural heritage into university aesthetic education not only meets contemporary demands for the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture, but also provides an effective pathway to overcome challenges in academic aesthetic education and enhance students' aesthetic literacy and cultural identity.

Current research indicates that academic attention to intangible cultural heritage (ICH) preservation and transmission primarily focuses on digital conservation, cross-cultural communication, and institutional development, while exploration of its relationship with aesthetic education remains in its infancy. Meng Fanxing et al. (2026), examining the fundamental connections between ICH



inheritance and contemporary aesthetic education, argue that integrating ICH into aesthetic education serves to cultivate modern individuals' subjectivity<sup>[1]</sup>. Cai Dali (2026), from an aesthetic perspective of ICH, emphasizes its "ethical-aesthetic" dimensions and embodied participatory practices<sup>[2]</sup>. Ji Zhongyang (2026) highlights the universality of ICH-related aesthetic experiences, asserting that bodily engagement itself constitutes an aesthetic approach within ICH<sup>[3]</sup>. While these studies provide theoretical foundations for ICH integration into aesthetic education, systematic investigations addressing the value positioning, mechanisms, and implementation pathways of ICH incorporation in university aesthetic education specifically targeting college students remain scarce. Building upon existing literature, this study aims to establish a theoretical framework for integrating ICH into college students' aesthetic education, offering insights for advancing university aesthetic education reform.

## 2. The intrinsic connection between intangible cultural heritage and aesthetic education for college students

(1) The aesthetic characteristics of intangible cultural heritage  
Intangible cultural heritage refers to various traditional cultural expressions passed down through generations by all ethnic groups as integral components of their cultural legacy, along with the physical objects and sites associated with these expressions. From an aesthetic perspective, intangible cultural heritage is not a static object for contemplation but rather a living entity shaped by people's dynamic participation in embodied practices and perceptual experiences (Cai Dali, 2026)<sup>[2]</sup>. Ji Zhongyang (2026) emphasizes that its living transmission always manifests through inheritors' actions "in time, place, and body"; bodily practice serves not only as the mode of existence but also as the aesthetic foundation of intangible cultural heritage<sup>[3]</sup>. The beauty of intangible cultural heritage lies primarily in the practice itself rather than its tangible forms—within this practice, the body both displays and performs externally while simultaneously opening up inwardly, with the pleasurable experience derived from one's own actions constituting the true source of its aesthetic value.

Furthermore, the aesthetics of intangible cultural heritage possess characteristics of atmospheric aesthetics. The works themselves and their physical spaces do not directly constitute aesthetic objects; rather, it is the atmosphere they create that serves as the direct aesthetic object. From the perspective of atmosphere creation, the colors, shapes, and overall features of these works merely serve as conditions for generating this atmosphere. Their aesthetic value is not discerned through appreciation or evaluation by a single sense, but is perceived directly by the body (Ji Zhongyang, 2026)<sup>[3]</sup>. This aesthetic approach, grounded in bodily engagement and atmospheric perception, effectively addresses the limitations of traditional aesthetic education, which tends to be contemplative and detached in nature.

(II) The Real Challenges in Aesthetic Education for College Students

Contemporary college students have grown up in an era of rapid digital technological advancement, and their aesthetic experiences are increasingly characterized by fragmentation, virtuality, and visuality. Traditional aesthetic education in universities primarily focuses on the appreciation of classical artworks and the teaching of aesthetic theories; while this approach enhances students' artistic understanding, it fails to address contemporary individuals' deficiencies in experiential perception, emotional expression, and sense of life meaning. This compartmentalized approach to art education isolates aesthetic activities from real-life contexts, making it difficult for students to translate aesthetic experiences into practical life applications, thereby reducing aesthetic education to mere knowledge transmission rather than personal character development.

Meanwhile, the impact of globalization and consumerism has posed challenges to college students' cultural identity. Some students blindly embrace foreign cultural symbols while lacking a deep understanding and emotional connection to their own traditional culture. The people-centered approach to intangible cultural heritage preservation focuses on spiritual values such as a sense of place, identity, and belonging, with its core lying in respecting individuals' cultural rights, emotional shared experiences, and creative practices (Wei Caihua et al., 2026)<sup>[4]</sup>. Therefore, integrating intangible cultural heritage into aesthetic education for college students not only expands educational resources but also serves as a vital pathway for fostering cultural identity and personal agency.

### (III) The Logical Connection Between Intangible Cultural Heritage and Aesthetic Education for University Students

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and aesthetic education for college students share profound alignment in terms of objectives, content, and methodologies. At the goal level, both aim at fostering holistic personal development and enhancing individual agency. Existing research indicates that integrating ICH into aesthetic education holds value not only in technical achievements but also in nurturing contemporary individuals' potential for self-awareness (Meng Fanxing et al., 2026)<sup>[1]</sup>. In terms of content, ICH encompasses diverse forms such as traditional music, dance, theater, fine arts, and craftsmanship, providing rich, life-oriented resources for university aesthetic education. ICH culture constitutes a composite system that transcends its physical manifestations, comprising five interwoven dimensions: material culture, institutional culture, behavioral culture, spiritual culture, and digital-intelligent culture, thereby offering multidimensional support for academic aesthetic education. Regarding methodology, ICH emphasizes embodied participation, contextual immersion, and community engagement, enabling it to transcend the limitations of traditional classroom-based approaches and facilitate a shift from passive observation to active participation, as well as from knowledge acquisition to experiential learning.

### 3. The Value of Integrating Intangible Cultural Heritage into College Students' Aesthetic Education

#### (1) Cultural Identity Construes Values: A Spiritual Journey from Being-in-itself to Being-for-itself

As the living gene of Chinese civilization, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) serves not only as a historical record of shared traditional culture among all ethnic groups but also as an emotional homeland where the Chinese nation thrives together. For college students, integrating ICH into aesthetic education primarily constitutes cultural identity cultivation. Following the developmental trajectory of the Chinese nation—from spontaneity to self-awareness to self-determination—ICH establishes the historical foundation and narrative framework for a shared spiritual home. During the "spontaneous" phase, ICH fosters a symbiotic basis for this shared spiritual home through temporal-spatial connections, the integration of the concrete and abstract, and resonance between self and others; in the self-awareness phase, it articulates value aspirations for this shared spiritual home through narratives rooted in political unity; and in the self-determination phase, it revitalizes cultural performances via digital technologies, advancing the construction of the Chinese nation's shared spiritual home across multiple dimensions.

Integrating intangible cultural heritage into college students' aesthetic education aims to guide them from passive inheritors of culture to conscious cultural identifiers, and ultimately to active cultural custodians. Through engagement with intangible cultural heritage practices such as paper-cutting, shadow puppetry, traditional opera, and seasonal folk customs, students can develop a profound understanding of Chinese culture through hands-on experience, cultivate a strong sense of local identity and cultural belonging, thereby strengthening their cultural confidence in the globalized context.

#### (2) The Value of Enhancing Aesthetic Literacy: A Return from Isolated to Embodied Experience

The core challenge of traditional aesthetic education lies in the separation between aesthetic experience and the lived world. The universality of intangible cultural heritage's aesthetic experience stems precisely from its bodily practice—the physical engagement with this heritage constitutes a broad form of aesthetic activity, endowing such experience with universal significance (Ji Zhongyang, 2026)<sup>[3]</sup>. The foundational approach to constructing aesthetic discourse around intangible cultural heritage aims to elucidate the unique "ethical-aesthetic" dimensions of folk traditions, while fully showcasing the diverse artistic expressions and aesthetic appreciation capacities of communities (Cai Dali, 2026)<sup>[2]</sup>. By participating in intangible cultural heritage activities—such as learning traditional crafts, experiencing seasonal customs, or engaging in folk dances—university students can restore their bodily perception diminished by digital lifestyles and develop comprehensive sensitivity to color, rhythm, form, and atmosphere through hands-on learning. This body-based aesthetic education effectively addresses the limitations of fragmented art education,

bringing aesthetics back into everyday life beyond museums and galleries.

#### (3) The Value of Cultivating Subjectivity: Personality Development from "Result" to "Process"

The cultivation of subjectivity constitutes the core value of intangible cultural heritage aesthetic education. The focus of intangible cultural heritage protection and transmission should shift from outcome-oriented to process-oriented approaches, by fully leveraging the immersive impact of conservation processes on individuals, thereby providing viable pathways for enhancing personal subjectivity and experiential development capacity (Meng Fanxing et al., 2026)<sup>[1]</sup>. In intangible cultural heritage practices, college students engage with authentic materials, adhere to traditional procedures, dialogue with inheritors, and collaborate within communities—a process that fosters their concentration, patience, creativity, and sense of responsibility. The relational, embodied, and everyday nature of intangible cultural heritage enhances perceptual sensitivity, enabling individuals to continually develop sensory experiences through interaction with the lived world. This cultivation of subjectivity is precisely the key to advancing university aesthetic education from "skill-based instruction" to "personality development education."

#### (4) Value Enrichment through Cultural Innovation: Stimulating Creativity from Inheritance to Transformation

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is not a static historical relic, but a vibrant cultural resource. ICH possesses functions of structural integration and environmental adaptability; its integrated system encompassing material culture, institutional culture, behavioral culture, spiritual culture, and digital-intelligent culture provides fertile ground for cultural innovation. For college students, ICH-based aesthetic education can stimulate their capacity for cultural innovation. AI-generated content is transforming the production of multimedia content and the interpretation of cultural resources, offering new technological support for contemporary expression of Guochao culture (Wang Haibo, 2026)<sup>[5]</sup>. By understanding the aesthetic principles of ICH, college students can employ modern design techniques, digital media, and artificial intelligence to creatively reinterpret ICH elements, fostering dialogue between tradition and modernity. Such innovative practices not only enhance students' professional competence but also cultivate their cultural sense of mission and creativity.

### 4. The Internal Mechanisms of Integrating Intangible Cultural Heritage into College Students' Aesthetic Education

The integration of intangible cultural heritage into college students' aesthetic education is not merely a simple addition of content, but rather achieves a profound transformation—from cultural awareness to personal internalization—through multi-dimensional and multi-level interactions. Based on literature review and logical analysis, this paper summarizes its underlying mechanisms across four dimensions: empowerment through cultural cognition, elevation through emotional identification, shaping through value guidance, and internalization through embodied practice.

(1) Cultural Awareness Empowerment: Constructing a Knowledge Map of Intangible Cultural Heritage Aesthetics

Cultural cognition forms the foundation of aesthetic education. Integrating intangible cultural heritage into college students' aesthetic education begins with systematic knowledge transmission, helping them establish a cognitive framework for understanding its aesthetics. This cognitive process encompasses three dimensions: first, historical cognition—understanding the historical origins, developmental trajectory, and geographical distribution of intangible cultural heritage items, as well as recognizing their fluidity and processual nature as living heritage; second, technical cognition—mastering the fundamental principles of craftsmanship, material properties, and production processes associated with these items, while appreciating the creative wisdom embedded within them; third, aesthetic cognition—comprehending the unique "ethical-aesthetic" significance of intangible cultural heritage, recognizing that its appreciation involves not merely observing the "work" but actively engaging with its creation process (Cai Dali, 2026)<sup>[2]</sup>.

Through this three-tiered cognitive framework, college students can overcome stereotypes about traditional culture and develop a professional understanding of intangible cultural heritage aesthetics. Such cognitive empowerment not only lays the foundation for subsequent aesthetic experiences but also enables them to form clear cultural judgments in a globalized context and define their own cultural identity.

(2) Sublimation of Emotional Identification: Activating the Resonance Mechanism of Cultural Memory

Emotional identification serves as the crucial bridge enabling aesthetic education to evolve from cognition to genuine recognition. Intangible cultural heritage carries rich cultural memories and emotional elements, capable of precisely resonating with college students' emotions. It represents the historical documentation of shared traditional cultures across ethnic groups and embodies the emotional homeland where the Chinese nation has coexisted through generations. When college students learn to make zongzi during the Dragon Boat Festival, compose Spring Festival couplets during the Lunar New Year, or experience moon-watching customs at Mid-Autumn Festival, these activities evoke not merely practical skill acquisition but also a profound interplay of familial bonds, national identity, and historical sentiment.

In university aesthetic education, ritualized intangible cultural heritage (ICH) experience activities should be employed to re-establish college students' sense of cultural belonging, enabling them to develop stable emotional identification within authentic cultural contexts. Research indicates that platforms redirect attention allocation through recommendation feeds and tag-based aggregation, shifting the communication logic from ritual cycles to platform-driven distribution mechanisms; meanwhile, standardized participation interfaces facilitate a transition in identity connection from innate affiliation to acquired identification. This finding suggests that ritualized ICH activities are essential for revitalizing students' innate sense of belonging in university aesthetic

education, fostering enduring emotional identification within authentic cultural environments. Once established, such emotional identification evolves into a lasting cultural belonging sentiment, serving as the core emotional foundation for college students' cultural confidence.

(3) Value Guidance and Shaping: Achieving the Internalization of Ethical Aesthetics

Value guidance constitutes the fundamental objective of aesthetic education. Intangible cultural heritage embodies rich ethical values and moral norms that align closely with the core socialist values. The core focus of constructing an aesthetic discourse on intangible cultural heritage lies in elucidating the distinctive "ethical-aesthetic" significance of folk traditions, providing a multidimensional portrayal of the folk relationships underlying these heritage practices, and revealing their holistic aesthetic wisdom encompassing knowledge, emotion, and intention (Cai Dali, 2026)<sup>[2]</sup>. This integration of ethics and aesthetics enables intangible cultural heritage-based aesthetic education to transcend mere skill transmission and achieve genuine value-oriented guidance.

Specifically, the craftsmanship spirit inherent in intangible cultural heritage embodies values of dedication and meticulousness; seasonal customs reflect ecological wisdom rooted in harmony between humanity and nature; while folk tales convey moral principles that promote virtue and goodness. Through integrated experiences encompassing knowledge, emotion, and intention, college students internalize these values and manifest them in their actions during intangible cultural heritage practices. This internalization occurs not through didactic instruction but through embodied participation and contextual engagement, resulting in greater stability and sustainability.

(4) Internalization through Embodied Practice: From Aesthetic Experience to Subjective Formation

Embodied practice serves as a comprehensive bridge connecting cognition, emotion, and values, constituting the fundamental distinction between intangible cultural heritage aesthetic education and traditional aesthetic education. The physical engagement with intangible cultural heritage represents a broad spectrum of aesthetic activities, where genuine pleasure derived from personal interaction forms the authentic source of its aesthetic value. For college students, embodied practice manifests at three levels: First, at the bodily perception level – restoring diminished bodily sensitivity through hands-on use of traditional tools, tactile engagement with natural materials, and appreciation of craft rhythms; Second, at the community interaction level – developing collaborative skills in communication, negotiation, and teamwork through participation in intangible cultural heritage communities; Third, at the innovative transformation level – integrating intangible cultural heritage elements with modern life while mastering traditional techniques to achieve creative adaptation. These progressive levels ultimately transform aesthetic experiences into subjective cultural identity formation, enabling students to genuinely experience their cultural agency and cultivate robust

cultural confidence through practical engagement with intangible cultural heritage.

### 5. Implementation Approaches for Integrating Intangible Cultural Heritage into College Students' Aesthetic Education

Based on the aforementioned value orientation and underlying mechanisms, integrating intangible cultural heritage into college students' aesthetic education requires establishing an implementation framework that involves coordinated efforts from universities, society, technology, and individuals.

- (1) At the university level: Reconstructing a three-tiered aesthetic education curriculum system encompassing cognition, experience, and creation

As the primary institution for talent cultivation, universities should systematically reform their intangible cultural heritage aesthetic education curriculum framework. The first stage involves the cognitive level, offering general education courses such as "Introduction to Intangible Cultural Heritage" and "Aesthetics of Intangible Cultural Heritage," which systematically cover its historical origins, cultural significance, and aesthetic principles to help students build a knowledge framework. The second stage focuses on the experiential level by establishing practical platforms like intangible cultural heritage workshops and laboratories, inviting inheritors onto campus to conduct immersive activities in paper-cutting, pottery, traditional music, and opera, thereby fostering emotional engagement through hands-on participation. The third stage addresses the creative level, encouraging students to apply their professional expertise to creatively transform intangible cultural heritage—through designing cultural products, producing themed short videos, or developing digital games—achieving a leap from preservation to innovation.

In course implementation, it is essential to overcome the limitations of traditional classroom instruction by adopting diverse approaches such as case-based teaching, situational simulation, and project-driven learning. Concurrently, efforts should be made to strengthen faculty development by recruiting professionals with backgrounds in folklore studies, art studies, and design studies, and inviting intangible cultural heritage inheritors to serve as part-time mentors, thereby establishing a dual-mentor system comprising academic mentors and heritage preservation mentors. Additionally, the concept of digital revitalization of intangible cultural heritage archives related to solar terms and folk customs can be integrated into curriculum resource development to enrich instructional materials (Jiang Lu et al., 2026)<sup>[6]</sup>.

- (2) Social Level: Establishing a diversified platform for collaborative conservation efforts

Intangible cultural heritage aesthetic education should not be confined to campuses; it requires the collaborative participation of society. Cultural heritage preservation is a systematic endeavor, with collaborative protection being its fundamental approach. Different cultural heritages and their respective stakeholders maintain a symbiotic and mutually beneficial relationship (Song

Junhua, 2026)<sup>[7]</sup>. Universities should actively establish partnerships with cultural centers, museums, intangible cultural heritage conservation centers, and communities to provide college students with diverse off-campus practical platforms.

Specifically, museums can organize thematic exhibitions and lectures on intangible cultural heritage for university students; communities can involve students in traditional festival celebrations, folk performances, and other cultural activities; cultural enterprises can develop programs such as traditional craft experiences and folk culture study tours, providing market-oriented practical opportunities for students. Through the collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders, university students can experience the contemporary vitality of intangible cultural heritage in authentic social contexts, understand its complexity and systemic nature of preservation, and cultivate their sense of social responsibility and cultural mission.

- (3) Technical Dimension: Exploring Innovative Communication Approaches for Digital Activation

Digital technology has opened up new possibilities for intangible cultural heritage aesthetic education. The rise of digital and intelligent technologies is reshaping the ecosystem of cultural dissemination, while the integration of big data, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality has created opportunities for cross-cultural transmission of intangible cultural heritage. In university aesthetic education, it is essential to actively explore ways to integrate digital technology with intangible cultural heritage education.

First, by leveraging virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies, digital museums and virtual experience spaces for intangible cultural heritage can be established, enabling students to immerse themselves in historical settings and production techniques of this heritage; second, utilizing new media platforms such as short videos and live streaming, online teaching and interactive dissemination on intangible cultural heritage themes can be conducted, aligning with college students' media consumption habits; third, the application of artificial intelligence-generated content (AIGC) in innovative design of intangible cultural heritage should be explored, guiding students to employ intelligent tools for modernizing heritage elements (Wang Haibo, 2026)<sup>[5]</sup>. It is important to note that the digitization process must adhere to ethical standards, establish informed consent mechanisms, and respect the cultural rights of intangible cultural heritage inheritors (Nie Xin, 2026)<sup>[8]</sup>.

- (4) At the individual level: Fostering college students' active participation

As the primary agents of aesthetic education, college students' proactive engagement is paramount. The core value of integrating intangible cultural heritage into aesthetic education lies in fostering contemporary individuals' sense of agency; therefore, institutional design and cultural guidance should be employed to stimulate students' initiative in participating in such educational initiatives.

On one hand, college students are encouraged to establish student organizations such as intangible cultural heritage clubs and

traditional handicraft associations to independently conduct research, preservation, and innovation activities related to intangible cultural heritage; on the other hand, intangible cultural heritage practices are incorporated into credit recognition and comprehensive quality evaluation systems, with measures like establishing intangible cultural heritage innovation projects and organizing design competitions to enhance student participation enthusiasm. More importantly, students should be guided to develop cultural awareness, recognize that preserving China's excellent traditional culture is a historical responsibility for contemporary youth, abandon utilitarian tendencies, genuinely embrace intangible cultural heritage from within, and become dedicated inheritors and active promoters of traditional culture.

## 6. Conclusion and Prospects

This study, through a systematic examination of the intrinsic connections between intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and aesthetic education for college students, draws the following conclusions: ICH, with its aesthetic characteristics of embodiment, relationality, and everyday relevance, provides a vital resource for addressing the challenges of "segregated art" in university aesthetic education; integrating ICH into student aesthetic education offers multiple benefits, including cultural identity construction, enhancement of aesthetic literacy, cultivation of subjectivity, and empowerment for cultural innovation; its mechanisms of action encompass four dimensions: cultural cognitive empowerment, elevation of emotional identification, value-oriented guidance, and internalization through embodied practice; implementation strategies should cover four aspects: restructuring university curriculum systems, establishing social collaboration platforms, leveraging digital technologies, and fostering individual agency.

Future research can be further deepened in the following aspects: First, conducting qualitative studies through in-depth interviews and case follow-ups to accurately understand the cognitive differences and demand characteristics of college students from various disciplines and regions regarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) aesthetic education; second, exploring an evaluation indicator system for the effectiveness of ICH aesthetic education and establishing a scientific assessment mechanism for its outcomes; third, strengthening international comparative studies by drawing on advanced experiences abroad in integrating cultural heritage with aesthetic education, while promoting the global dissemination of China's ICH aesthetic education. Only by fully leveraging the educational function of ICH can we truly achieve a

profound transformation of university aesthetic education from skill-based instruction to character-oriented cultivation, nurturing new generations with strong cultural confidence and high aesthetic literacy.

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