



Research Article

Value Construction and Contemporary Transformation of Huizhou Lacquer Art from the Perspective of Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection

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Abstract: In the context of China's efforts to protect intangible cultural heritage and revitalize regional culture, Huizhou lacquer art faces pressing challenges. It serves as an important carrier of Huizhou culture. Its value reconstruction and modern transformation require both theoretical reflection and practical exploration. This study adopts an interpretivist approach. The research relies on secondary data analysis. The study uses existing literature and historical documents. It also draws on research materials from design, economics, and sociology.

The research systematically reviews the historical development of Huizhou lacquer art. It examines its cultural meanings and technical features. Through this approach, the study aims to clarify the contemporary significance of Huizhou lacquer art and its potential paths for renewal. It further analyzes the limitations of current research in value positioning and industrialization paths. By constructing a niche value evaluation system for Huizhou lacquer art, this study reveals the influence mechanism of "cultural connotation → transformation path → market acceptance" and proposes modern transformation strategies that balance cultural authenticity and contemporary adaptability. The research aims to provide theoretical support and practical paradigms for the protection and innovation of local ICH and traditional crafts.



Keywords: ICH protection, Huizhou Lacquer Art, Value construction, Modern transformation

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Intangible cultural heritage, as a living inheritance of human civilization, serves as the core carrier of regional cultural identity (Hao et al., 2024). The Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage issued by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council clearly proposes to “connect ICH with modern life, promote the revitalization of traditional crafts, and construct a contemporary value system for traditional crafts” (Fang et al., 2022).

Zhang (2024) points out that Huizhou lacquer art originated in the Tang and Song dynasties. The art form reached its peak during the Ming and Qing dynasties. It is well known for techniques such as luodian (mother-of-pearl inlay) and xipiqi (rhinoceros skin lacquer). These techniques give Huizhou lacquer art an important place in the history of Chinese lacquer art. Huizhou lacquer art acts as a material carrier of Huizhou culture. Its vessel forms and decorative systems reflect clan ethics, commercial wisdom, and aesthetic ideals. Its creative principle emphasizes refined materials and skilled craftsmanship. Its artistic language highlights the balance between emptiness and reality. Together, these features form a distinctive cultural code. However, modernization presents serious challenges. Huizhou lacquer art now faces gaps in inheritance, a shrinking market, and limited innovation. These issues raise concerns about how well its traditional value system can adapt to contemporary social needs.

1.2. Problem Statement

Dong (2021) argues that current research on Huizhou lacquer art mainly concentrates on craftsmanship and product innovation. Many studies overlook a systematic analysis of its value system and historical development. Researchers often



discuss cultural, symbolic, aesthetic, or practical values separately. This approach ignores the interaction between material objects and human practices. Such fragmentation leads to unclear value positioning and limits further development.

Huizhou lacquer art also faces an uncertain status. It stands between traditional heritage and modern art. It shifts between practical function and aesthetic appreciation. Market imbalance further complicates its situation. In the context of globalization and intangible cultural heritage protection, scholars need to clarify its value system.

1.3. Research Objectives

1.This study examines the different value components of Anhui lacquer art across its historical development. It analyzes how these values interact and influence one another.

2.This study uses the framework of intangible cultural heritage protection. It explores practical pathways to support the application of Anhui lacquer art in cultural industries and economic development.

1.4. Significance of the Study

Current academic research on Huizhou lacquer art mainly focuses on technical classification and artifact-based studies. This research often overlooks a systematic discussion of its value position within the Huizhou cultural ecosystem. Based on the policy background of “productive protection”, this study explores the “dual innovation” (creative transformation and innovative development) paths by deconstructing the niche value of Huizhou lacquer art, promoting its integration and innovation with the cultural and creative industries. This not only activates the economic value of traditional crafts to boost the upgrading of local cultural industries but also realizes a positive interaction between ICH protection and people’s livelihood improvement through the synergy of skill inheritance and industrial development.

2. Literature review



2.1. China Research Status

2.1.1 Historical Origin Research

Preliminary achievements have been made in sorting out the historical context of Huizhou lacquer art. Niu (2020) systematically combed its development process in *Eclectic and Luminous: Appreciation of Huizhou Lacquer Art in the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, pointing out that the rise of Huizhou lacquer art was closely related to the prosperity of Huizhou merchants. Huizhou merchants not only promoted the industrialization of lacquer art through commercial networks but also injected regional cultural aesthetics into artifact creation, enabling techniques such as *luodian* and *xipiqi* to reach their peak during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Additionally, academic circles generally believe that Huizhou lacquer art integrated the characteristics of lacquer art from Zhejiang and Fujian during its development, forming an “eclectic yet unique” technical system (Sun, 2020).

2.1.2 Cultural Value Research

Scholars mostly interpret the connotation of Huizhou lacquer art from the perspectives of aesthetics and cultural symbols. Sun and Sheng (2014) proposed the material beauty is reflected in the gentle luster and texture of natural raw lacquer; craftsmanship beauty is demonstrated through complex techniques such as painting, polishing, and inlaying; and artistic conception beauty originates from the “interplay between emptiness and reality” concept shared with Huizhou painting and garden art. He emphasized that Huizhou lacquer art is not only a practical utensil but also a “materialized expression of the spiritual world of Huizhou people”, carrying the ethical concept of “respecting ancestors and uniting clans” and the cultural pursuit of “being merchants yet valuing Confucianism”.

2.1.3 Industrialization Research

With the advancement of productive protection of ICH, industrialization research has become a hotspot. Through enterprise surveys, Li and Zhang (2020) pointed out



that Huizhou lacquer art industrialization faces the dilemma of “single product category and vague market positioning”. They suggested improving added value through “personalized customization + high-end market” and promoting the integration of lacquer art with cultural tourism to create experiential consumption scenarios. Focusing on technological innovation, Li (2022) proposed application paths for digital technology: optimizing paint mixing quality through intelligent painting systems and shortening the design cycle with 3D modeling to achieve efficient integration of “traditional techniques + modern technology”.

2.2. International Research Status

Foreign research directly focusing on Huizhou lacquer art is scarce, but studies on lacquer art in similar cultural contexts provide reference value. South Korean scholar Jang (2016) analyzed Korean lacquer art in the context of cultural inheritance in *Lacquer as Adhesive: Its Historical Value and Modern Utilization*, emphasizing its characteristic of “coexistence of practicality and aesthetics”, which provides a cross-cultural perspective for exploring the cultural connotation of Huizhou lacquer art.

Research on the modern transformation of Japanese lacquer art is more instructive. Yanagi (2011) concept of the “Mingei Movement” proposed in *The Beauty of Everyday Things* advocates that “crafts should return to daily life”, influencing the transformation of Japanese lacquer art from “aristocratic art” to “mass consumption”. Dong (2021) further pointed out Japan has realized mass production and high-end positioning of lacquer art through the path of “standardization of traditional techniques + personalization of modern design”, which provides important enlightenment for the industrialization path of Huizhou lacquer art.

In terms of international communication, American scholar Patricia Graham (2014) analyzed the international promotion strategies of Japanese lacquer art in *Japanese Design: Art, Aesthetics & Culture*, emphasizing the importance of “cross-cultural dialogue”—transforming regional cultural symbols into a global aesthetic language through international exhibitions and design exchanges. This provides methodological reference for the international communication of Huizhou lacquer art.



2.3. Literature Gap

Although existing studies have made progress in historical context and cultural connotation, there are still three limitations: first, research objects focus on traditional works and inheritors, with insufficient attention to contemporary lacquer art innovation practices; second, research methods are dominated by literature analysis and case studies, lacking empirical data support and interdisciplinary integration; third, research perspectives are biased towards arts and crafts and cultural inheritance, with inadequate exploration of industrialization paths from an economic perspective and social value from a sociological perspective. Based on this, this study takes “value construction” as the core to build an interdisciplinary research framework, filling the existing research gaps.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in interpretivism and systems theory to investigate the value system of Huizhou Lacquer Art. Interpretivism allows for active engagement with the socio-cultural and historical dimensions of the craft, while systems theory facilitates the analysis of dynamic interactions between value subjects (e.g., artisans, consumers) and value objects (the lacquer art itself). The study examines these values through human practice and cognitive activity. This approach builds a holistic and nuanced understanding of the value system of Huizhou lacquer art. The findings aim to support its preservation and sustainable development as an intangible cultural heritage.

3.2. Data Collection

This study uses secondary data as its main source. The data include academic articles, books, reports, and case studies on intangible cultural heritage protection and traditional craft preservation. The study selects secondary data because these sources offer wide-ranging research findings, policy frameworks, and theoretical views. These



materials help explain the current situation of Huizhou lacquer art preservation. Secondary sources also provide historical, theoretical, and cultural knowledge. This approach avoids practical limits such as time pressure and limited access to artisans.

3.3. Study Sample

This research uses a case study method. The study focuses on Huizhou lacquer art as a form of traditional Chinese craftsmanship under preservation pressure. And selects Huizhou lacquer art because of its long history and its status as recognized intangible cultural heritage. The case study examines cultural, social, and economic factors that shape preservation strategies. This focused approach allows the study to explore how value-based protection frameworks can be developed and applied in a sustainable way.

3.4. Data Analysis

The study analyzed the collected secondary data through thematic analysis. This method is a qualitative research approach. It helps identify and examine repeated patterns in textual data. Thematic analysis fits this study because it allows a clear and structured review of the literature on Huizhou lacquer art preservation. The analysis focuses on key themes and ideas found in the texts. The research objectives guide the theme selection. The study examines historical, artistic, social, and economic values in Huizhou lacquer art.

4. Research Results

4.1. The Evolution and Layering of Value in Historical Context

The value of Anhui lacquer art developed over a long historical process. Different value elements formed and interacted over time. Material value stands as its basic component. This value comes from physical properties and their advanced uses. People already recognized this value in ancient times and during the Western Zhou dynasty. During the period of the Hundred Schools of Philosophy, philosophical



thought flourished. Practical, ritual, and aesthetic values worked together. This interaction pushed lacquer craftsmanship forward from the Warring States period to the Han dynasty. From the Tang to the Qing dynasties, Anhui lacquer art continued to grow. Craft techniques and material value shaped its forms and uses. Lacquer objects served the court and the elite for aesthetic enjoyment. They also met religious needs and daily use in civil society. Some objects developed into tools for scholars. Among merchants, lacquerware showed social status. Among ordinary people, lacquerware mainly appeared in rituals of birth and death. By the late Ming and early Qing periods, social elites promoted lacquer art. As a result, Chinese lacquer art became a strong symbol of Eastern culture.

4.2. Modern Transformation and the Disruption of the Value System

In the late Qing dynasty, imperial power weakened. Commercial activity became more important. As a result, the commercial value of lacquer art increased. During this period, the state began to intervene in lacquer art production and trade. The government gradually moved away from the traditional craftsmen registry system. The traditional value of lacquer art weakened under the influence of the overall financial environment and modern industrial production during the late Qing and Republican periods. From the founding of the People's Republic of China to the period before the reform and opening-up, Anhui lacquer art transitioned from its original industrial form to a state-owned factory model integrated with state capital. During this process, lacquer art was classified as a light industry responsible for earning foreign exchange, leading to the hollowing out of craftsmanship and material value. This, in turn, undermined its practical and aesthetic value, severely damaging the overall value system of lacquer art.

4.3. Challenges and Adjustments in the Contemporary

Marketization Process

From the reform and opening-up to the post-2000 era, lacquer art underwent a market-driven reorganization of its commercial value. Production shifted from large-scale state-owned labor-intensive operations to individual and small



workshop-based enterprises. Following the gradual withdrawal of state-owned lacquer art assets, state capital began limited intervention in the industry through measures such as intangible cultural heritage support. The lacquer art industry went through an uneven revival. Private lacquer art enterprises reached a peak in workforce size and output value in 2013. After 2018, both figures began to decline.

5. Discussion

The core value of Anhui lacquer art lies in the irreplaceability of natural lacquer. As a medium of craftsmanship and a material cultural carrier that runs through history, the physical properties and practical applications of natural lacquer constitute the essence of this art form. Although chemical paint may mimic its surface effect, it cannot convey the deeper cultural significance contained within it. From a historical perspective, the value system of lacquer art has evolved dynamically: from the fusion of early practical and ceremonial functions, to the multifaceted expression of serving religion, political power, and literati aesthetics, and to the value imbalance faced under the impact of modern industrialization. In the era of planned economy, excessive emphasis on economic function led to the erosion of its artistic value, but today, it is striving to solve the problem of ambiguous positioning between tradition and modernity, function and aesthetics. These challenges highlight the importance of maintaining the integrity of its overall value system.

To achieve sustainable development, a multidimensional revitalization approach should be established: at the policy level, specialized protection plans should be formulated to incorporate lacquer art into local cultural development strategies; At the industry level, a market system based on value cognition should be established to develop products that combine cultural significance with modern needs; At the societal level, public awareness should be raised through educational dissemination. The dissemination of lacquer art must go beyond simple technology and encompass its complete value ecosystem, including the organic unity of materials, craftsmanship, aesthetics, and social significance. This value system perspective not only provides a framework for the protection of lacquer art, but also serves as a reference for the live transmission of other intangible cultural heritage projects, exploring practical ways to protect cultural uniqueness and contemporary vitality in the context of globalization.



6. Conclusion

The value construction of Huizhou lacquer art is not only necessary for the inheritance of skills, but also an important way for regional cultural revitalization. This study reveals the multidimensional value of Huizhou lacquer art in culture, economy, and society through empirical research, and constructs a complete “evaluation” system. The innovation of this study lies in breaking the disciplinary limitations of traditional craft research and establishing a niche value analysis framework; Incorporate cultural authenticity and market adaptability into a unified research scope, and propose actionable transformation strategies. Future research can be further expanded by conducting long-term tracking studies on the implementation effects of transformation strategies; The second is to explore the dialogue mechanism between Huizhou lacquer art and international lacquer art, and promote their value recognition in the global cultural context. Through continuous theoretical innovation and practical exploration, Huizhou lacquer art has been revitalized in contemporary society, becoming a cultural link connecting tradition and modernity.

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