

**Research Article****Value Construction and Contemporary Transformation of Huizhou Lacquer Art from the Perspective of Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection**Hongliang Zhang<sup>1</sup>, Ramin Hajianfard<sup>1,\*</sup><sup>1</sup>Faculty of Creative Industries, City University Malaysia, Petaling Jaya 46100, Malaysia\*Correspondence: Ramin Hajianfard, [ramin.hajianfard@city.edu.my](mailto:ramin.hajianfard@city.edu.my)

© The Author(s) 2026.

This article is published by Wisdom Academic Press Ltd. under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. The license permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution, and reproduction in any medium or format, provided that appropriate credit is given to the original author(s) and the source, a link to the license is supplied, and any modifications are indicated. Unless otherwise stated, all images and third-party materials included in this article are also covered by the same license. For any material not covered by this license, if the intended use is neither permitted by applicable law nor allowed under the license terms, direct permission must be obtained from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this license, please visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

---

**Abstract**

Under the framework of China trying to preserve intangible cultural heritage and reinvigorate the local culture, Huizhou lacquer art is faced with serious challenges. It is one of the significant bearers of the Huizhou culture. Its value reconstruction and modernization need both theoretical consideration and practical experiments. The research applies an interpretivist perspective. The study is based on the analysis of secondary data. The paper has made use of available literature and historical records. It also utilizes the work done in the areas of design, economics and sociology.

The systematic review presented in the research is on the historical evolution of Huizhou lacquer art. Its cultural implications and techniques are discussed within it. With this method, the paper will try to explain the modern-day importance of Huizhou lacquer art and its possible lines of rejuvenation. It also scrutinizes the shortcomings of existing studies related to value positioning and industrialization processes. This paper, based on the construction of a niche value evaluation system of Huizhou lacquer art, discloses the mechanism of influence of cultural connotation, transformation path and market acceptance, and offers modern strategies of transformation that can be balanced with cultural authenticity and modern adaptability. The research will offer both theoretical and practical paradigms of 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).

As Zhang (2024) notes, Huizhou lacquer art was born in the era of the Tang and Song dynasties. The art form peaked in the Ming and Qing dynasties. It is famous with the methods of luodian (mother-of-pearl inlay) and xipiqi (rhinoceros skin lacquer). These methods make Huizhou lacquer art play an important role in the history of Chinese lacquer art. Huizhou lacquer art serves as a carrier of materiality of Huizhou culture. Its vessel structures and decoration systems are a manifestation of clan morality and commercial wisdom and aesthetic values. It focuses on the principle of fine materials and skillful workmanship. Its artistic language expresses the harmony of emptiness and reality. The sum of all these qualities makes up a unique cultural code. Nevertheless, modernization poses a significant challenge. There are gaps in inheritance, a loss of market, and a lack of innovation in the modern-day Huizhou lacquer art. Such problems lead to uncertainty of whether its age-old value system will be able to meet the demands of the current society.

## 1.2. Problem Statement

According to Dong (2021), the existing studies of Huizhou lacquer art are predominantly focused on craftsmanship and innovation of products. Most of the articles disregard the systematic evaluation of its value system and historical evolution. Scholars tend to address cultural, symbolic, aesthetic or functional values independently. There is no consideration of the interrelation of material things with human activities. The result of such fragmentation is the absence of clear value positioning and it prevents further development.

The Huizhou lacquer art is in a state of uncertainty as well. Its position is between the traditional heritage and the modern art. It is changing between a useful purpose and an artistic pleasure. The market instability only adds to its predicament. It is within the framework of globalization and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage that researchers should define its system of values.

### **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**

The current academic literature on Huizhou lacquer art is largely devoted to the technical classification and the study of artifacts. The study often neglects a comprehensive analysis of its value place in the ecosystem of Huizhou culture. According to the policy context of the productive protection, this paper aims to examine the ways of the dual innovation (creative transformation and innovative development), by unpacking the niche value of Huizhou lacquer art and facilitating its penetration into the cultural and creative sectors as well as its innovation. It is not only an activation of the economic value of the old crafts to help increase the level of the local cultural industries but it also enables the achievement of a positive relationship between the ICH protection and the improvement of people livelihood via the synergy of skill inheritance and industrial development.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. China Research Status**

#### **2.1.1. Historical Origin Research**

Initial steps toward establishing the historical background of Hui zhou lacquer art have been undertaken. In the *Eclectic and Luminous: Appreciation of Huizhou Lacquer Art in the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, Niu (2020) has thoroughly examined the developmental stages of this art form and stated that the development of the lacquer art of Huizhou had a strong connection with the economic success of the Huizhou merchant class. Besides commercializing lacquer art by commercializing lacquer art itself, Huizhou merchants also brought into the process of making artifacts the regional cultural aesthetics which led to the peak of methods like luodian and xipiqi in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Moreover, it is commonly accepted in academic circles that while developing the features of lacquer art of

Zhejiang and Fujian were combined in the process of creating Huizhou lacquer art, an eclectic but unique technical system was created (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

Though the current research has advanced in the historical background and cultural meaning, there are three drawbacks that remain: firstly, research subjects are placed on the traditional pieces and their creators, and do not pay enough attention to modern practice of lacquer art innovation; secondly, research techniques are characterized by literature-based analysis and case studies, which are not supported by empirical data and interdisciplinary research; thirdly, research views are inclined to arts and crafts and cultural heritage, and the industrialization road is not explored sufficiently under the angle of economics and social worth is not examined through the lens of sociology. This is why this paper uses the concept of value construction as the main component of an interdisciplinary research framework to fill the gaps in the current research.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Method

The research design used in this study is qualitative based on the interpretivism and systems theory that is used to explore the value system of Huizhou Lacquer Art. Interpretivism can be actively engaged with socio-cultural and historical aspects of the craft whereas systems theory can be used to analyse dynamic relationships between value subjects



(artisans, consumers etc.) and value objects (lacquer art). The research considers these values in terms of human practice and cognitive activity. This method helps to develop a comprehensive and subtle picture of the value system of Huizhou lacquer art. The results obtained are intended to aid in its maintenance and conservation as an intangible cultural property.

### **3.2. Data Collection**

The secondary data are adopted as the primary source of information in this study. The data consist of academic articles, books, reports, and case studies that address both the protection of intangible cultural heritage and the preservation of traditional crafts. Secondary data is chosen by the study because such sources present a broad range of research results, policy directions, and theoretical positions. These materials can be used to elucidate the current position of Huizhou lacquer art preservation. Secondary sources are also useful in providing a historical, theoretical, and cultural insight. Such approach would not involve practical constraints i.e. time constraints or limited contact with artisans.

### **3.3. Study Sample**

The research will be carried out in a form of a case study. The research is based on the preservation pressure of Huizhou lacquer art as a kind of traditional Chinese craftsmanship. And it chooses Huizhou lacquer art due to its rich history and the fact that it is an acknowledged intangible cultural heritage. The case study considers cultural, social, and economic influences impacting preservation policies. It is this particular strategy that will enable the research to determine what mechanisms of protecting values may be created and implemented in a sustainable manner.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

The paper examined the secondary data gathered according to thematic analysis. It is one of the approaches to qualitative research. It assists in identifying and analyzing recurring patterns in the textual data. The thematic analysis is suitable in this research as it enables a clear and organized review of the literature on preserving Huizhou lacquer art. The themes and ideas that are central to the analysis are identified and discussed. Research goals and objectives determine the choice of the theme. The research studies the value of history, art, society, and economy in the context of Huizhou lacquer art.

## **4. Research Results**

### **4.1. The Evolution and Layering of Value in Historical Context**

Anhui lacquer art has a long history of development. Various value aspects were created and evolved over time. The material value is the first element of it. This value is derived by physical properties and their advanced applications. This value was known to man both in ancient times and in the Western Zhou dynasty. The Hundred Schools of Thought saw the flourishing of philosophical thought. The practical, ritualistic and aesthetic values combined. This interaction propelled the advancement of lacquer craftsmanship between the Warring States and the Han dynasty. Since the Tang dynasty and the Qing dynasty, Anhui lacquer art kept developing. Its shapes and functions were defined by craft methods and material value. Lacquer objects were used by the court and the elite to appreciate them aesthetically. There were also those that fulfilled their religious demands and everyday life in the civil society. Other objects transformed to be scholar tools. Among merchants, lacquerware was a sign of social status. In the commoners, lacquerware was mostly used in the rituals of birth and death. Social elites encouraged the spread of lacquer art in the late Ming and early Qing periods. Consequently, Chinese lacquer art became one of the most powerful symbols of Eastern culture.

### **4.2. Modern Transformation and the Disruption of the Value System**

At the end of the Qing dynasty, imperial authority was declining. Commerce now assumed greater significance. Consequently, the business value of lacquer art rose. In this era, the state started playing a role in the production and trade of lacquer art. The government slowly phased out the traditional craftsmen registry system. The traditional importance of the lacquer art had been diminished due to the general economic condition and modern industrialisation throughout the late Qing and Republican eras. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China up until the pre-reform and opening-up stage, Anhui lacquer art had already shifted from its initial industrial style to a state-owned factory style, which combined with state capital. This in turn resulted in the hollowing out of both craftsmanship and material value as lacquer art was grouped into a light industry to earn foreign exchange. This also destroyed its practical and aesthetic worth, which caused great harm to the overall worth structure of lacquer art.

### **4.3. Challenges and Adjustments in the Contemporary Marketization Process**

Since the reform and opening-up, the commercial value of lacquer art was reorganized in the market. Large-scale labor-intensive manufacturing by state-owned industries was replaced by individual and small-scale workshops. With the gradual disappearance of the state-owned lacquer art properties, state capital started to intervene in the sector with some restrictions including supporting the intangible cultural heritage. Lacquer art industry experienced an irregular recovery. In 2013, private lacquer art companies peaked in terms of the number of employees and the value of production. Since 2018, there has been a reduction in numbers in both.

## 5. Discussion

The most important attribute of Anhui lacquer art is that natural lacquer cannot be replaced by anything else. Being both an art form and a material culture object throughout history, the physical nature and functionality of natural lacquer are the fundamentals of this art form. Even though chemical paint can match its surface appearance, it cannot express the underlying cultural meaning inside it. In terms of history, the value system of lacquer art has developed dynamically: starting with the combination of initial practical and ritualistic purposes, to the complex manifestation of religion, political authority, and the literati aesthetic, and to the value imbalance experienced due to the effects of modern industrialization. In the time of the planned economy, it had been focused too much on its economic role, which caused depreciation of its artistic value, but nowadays, it tries to resolve the issue of blurry status between traditionalism and modernism, functionality and beauty. Such problems underscore the significance of ensuring the integrity of its entire value system.

In order to ensure the sustainable development, there should be a multidimensional revitalization strategy: at the policy level, specific protection programs are required to integrate lacquer art into the local cultural development policies; At the industry level, a market system with the concept of value cognition needs to be developed in order to produce products that are culturally important and up to date; At the societal level, the education dissemination should be used to increase the level of public awareness. The spread of lacquer art should be extended beyond the mere technology and embrace the entire value ecosystem, which is the organic unity of materials, crafts skills, aesthetics, and social values. Such a value system approach will not merely offer an outline of how the preservation of lacquer art can be accomplished, but will act as a basis of the live broadcast of other intangible cultural heritage projects and will examine practical methods of preserving cultural distinctiveness and current dynamism within the global setting.



## 6. Conclusion

The value construction of Huizhou lacquer art is not just needed to pass on the skill, but also one of the essential means of revitalizing regional culture. Empirical studies in this paper will reveal how multidimensional the value of Huizhou lacquer art in culture, economy, and society is, and will create a fully developed evaluation system. The novelty of this paper is that it will overcome the constraints of traditional craft research in terms of disciplines and will develop a niche value analysis model; It should include both cultural authenticity and market responsiveness as a single research focus, and suggest workable transformation measures. Long-term tracking investigations of the implementation effects of transformation strategies can also be done to further extend future research. The second is to investigate the dialogue process between Huizhou lacquer art and international lacquer art, and facilitate their value realization in the global cultural environment. With the help of constant theoretical renovation and practical research, the Huizhou lacquer art has revived in modern-day society and remains as a cultural bridge between the old and the new.

---

### Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

---

### Author contributions

Not applicable.

---

### Funding

Not applicable.

---

### Data Availability

No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

---

### Declarations

#### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no Conflict of interest.

#### Ethics approval

Not applicable.

#### Consent to participate

Not applicable.

**Consent for publication**

All authors have given their consent.

**Additional information**

---

**Received:** 3 December 2025

**Accepted:** 25 December 2025

**Published online:** 21 March 2026

**Publisher's Note**

Wisdom Academic Press Ltd. remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

## Works Cited

- Dong, Wenying, and Yien Geng. "Life Aesthetics in Japanese Civil Lacquerware and Its Enlightenment to Chinese Traditional Handicrafts." *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research/Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, Jan. 2021, pp. 294–97, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210609.059>.
- Fang, Qunli, and Zao Li. "Cultural Ecology Cognition and Heritage Value of Huizhou Traditional Villages." *Heliyon*, vol. 8, no. 12, 2022, p. e12627, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e12627>.
- Hao, Yunhong, et al. "Damage and Restoration Technology of Historic Buildings of Brick and Wood Structures: A Review." *Heritage Science*, vol. 12, no. 1, Springer Science+Business Media, 2024, p. 301, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40494-024-01422-y>.
- Jang, Sung Yoon. "Lacquer as Adhesive : Its Historical Value and Modern Utilization." *Korean Journal of Heritage: History & Science*, vol. 49, no. 4, National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, 2016, pp. 114–25, <https://doi.org/10.22755/kjchs.2016.49.4.114>.
- Li, Danhua. "A Brief Discussion on Incorporating Lacquer Craft Products into Modern Design Life." *Tian Gong: A Journal on Crafts and Design*, no. 22, 2022, pp. 66–68. (In Chinese)
- Li, Yang, and Jun Zhang. "The Inheritance and Development of Huizhou Lacquerware Making Techniques." *Industrial Innovation*, no. 10, 2020, pp. 144–46. (In Chinese)
- Niu, Xiaoxue. "Drawing on Diverse Sources: The Luminous Radiance of Lacquer: Appreciating Ming and Qing Huizhou Lacquer Art." *Collector*, no. 12, 2020, pp. 61–64. (In Chinese)
- Patricia Jane Graham. *Japanese Design : An Illustrated Guide to Art, Architecture and Aesthetics in Japan*. Tuttle Publishing, 2021.
- Sun, Fuliang, and Wei Shu. "Research on the Innovative Approach of Intergrowth of Xipi Lacquer Art in Huizhou and Modern Product Design." *E3S Web of Conferences*, edited by A. Ghadouani and F. Wu, vol. 179, 2020, p. 02069, <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202017902069>.
- Sun, Xin, and Rong Sheng. "A Brief Discussion on the Beauty of Huizhou Lacquer Art." *Art Education Research*, no. 18, 2014, p. 31. (In Chinese)
- Yanagi, Sōetsu. *Japanese Handicrafts*. Translated by Lu Zhang, 2nd ed., Guangxi Normal University Press, 2011. (In Chinese)



Zhang, Wenxin, and Fauzi Naeim Mohamed. “Probe into the Symbolic Significance of Cultural Symbols and Traditional Crafts of Huizhou Lacquerware.” *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2024, pp. 138–41, <https://doi.org/10.54097/bvck6k10>.