

# Research on the Protection and Inheritance of the Traditional Handicraft Techniques and Innovative Design under the Vision of Intangible Cultural Heritage—Taking Rongchang Pottery as a Case Study

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**Abstract:** Intangible cultural heritage(ICH) is not only the crystallization of civilization and the wisdom of the Chinese nation, but it also the precious wealth shared by all mankind. With the development of Chinese excellent traditional culture inheritance of project implementation, to excavate and sort, as well as to inherit and protect the ICH is a common academic topic, but, based on the vision of ICH, and around the traditional making skill's creative transformation and innovative development research is relatively few and lack of research on the key force of creative design driving the protection and inheritance of ICH. This paper ,taking Chongqing Rongchang Pottery as a case study, focus on the pottery making skills and the craft inheritance and creative development. The author points out that the protection and inheritance of ICH is not only focus on multimodal interaction among people, things and the spatial-temporal landscape, but also to focus on the creative design and the power of science and technology. To explore the connection point of traditional culture and modern life, it will promote the preservation, inheritance, creative transformation and innovative development of ICH in an all-round way.

**Keywords:** Rongchang pottery, intangible cultural heritage, protection and inheritance, creative design

## 1. Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage not only embodies the quintessence of the excellent traditional Chinese culture, but also reflects the fruit of the wisdom and civilization of the Chinese nation. Since the CPC's 18th National Congress, the State has attached great importance to the protection and inheritance of ICH, and increased support for ICH inheritors. In 2021, the outline of the "14th Five-Year Plan" further put forward a new strategic plan for "improving the system of intangible cultural heritage protection and inheritance, and strengthening the protection and inheritance of excellent traditional handicrafts of all ethnic groups", demanding in-depth implementation of the project to promote the inheritance and development of Chinese excellent traditional culture, and comprehensively promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese excellent traditional culture. However, at present, the research on the protection and inheritance of ICH in academic circles mostly focuses on the identification of inheritors, <sup>[1]</sup> training and intergenerational inheritance, <sup>[2]</sup> ICH aesthetics, <sup>[3]</sup> production process and industrial development, <sup>[4]</sup> as well as the use of text, video and digital multimedia forms of organizing the protection of ICH resources and other aspects of the development.<sup>[5]</sup> They neglected the research and exploration on the creative transformation and innovative development of ICH, which makes the protection and inheritance of ICH lack overall planning and humanistic frontier, resulting in the gradual alienation of traditional culture from modern life, and even a disconnection phenomenon.

Therefore, this paper takes Chongqing Rongchang pottery as a case study, and mainly focuses on how to alleviate the loss of ICH talents and skills through creative design, drive the protection and inheritance of ICH and creative transformation and development, and realize the theory and practice of effective connection between ICH protection and creative development. This paper aims to provide

reference for the discipline construction of ICH, and the study of ICH protection and inheritance.

## 2. Overview of the history and production process of Rongchang pottery

China is one of the first countries in the world to invent the ceramics. However, Chongqing Rongchang is the “Ceramic Capital of Western China”, which located at the golden junction of Sichuan, Guizhou and Chongqing. Rongchang is the meeting point of Ba Shu, Hakka and immigrant cultures, and is rich in tangible cultural heritage and ICH. At present, Rongchang has recognized more than 120 ICH product lists, and owns three national ICH lists of folding fan, summer cloth and Rongchang pottery. Among them, Rongchang pottery is famous at home and abroad, and it is known as “China's four famous potteries” along with Yunnan Jianshui pottery, Guangxi Qinzhou pottery and Jiangsu Yixing Zisha pottery, and also known as “China's three major pottery capitals” together with Jiangsu Yixing and Guangdong Foshan.

Rongchang pottery is mainly produced in Anfu Town, Rongchang District, Chongqing, and is called “An Tao” or “Rongchang Tao” for short. Before the Qing Dynasty, Anfu Town was called “Ciyao center”. However, as early as the Han Dynasty, pottery production had already begun in the Anfu area. Tang and Song Dynasty towards prosperity, mainly firing black glazed porcelain and white glazed porcelain, appeared “Anfu field, five miles long, porcelain kiln, wine workshop, clay fine pots rows, wine droplets alley fragrance” large-scale pottery production and sales of the scene. But at the end of the Ming and early Qing dynasties, due to war and natural disasters, Rongchang pottery production ups and downs, the loss of talent and skills is serious, Rongchang pottery heritage protection is facing great challenges. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Rongchang pottery has been rapidly restored and developed. So far the production history of Rongchang pottery has been more than 2000 years.

Rongchang pottery has a thousand-year history of exquisite craftsmanship, and its production process includes 24 processes such as sunning mud, grinding mud, slurry, billeting, carving, kiln loading, kiln firing and kiln shutting down. Each process consists of several steps, each of step is accompanied by a number of emotional interventions and cultural taboos. In terms of the shape of the wares, they are characterized by “liu, mao, zhi and zhang”, and the decorative techniques of “sculpture, carving, skeletonization, poi and heap” are adopted. The color glaze varieties are most representative of cinnabar glaze, black glaze, Jun glaze and red glaze. The raw materials of Rongchang pottery are also particularly delicate, mainly using the red clay and underground white clay from the mountains of Crow Yu Mountain in Anfu of Rongchang. After collection, the clay is left in the open air for more than two to three months to weather naturally by the wind, sun and rain, and then the clay is crushed into powder, and then successively entered the production and firing process. The clay has fine texture, pure color and good sintering property. The clay is fired by the traditional wood burning process, showing the temperament of “red as jujube, thin as paper, sound as chime, bright as mirror”.

Due to the unique clay, glaze decoration and firing techniques, Rongchang pottery was listed as the third batch of national ICH by the state in 2011, which further drove the pace of development of Rongchang pottery industry. At present, the type of pottery has been pushed from daily-use pottery, practical pottery to arts and crafts pottery, packaging pottery, as well as garden construction pottery. The varieties of pottery have reached eight hundred, the pottery industry has more than ten thousand people. Rongchang has developed from the original “a piece of pottery” to the western “ICH city”. Pottery products are exported to Europe, America, Asia, Africa, Latin America and other more than 20 countries and regions, and further promote the dissemination of China's ceramic culture to the outside world, as well as with the overseas material and cultural markets between trade and commerce.

## 3. Overall presentation: the vision and concept of ICH inheritance protection

As a historical and cultural memory of humankind, the ICH is deeply embedded in the “spatial and temporal landscape” of local social relations, cultural networks and political-economic structures, and constitutes an important part of local traditional culture and people's daily lives. Multi-species “non-human” elements, re-localization and multi-subjective innovative practices can, in turn, contribute to heritage preservation and innovation.

As a kind of human historical and cultural memory, the ICH is deeply embedded in the “spatial and temporal landscape” of the local social relations, cultural networks and political-economic structure, and constitute an important part of local traditional culture and people's daily lives. In turn, the practice

of relocalization and multi-subject cooperation in the innovation of ICH will promote the protection, inheritance and innovation of heritage. The holistic perspective of cosmopolitanism and the concept of reinhabitation are the cultural schema of Rongchang pottery production techniques and conservation, and also the secret of the inheritance and development of Rongchang pottery that has endured for thousands of years.

### ***3.1. The “human being” and “non-human being”: a holistic cosmopolitan perspective***

Pottery is often regarded as an art of “earth” and “fire”, but in fact it is the result of the joint visualization and shaping of pottery makers and multiple elements, such as gold, wood, water, fire and earth. The traditional pottery craft inosculate painting, carving, calligraphy, decoration, inlaying and firing as a whole. This process reveals that the actors of pottery making include not only human being, but also "non-human" species elements, such as machines, plants, animals, microorganisms, fire and other species. All the actors were involved in pottery making. However, most of people's actions on the protection of ICH mainly focus on "people", "things" or "a certain skill". This one-way protection method cuts off the internal connection between ICH and local ethnic groups, historical traditions, animals, plants and other natural landscapes. Similarly, people also put too much emphasis on the material aspect of ICH development, while ignoring the skills, emotions, conceptual expressions, aesthetic ways and folk wisdom behind ICH. Even if the protection of ICH is based on a universal or global perspective, it is still, in essence, a human-centered cultural practice.

Rongchang's pottery makers have always followed the "concept of mutual creation of all things", especially in the process of transforming "soil" into "ware". They believe that all things in nature, like human beings, are shaping the formation of pottery all the time. Based on the overall perspective of "human" and "non-human", the design concept of pottery makers breaks through the traditional human-centered design. This transformation enables ICH works to be presented in a new and holistic way.

### ***3.2. Reterritoriality of heritage: the essence of ICH protection and inheritance***

The protection and inheritance of ICH is a "dynamic" systematic project. Each generation of inheritors will incorporate their own experience and emotions in the process of inheriting ICH skills, knowledge and ideas, and the works they create will correspondingly leave historical marks and regional elements. Different types of ICH will lead to different paths of protection, inheritance, development and utilization, and not all intangible cultural heritage can be industrialized and "performed" [6]. ICH is a public cultural heritage, it is local, and it is the way of life and historical memory passed on and recognized by the community groups; At the same time, it is also a multi-local cultural creation result jointly created, enjoyed and inherited by different nationalities based on their own cultural resources [7]. Therefore, the protection and inheritance of ICH cannot be simply understood as turning from "static" protection to "active" inheritance. The protection of the authenticity of "original flavor" in the locality will inevitably make the protection and inheritance of ICH fall into the dilemma of "essence". The protection of multiple places may also make the intangible heritage become a "non-subject" heritage.

Rongchang pottery has a re-localized nature. The content and practice of re-localization is based on the pottery making skills and historical memory of Anfu Town, the origin of An Tao, and it has nourished its own cultural personality by drawing on the pottery making skills and cultural values of many places in the process of development through the ages. The practice of systematizing the protection and inheritance of ICH of re-localization has made the Rongchang pottery making skills vibrant and unique.

### ***3.3. Outward attraction and inward molding: multi-subject innovation and practice of ICH inheritance***

The relocation of Rong Changtao is also reflected in the ICH inherited pluralistic subjectivity. ICH inheritors are not only practitioners of ICH, but also inheritors of skills, knowledge and ideas. In terms of ICH inheritance, Rongchang's pottery inheritance has long broken through the traditional mode of family inheritance and teacher-apprentice teaching. As early as the 1930s, Rongchang opened a pottery test ground to recruit poor young people to learn pottery, and the school even sent teachers to Jiangxi Province to study and buy back pottery for students to learn from each other. At present, Rongchang has been teaching pottery to college students or young people in various forms such as education and cultural travel experience. At the same time, a group of national and provincial pottery masters and

potter-related graduates have been introduced to Rongchang, and actively cooperate with local inheritors to jointly carry out ICH creation and skill teaching. Inheritors from different regions and different backgrounds bring new aesthetic trends and plastic arts to the development of Rongchang pottery industry, creating a habitat for the diversification of ICH inheritance paths and multi-subject collaborative innovation practice.

#### **4. Creativity and Design: The Path of Creative Transformation and Development of Rongchang Pottery**

The creative transformation and development of Rongchang pottery cannot be separated from the skill inheritance of local generations, the participation of talents from all sides and the continuous support of national policies, nor can it be separated from the creative design to drive industrial innovation and change. Based on innovative design, Rongchang pottery not only inherits the traditional context and historical memory, but it also promotes the creative products undergoing creative transformation and development. This innovative design enables ICH to obtain a new aesthetic expression paradigm and development space.

##### ***4.1. Creative transformation of ICH culture in the design of cultural and creative products***

The design of ICH cultural and creative products is a collection of culture, craftsmanship, innovation, man and nature. On the basis of traditional and regional culture, pottery creators take pottery firing, production and the craft techniques and cultural symbols embedded in pottery as the source of inspiration for design. Through the successive combination of modern creative design and artistic aesthetics and innovative practice, they have translated and extracted the factors of ICH, developed unique pottery techniques such as clay technology, glaze and wood firing, enriched the diversification of decorative patterns and the multi-functional conversion of pottery, and realized the connection between traditional culture and modern design. Among them, the clay twisting technology is an innovative design around the soil materials. It is mainly divided into four steps: In the first step, the potter combines the red clay and the white clay according to the ratio to synthesize different clay shapes; In the second step, they use the traditional freehand style to shape the pottery; And third step, they use cinnabar glaze, selenium green glaze and other glazes for decoration. Finally, the pottery maker integrates soil, people and nature in a plain way, presenting a brilliant color, and the shape is full and delicate.

In recent years, Rongchang has successively caused gas firing, electric firing and other firing equipments, diversified and improved the firing method, and improved the technological quality of the products. Meanwhile, it has also begun to take advantage of the power of 3D printing and three-dimensional animation and imaging technology, and constantly draws the aura and essence from the modern technology and art design, develops new techniques and materials, and vigorously develops the ICH derivatives and tourism cultural and creative products which are both practical and craftsmanship. Modern aesthetics and design empowerment have expanded the artistic space of ceramics in terms of shape, technique, type and decorative language, and enhanced the contemporary cultural value of cultural and creative products and the diversified needs and emotional resonance of consumers for public cultural products.

##### ***4.2. Diversified spatial display and development of ICH through “Industry-University-Research Collaborations”***

In order to promote the ICH creative transformation and development, we should not only rely on the cultural practice of the government and inheritors, but also to exert the advantages of public power. Multi-subject cooperation, let the intangible cultural heritage into people's lives, integrated into public services. Multi-subject cooperation can effectively integrate ICH into people's lives and serve the development of society. Rongchang with the help of creative platform design, multi-channel exploration and cooperation with enterprises, universities and communities, the formation of “Industry-University-Research” integration of open and sharing platforms, built a collection of products, display, experience, exchange, research and development and sales as one of the creative industry parks, museums, research institutes and national demonstration of comprehensive practice base. Rongchang pottery through film and television, exhibition halls, books and the Internet and other multi-modality pottery culture presentation, as well as protection, inheritance, production and experience in one of the ICH industry entity show, guide the transformation and upgrading of the pottery industry, casting

people firmly cultural consciousness of consciousness, to carry forward the traditional culture of ICH of the original intention.

In addition, Rongchang actively hosts and participates in pottery competitions and ceramics expositions at home and abroad, expanding the pottery culture circle along the “Belt and Road” and shaping the international influence of its own pottery culture. In order to strengthen the protection and inheritance of ICH, Rongchang actively advocates some cultural practice activities, such as advancing ICH into villages, communities, campuses and textbooks, which promote ICH to be inherited and developed in a sustainable way.

#### ***4.3. Design-driven Innovation and Development of ICH Industry under Cultural and Tourism Integration***

Rongchang District, where Rongchang Pottery is located, has rich tourism and cultural resources. Based on the national ICH, Rongchang takes the pottery production process as the source of design, and through the pottery experience, product performance display, industrial design, research and study and other cultural and strong district strategies, it transforms the ICH resources into the cultural and creative resources available for the public to experience, consume, learn and identify with the modern life, and integrates it into the tourism and service of the national development strategy. The cultural industry and tourism industry from each other. Integrating ICH into tourism can not only inject cultural connotation into tourism, but also expand the consumption space for ICH, which promote the transformation and upgrading of "ornamental tourism" into "global experience tourism".

Rongchang local government actively supports the development of traditional cultural industries, and vigorously introduces enterprises to participate in ICH towns ‘construction and operation, such as supporting the development of cultural industries, hotels, catering, and cultural performance related industries, laying a solid economic and industrial foundation for the integration of ICH and tourism , urban and rural culture.<sup>[8]</sup>

### **5. Conclusion**

Innovative design is not only a professional skill, but also a way of thinking and problem solving. It is not only to solve the relationship between people and environment, people and people, and human being and non-human being, but also to expand the paradigm shift of design thinking, promote the creative transformation of traditional culture and the innovative development of society, and thus enhance the well-being of mankind and the prosperity of the world.

Based on the Rongchang pottery case study, this paper found that the contemporary transformation and creative development of the concept of protection and inheritance of national-level ICH. Rongchang pottery is accomplished by the collaborative participation of multiple subjects ,such as generations of skilled ICH inheritors, designers, artists and scholars, with the strong support of the Party and state policies. The most crucial is the engine power of creative design based on cosmopolitanism.

On the one hand, creative design adheres to the re-localization of the protection and inheritance of ICH, and the objects of concern are not only limited to human beings, but also plants, clay, skills and industry beliefs intertwined with human beings, as well as mountains and rivers and other landscapes are also included in the objects of inheritance protection and innovative design. On the other hand, the creators of Rongchang pottery are based on the traditional skills and resources. Through creative design, they have incorporated the modern design concepts and aesthetic sentiments into the design and production of pottery, which has improved the quality of the pottery and improved the quality of the pottery. Cultural innovation has enhanced the contemporary value and aesthetic needs of pottery products, found the connection point between Rongchang pottery and modern life, promoted the deep integration of pottery industry with education, cultural tourism, cuisine and other forms of business, promoted the creative transformation and innovative development of ICH talent and technology protection and inheritance, and made ICH vitality in the new era. The experimental design and innovative practice of Rongchang ICH inheritors have important guiding significance for us to carry forward and inherit the excellent inheritance culture of China.

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