

A preliminary study on the integration of intangible cultural heritage into art education: a case study of tie-dyeing

Ruolin Gao^{1}, Lin Zhu¹*

¹Xinyang Normal University, Xinyang, China

*Corresponding Author. Email: 3603472052@qq.com

Abstract. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is the treasure of national culture, carrying the memory of history and the spirit of the nation. In the context of globalization and cultural diversification, the transmission of ICH is facing severe challenges. As an important means of cultivating aesthetic and creative abilities, art education provides a new platform for the inheritance and innovation of ICH. This paper takes tie-dyeing—a representative form of ICH—as a case study to explore specific strategies for integrating it into art education. The aim is to enhance students’ cultural identity, improve their aesthetic literacy and hands-on abilities, and to explore effective approaches for the living transmission of ICH.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), art education, tie-dyeing

1. Introduction

As an important traditional craft in ancient China, tie-dyeing is known for its unique patterns, rich colors, and strong artistic appeal. The inheritance and promotion of tie-dye art can revitalize this folk tradition and infuse it with greater vitality in modern society. Against the backdrop of the new curriculum standards, primary and secondary school art teachers should actively incorporate tie-dyeing into classroom instruction, continuously innovating both content and pedagogy. At the same time, teachers must accurately grasp the current state of art education in schools and, based on this foundation, leverage tie-dye instruction to enhance students’ awareness of cultural heritage and support the development of their aesthetic appreciation and artistic creativity [1].

2. The historical evolution of tie-dyeing

2.1. Origins and development

The origins of tie-dyeing can be traced back to the Common Era, when people began experimenting with various dyeing techniques to meet practical needs and aesthetic aspirations. As textile civilization advanced, the craft steadily evolved and eventually matured into a distinctive form of artistic creation. Among traditional tie-dye works, the most iconic are blue-and-white fabrics dyed with natural indigo. Their fresh and elegant style exemplifies the authentic aesthetic of folk art, planting the seeds of beauty in everyday life and yielding new creative outcomes—precisely the kind of educational value that art education seeks to cultivate through both inheritance and innovation [2].

2.2. Cultural connotations

As a representative of traditional Chinese handicrafts, tie-dyeing is not only visually striking but also rich in cultural meaning. This ancient technique vividly illustrates the Chinese people’s reverence for nature and their pursuit of harmony, embodying the philosophical principle of the unity of heaven and humanity (“tian ren he yi”). In its artistic expression, tie-dyeing employs unique pattern composition and color combinations to serve as a vital medium for cultural transmission. Its symbolic designs and chromatic language reflect the societal beliefs, values, and aesthetic ideals of specific historical periods.

2.3. Transmission of craftsmanship

The transmission and development of tie-dyeing techniques have accumulated over centuries of cultural heritage. In ancient times, the craft was mainly passed down orally and through hands-on instruction within the master-apprentice system, exemplifying the traditional mode of craftsmanship inheritance. With changing times, contemporary tie-dye artisans continue to innovate boldly while preserving the core essence of the tradition, breathing new life into this age-old art. It is also worth noting that diverse regional and ethnic practices have given rise to a variety of distinctive tie-dye styles. Together, these differing traditions form a vibrant and multifaceted artistic lineage within Chinese tie-dyeing.

3. The artistic features and educational significance of tie-dyeing in art education

3.1. Artistic features of tie-dyeing in art education

Tie-dye patterns, as living embodiments of intangible cultural heritage, contain geometric symbol systems that carry collective memories and philosophical beliefs. For instance, the “butterfly motif” of the Bai people in Dali symbolizes the cycle of life, while the Yi people’s “flint motif” represents light and the dispelling of evil. In art education, guiding students to decode these cultural symbols helps establish cognitive bridges between visual signs and cultural connotations.

The process of creating tie-dye works spans from two-dimensional pattern design to three-dimensional spatial construction. The knotting phase challenges students’ spatial prediction skills, the dyeing phase involves an understanding of the physical properties of materials, and the untying phase reveals artistic surprises along the dimension of time. This comprehensive creative process effectively fosters students’ spatial thinking and their ability to work with materials.

Traditional tie-dyeing adheres to the use of plant-based dyes such as indigo root. The process itself serves as a natural textbook of ecological ethics education. Incorporating natural dyeing practices into contemporary teaching not only preserves the wisdom of green craftsmanship but also cultivates a sustainable ecological aesthetic—resonating with the Eastern philosophical ideal of “harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.”

As an art form deeply rooted in cultural DNA and adaptable to contemporary needs, tie-dyeing offers a multidimensional teaching model that combines skill transmission, cultural identity, and innovative thinking. Its educational value far surpasses mere technical training.

3.2. The educational significance of tie-dyeing

As a dazzling gem of traditional Chinese craftsmanship, tie-dyeing—with its rich regional character and profound national aesthetic tradition—has found renewed vitality in modern aesthetic education. Introducing this form of intangible cultural heritage into art education not only opens innovative pathways for cultural inheritance but also becomes an essential medium for cultivating young people’s cultural confidence and aesthetic literacy.

From the perspective of quality-oriented education, the value of tie-dye courses extends well beyond the transmission of technique. These courses focus on the comprehensive development of students’ core competencies. In the process of creative practice, students must actively engage their powers of observation, concentration, and teamwork. Cultivating these qualities plays a vital role in fostering well-rounded character and holistic development. In-depth exploration of how tie-dyeing can be integrated with modern art education not only infuses traditional culture with new vitality but also provides a valuable model for the reform and innovation of art education [3].

3.3. The current application of tie-dyeing in art education

Currently, art education at the grassroots level in Chinese primary schools still faces numerous challenges—particularly in county-level and rural areas where art classes are often viewed as secondary or non-essential. This situation largely stems from widespread misconceptions about art education, which is often narrowly interpreted as training in drawing techniques while neglecting its broader role in cultivating aesthetic appreciation and stimulating creativity. The newly revised national compulsory education arts curriculum provides clear directives for addressing this issue. It emphasizes the need to engage students in diverse forms of artistic practice, especially folk art forms with regional characteristics, enabling them to experience beauty and achieve emotional growth through participation.

The new curriculum particularly underscores the importance of fostering cultural identity and national pride through exposure to traditional arts. Integrating such forms of intangible cultural heritage into basic education not only broadens the implementation channels of aesthetic education but also injects fresh vitality into cultural inheritance. Organizing students to participate in hands-on tie-dye activities develops their practical skills and creative thinking while deepening their understanding

of traditional culture. This dual objective of aesthetic and cultural education is well aligned with current educational reform initiatives and provides a practical model for constructing an aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics [4].

4. Integration of tie-dyeing with modern life

4.1. Form: innovating everyday life

Form is the most direct and fundamental visual language of tie-dyeing. Traditionally, tie-dye forms were constrained by the flatness of fabric and the physical limitations of tying and stitching techniques. However, in the context of modern life, the forms of tie-dyeing can be greatly expanded and reimagined, thereby achieving the goal of “innovating everyday life.”

4.2. Color: innovating the color palette

Color is the soul of tie-dyeing. Its natural, spontaneous, and gradient effects are central to its artistic charm. In modern applications, tie-dye colors are no longer restricted to traditional blue-and-white schemes or monochromatic tones. Instead, by integrating various color theories, tie-dyeing has evolved to produce striking and refreshing new palettes—creating truly “innovative color schemes.”

4.3. Styling: creating decorative aesthetics

Styling here refers not only to the external shape of an object, but also to the unique textures and decorative effects produced by tie-dyeing. The wrinkles, imprints, and color gradients left by the process become a distinctive visual language, offering rich decorative possibilities for contemporary life.

The integration of tie-dyeing into modern living is a dialogue between tradition and innovation, and a fusion of art and daily experience. In terms of form, it transcends flat surfaces, advancing into three-dimensionality and deconstructed reassembly, enriching the material dimensions of everyday life. In terms of color, it blends and clashes, creating innovative palettes that meet modern aesthetic desires. In terms of styling, it enhances the tactile and patterned aspects of objects, adding a personalized artistic touch to life [5].

In art education, guiding students to explore these possibilities not only revitalizes this ancient craft for younger generations but also effectively cultivates their creativity, aesthetic judgment, hands-on ability, and cultural identity. Through tie-dyeing as a medium, students learn to observe, beautify, and reflect on life—planting seeds of beauty in the soil of everyday experience and ultimately reaping new creative fruits. This, indeed, is the true value of art education in the dual pursuit of cultural inheritance and innovation.

5. Conclusion

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is a valuable treasure of the Chinese nation, and integrating it into art education is an important pathway for preserving and promoting traditional culture. As a traditional craft, tie-dyeing possesses unique artistic charm and profound cultural connotations, making it an outstanding vehicle for ICH transmission within the realm of art education. Through tie-dye instruction, students not only acquire hands-on skills but also strengthen their cultural identity and develop their aesthetic judgment and creative abilities. Both domestic and international case studies have demonstrated that incorporating tie-dyeing into art education is feasible and yields significant results. However, this integration process also faces certain challenges, such as insufficient teacher training and limited teaching resources, which require joint efforts from all sectors of society.

To better integrate ICH into art education, several measures should be taken. First, teacher training must be strengthened to enhance educators' understanding of ICH and improve their instructional capacity. Second, teaching resources should be enriched by developing more ICH-related textbooks and curricula. Third, social support must be reinforced by inviting ICH inheritors into schools to provide hands-on guidance for students. Through these initiatives, we can revitalize ICH within art education and contribute meaningfully to the inheritance and development of China's outstanding traditional culture.

References

- [1] Zhang, T. T. (2025). Research on Inheritance Strategies of Traditional ICH Culture in Primary School Art Education. *Proceedings of the 2025 Conference on Young and Middle-aged Teachers' Development under the Background of AI*, Jinan, Shandong: Hujizhen Central Primary School. DOI: 10.26914/c.cnkihy.2025.008117.
- [2] Zhang, W. T. (2023). Innovation and Tradition in Tie-Dye Art: A Modern Expression of Culture. *Future Aesthetics*, (21), 164–166.

- [3] Liu, Z. J., & Li, L. X. (2025). Practical Research on the Transmission of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Art-Based Project Learning. *Education Circle*, (07), 14–16.
- [4] Ye, L. Y. (2025). Strategies for Integrating ICH into Junior High School Art Classrooms. *Asia-Pacific Education*, (03), 4–6.
- [5] Ma, Z. J. (2023). Research on Incorporating Tie-Dye Art into Preschool Art Curriculum in Universities. *Art Education Research*, (17), 150–152.