

An Analysis of Anhui Five-Animal Exercises' Regional Tourism Development from the Angle of Intangible Cultural Heritage Activation and its Promoting Effect

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Abstract

As a national intangible cultural heritage (ICH), Anhui Five-Animal Exercises is a bionic health-preserving exercise created by Hua Tuo, a renowned physician of the Eastern Han Dynasty in China. It is itself an organic integration of regional culture, traditional Chinese medicine wisdom, and traditional sports, thus possessing profound cultural connotations and high tourism development value. However, the academic community has not yet conducted sufficient and rigorous theoretical discussions on how ICH revitalization can promote regional tourism development. Therefore, this paper takes the Five-Animal Exercises in Bozhou City, Anhui Province as an example to systematically and hierarchically examine how to transform ICH revitalization into tourism development outcomes. More importantly, this paper breaks through the traditional framework of merely descriptive discussions on ICH-based tourism and proposes a logical and theoretically valuable analytical mechanism, clarifying how ICH activation facilitates tourism and development effects. This not only provides a new perspective on the role of intangible cultural heritage in tourism development but also offers practical insights for other countries or regions seeking to combine cultural heritage protection with regional economic growth through tourism.

Keywords: Anhui Five-Animal Exercises, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Tourism Development, Cultural-Tourism Integration, Revitalization of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Introduction

On October 17, 2003, the 32nd session of the UNESCO General Conference adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Convention recognizes the intrinsic interdependence between intangible cultural heritage (ICH), tangible cultural heritage, and natural heritage. ICH serves as a vital element that fosters human connections, facilitates communication, and deepens mutual understanding, with immeasurable significance. It encompasses traditional cultural expressions preserved across generations by ethnic groups as integral components of their cultural heritage, along with associated physical artifacts and sites. The Convention emphasizes that nations should leverage the unique advantages of ICH resources to

develop culturally distinctive products and services with local and ethnic characteristics, while ensuring effective protection and sustainable utilization of representative ICH items (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2011). The inherent connection between intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and tourism has led to ICH being increasingly recognized as a strategic resource for sustainable tourism and regional development.

In 2009, the State Council of the People's Republic of China issued the Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Tourism, proposing to “vigorously promote the integrated development of tourism with related industries such as culture and sports” (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2009). In April 2021, the National Development and Reform Commission of the People's Republic of China released the Implementation Plan for the Cultural Protection, Inheritance, and Utilization Project, which stated that “by 2025, the public cultural service system in urban and rural areas across the country will be further improved, the protection level of key cultural relics and major archaeological sites will be effectively enhanced, the integration of culture and tourism will be significantly deepened, the capacity to expand domestic demand and promote consumption will be continuously strengthened, the dissemination and influence of important symbols of Chinese culture will be further highlighted, and the people's sense of gain, happiness, and satisfaction will be significantly improved” (National Development and Reform Commission of the People's Republic of China, 2021). With the deepening of China's cultural and tourism integration strategy, “culture + tourism” has become an important path to promote regional economic development and inherit the excellent traditional Chinese culture.

Research Background

As the core carrier of China's outstanding traditional culture, the dynamic inheritance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and its integration with the tourism industry must not only focus on rescuing, protecting, and preserving traditions, but also embrace modernity by fully tapping into their potential social and economic value. Through creative production, innovative products, and technological advancements, ICH can be transformed to continue playing a vital role in contemporary society (Huang & Ji, 2018). The goal of dynamic inheritance is to move ICH from “museums” to “lifelong engagement,” transitioning from passive viewing to active participation. This enhances cultural dissemination and influence while bridging the gap between ICH and tourists. It enriches the cultural depth of tourism products, addresses the homogenization issues in traditional tourism, and promotes high-quality development of the tourism industry, thereby facilitating the preservation of ICH.

Literature Review

In recent years, the integration of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and tourism has become a key topic in academic research. Existing studies mainly focus on three aspects. First, research on the value and protection of ICH resources suggests that ICH possesses dual attributes as both cultural assets and economic resources, and its rational development can promote regional economic growth (Pan, 2026). Second, studies on sports–tourism integration mechanisms emphasize that coordinated development between sports and tourism can enhance industrial quality and regional competitiveness (Li & Zhang, 2023). Third, research on traditional health culture dissemination indicates that Five-Animal Exercises hold unique advantages in health communication and cross-cultural transmission (Li, 2025). Meanwhile, scholars examining historical evolution and cultural value argue that Five-Animal Exercises represent an important form of ancient Chinese therapeutic exercise and embody the integration of traditional medicine and embodied practice (Zhou, 2015).

Additionally, life-cycle-based studies on sports–tourism integration propose that transforming cultural resources into tourism products requires systematic institutional support (Jiang et al., 2020). Overall, although previous studies provide important foundations for understanding the relationship between ICH and tourism, gaps remain in theoretical integration and mechanism explanation.

Research Gap and Problem Statement

Although existing studies discuss ICH protection, cultural tourism integration, and the cultural value of Five-Animal Exercises, three limitations remain:

Most studies are descriptive rather than mechanism-oriented.

Research largely focuses on macro-level policy or industry perspectives, lacking in-depth case analysis.

There is still no systematic explanation of how ICH “activation” is transformed into tourism development momentum.

Therefore, the academic field has yet to establish a theoretical framework capable of explaining both the pathways and mechanisms through which ICH resources promote regional tourism development.

Research Motivation and Significance

Under the national strategy of cultural revitalization and cultural–tourism integration, exploring how ICH resources can achieve a dynamic balance between protection and utilization has become increasingly important. As a national-level ICH project integrating cultural, health, educational, and industrial attributes, Anhui Five-Animal Exercises provide an ideal case for examining activation mechanisms. Therefore, this study selects Bozhou’s Five-Animal Exercises as a case to systematically analyze their role in promoting regional tourism. The significance of this research lies in three aspects: Theoretical: enriching studies on ICH activation and regional development mechanisms; Practical: providing decision-making references for local cultural-tourism planning; Methodological: constructing a replicable analytical framework for similar regional cases.

The Cultural Connotation and Tourism Development Value of Anhui Five-Animal Exercises

The Five-Animal Exercises originated in Qiaocheng District, Bozhou City, Anhui Province. Developed by the renowned physician Hua Tuo during the late Eastern Han Dynasty, this traditional health practice was inspired by the movements of five animals—tiger, deer, bear, ape, and bird—based on the Five Elements theory and the theory of zang-fu organs in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). In 2011, the exercises were officially recognized by the State Council as part of the third batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage, establishing them as one of Bozhou’s most iconic cultural symbols. According to the government work report of Bozhou, Anhui, the local practice has attracted 1.14 million practitioners by 2025, accounting for 20% of the city’s total population (Bozhou Municipal People’s Government, 2025). The exercises are primarily promoted through the “Five-Animal Exercises Five-Entry” campaign, which involves bringing them into schools, government offices, communities, enterprises, and rural areas. However, participation in other provinces remains limited due to a lack of audience and commercial dissemination channels.

In recent years, with the government’s strong promotion, the integration of Five-Animal Exercises and the tourism industry has been gradually advanced. Bozhou, Anhui, has leveraged Five-Animal Exercises as a core cultural resource to create distinctive tourism products such as Five-Animal Exercises theme parks, educational travel routes, intangible cultural heritage performances, and intangible cultural heritage cuisine, achieving certain results (Bozhou Municipal Bureau of Culture,

Tourism and Sports, n.d.). Unlike other projects, Five-Animal Exercises is not only a traditional Chinese culture but also a sports and wellness activity. As an intangible cultural heritage project that combines cultural, wellness, aesthetic, and participatory elements, Five-Animal Exercises naturally aligns with the tourism industry—its profound historical and cultural heritage enriches the cultural content of tourism, its unique wellness benefits meet the health needs of modern tourists, and its sports functions and diverse forms of expression create distinctive tourism experiences. However, at present, Bozhou still faces issues such as unclear positioning, insufficient cultural exploration, inadequate publicity, and an incomplete industrial chain in the development of Five-Animal Exercises tourism, which constrain its role in promoting regional tourism development. Based on this, this paper focuses on the integration path of Anhui Five-Animal Exercises and regional tourism development, exploring its intrinsic mechanisms and optimization strategies for promoting tourism development. This has significant practical and theoretical value for revitalizing Anhui's intangible cultural heritage, enhancing regional tourism competitiveness, and achieving a win-win situation between cultural inheritance and economic development.

The Cultural Connotation of Anhui Five-Animal Exercises

During the Western Jin Dynasty, Chen Shou recorded in his work *Records of the Three Kingdoms: Biography of Hua Tuo* the Five-Animal Exercises created by Hua Tuo: “I have a technique called the Five-Animal Exercises, named after five animals: the tiger, the deer, the bear, the ape, and the bird. It is also used to treat diseases and strengthen the limbs, serving as a form of guiding and stretching” (General Administration of Sport of China, n.d.). Both *Records of the Three Kingdoms: Book of Wei: Biography of Medical Techniques* and *Book of the Later Han: Biographies of Medical Arts* clearly document Hua Tuo's creation of the Five-Animal Exercises and the cases of his disciple Wu Pu benefiting from practicing them. The *Guiding and Stretching Diagram* unearthed from the Han Dynasty tomb at Mawangdui in Changsha in 1973 depicts 44 therapeutic guiding and stretching movements, serving as crucial physical evidence of the Five-Animal Exercises. This proves that the Five-Animal Exercises were the first in China to integrate sports into medical interventions. The Five-Animal Exercises ingeniously combine the limb movements of animals with human breathing and exhalation, increasing the range and intensity of the movements while emphasizing the control of exercise volume. It is the earliest complete set of bionic medical exercises in China, and Hua Tuo elevated ancient Chinese medical exercises to a new peak (Zhou, 2015).

Anhui Five-Animal Exercises is not only a set of health-preserving exercises, but also a cultural complex integrating historical culture, TCM health preservation, traditional sports, and philosophical thought. Its cultural connotation is mainly reflected in three aspects.

First, historical and cultural connotations. The Five-Animal Exercises, founded by the physician Hua Tuo during the Eastern Han Dynasty, embody the medical culture and social landscape of that era, serving as a “living fossil” of traditional Chinese health preservation culture. As Hua Tuo's hometown, Bozhou is also renowned as the “Hometown of Medicinal Herbs.” The inheritance of Five-Animal Exercises has always been closely linked to Hua Tuo culture and TCM, forming a complete cultural lineage of “Hua Tuo—Five-Animal Exercises—Health Preservation Culture,” which has become the core symbol of Bozhou's regional culture and highlights the profound heritage of Anhui's traditional culture. Over a thousand years of inheritance, Five-Animal Exercises has evolved into multiple sects, including the Bozhou Sect, Guozi Sect, and Hua Tuo Inheritance Sect, each with unique styles that further enrich its historical and cultural connotations. Scholar Liang Shifeng, in his work *The Marvelous Power of Movement and Stillness*, categorizes Five-Animal Exercises into

external movement forms, internal movement forms, and combined external-internal movement forms. Although these various Five-Animal Exercises styles and movements differ, they all possess the efficacy of strengthening the body and preventing diseases (He, 2017).

Secondly, the connotation of TCM health preservation. The creation of the Five-Animal Exercises adheres to the TCM principles of “harmony between heaven and humanity” and “preventive treatment,” integrating the theory of the Five Elements with the theory of zang-fu organs. The five movements correspond to the five zang organs: the tiger movement targets the liver, the deer movement targets the kidneys, the bear movement targets the spleen, the ape movement targets the heart, and the bird movement targets the lungs. By mimicking animal movements, it regulates the circulation of qi and blood in the human body, achieving the effects of strengthening the body and preventing diseases (Cao et al., 2023). In the theory of the Five Elements in China, corresponding elements include the five tones, five zang organs, five sensory organs, and five colors. The Five-Animal Exercises, born from the Five Elements, also correspond to other elements, representing the culmination of China's traditional health preservation culture. This concept of “exercise for health preservation” aligns with modern people's pursuit of a healthy lifestyle and has become one of the core competitive advantages in the tourism development of the Five-Animal Exercises.

The Five-Animal Exercises correspond to the Five Viscera Diagram



From the perspective of traditional sports and philosophical connotations, the discussion can be naturally and appropriately unfolded: The Five-Animal Exercises are an extremely typical and mature representative of China's traditional sports culture. Their movements combine hardness and softness, interweave reality and illusion, possess excellent visual appeal, and are rich in practical value, thus embodying the spiritual core of “internal and external cultivation” in traditional Chinese sports. More remarkably, when Hua Tuo created the Five-Animal Exercises, he systematically and meticulously observed animal movements, synchronized them with breathing rhythms, and practiced them in natural environments to eliminate distractions and negative thoughts. The Five-Animal Exercises take the forms of various animal characteristics—such as the ferocity of tigers, the ease of deer, the steadfastness of bears, the agility of apes, and the expansiveness of birds—and integrate Taoist philosophy and health preservation theories into them. Therefore, they can be aptly regarded as an excellent embodiment of the ancient Chinese concept of harmonious coexistence

with nature (Hua & Huang, 2025). More importantly, the philosophical idea of “harmonious coexistence between humans and nature” embodied in the Five-Animal Exercises aligns closely with the modern tourism concept of “ecology, health, and leisure,” thereby providing a clear and robust ideological foundation for the deep integration of the Five-Animal Exercises and the tourism industry (Hu, 2013).

The Tourism Development Value of Anhui Five-Animal Exercises

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory posits that human needs are hierarchical, progressing sequentially from physiological needs to safety needs, belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs, which can be upgraded and transformed under certain conditions (Maslow, 2021). With the transformation of the principal contradiction in Chinese society in the new era, the five happiness industries—tourism, sports, culture, health, and elderly care—have become prominent manifestations of people's aspirations for a better life (Jiang et al., 2020). As the Five-Animal Exercises is a rare intangible cultural heritage that integrates tourism, sports, culture, health, and elderly care values, it deserves proper protection and inheritance, and should be recognized and learned by more people to achieve these values. Therefore, Bozhou should intensify its development and promotion efforts to facilitate its effective inheritance and advancement.

Since the value of tourism development is the fundamental premise of promoting regional tourism development, it is natural and appropriate to summarize the value of Five-Animal Exercises in cultural inheritance, economic development, product experience, brand building and so on from the perspective of cultural connotation and the needs of the times.

Firstly, Bozhou in Anhui Province is the birthplace of Hua Tuo, the creator of the Five-Animal Exercises. As a national intangible cultural heritage, the Five-Animal Exercises embody a perfect fusion of Three Kingdoms history, TCM wellness practices, and sports culture. This makes it ideal for enriching the cultural appeal of Bozhou and its surrounding areas, while also fostering distinctive and refined cultural tourism products. More remarkably, tourism serves as a dynamic medium to preserve the Five-Animal Exercises. Visitors can learn about intangible cultural heritage, engage with historical traditions, experience sports culture, and immerse themselves in traditional practices—all while developing a sense of cultural identity and belonging. This approach significantly elevates the cultural sophistication of regional tourism.

Secondly, the tourism development of Five-Animal Exercises can stimulate the growth of various sectors in the tourism industry chain, including scenic areas, catering and accommodation, transportation and logistics, cultural and creative products, and cultural training. This will inevitably create numerous job opportunities, directly boost local fiscal revenue and residents' income. More importantly, it will promote rural revitalization by encouraging the vigorous development of rural tourism in the surrounding areas of Bozhou, effectively transforming cultural resources into economic assets.

Third, the value of experiential tourism. Modern tourism has evolved from “sightseeing” to “experience-oriented” models. The Five-Animal Exercises, combining participatory and aesthetic elements, can be developed into diverse experiential tourism products such as wellness workshops, intangible cultural heritage performances, educational tours, and fitness check-ins. These initiatives allow tourists to personally engage in Five-Animal Exercises practice, experience its health benefits, and enhance their travel satisfaction and engagement, thereby boosting the appeal and

competitiveness of tourism offerings. Bozhou's Five-Animal Exercises educational tours have already provided on-site instruction for over 10,000 teachers and students, achieving remarkable results. Compared to traditional health and tourism concepts, outdoor fitness tours that promote holistic well-being—spanning mental, psychological, physiological, and social dimensions—better align with contemporary people's pursuit of “comprehensive health” and “entertainment-oriented” life styles (Li & Zhang, 2023). Fourth, regional brand value. Sports tourism serves as a novel industry and economic driver, Both the local economy and industrial development rely on sports tourism as a pillar force (Li & Zhang, 2023). As a core cultural symbol of Bozhou, Anhui, the Five-Animal Exercises can shape a distinctive regional tourism brand and enhance the reputation and influence of Bozhou's tourism. By creating the “Five-Animal Exercises Wellness Tourism” brand, it can differentiate itself from other regional tourism products, achieve precise positioning, and attract more tourists who seek cultural experiences and prioritize their physical and mental health, thereby promoting the shift from “resource-driven” to “brand-driven” regional tourism. Currently, Bozhou has been awarded several national honorary titles, including “China's Hometown of Five-Animal Exercises” and “International Capital of Fitness Qigong Five-Animal Exercises,” with the brand effect officially recognized. It awaits the joint efforts of local governments, cultural and tourism enterprises, and inheritors to deeply embed the brand value in people's hearts.

The Role Path of Anhui Five-Animal Exercises in Promoting Regional Tourism Development

Based on the practical experience of tourism development of Five-Animal Exercises in Bozhou, Anhui Province, Five-Animal Exercises promotes regional tourism development through four approaches: enriching tourism product supply, shaping regional tourism characteristics, upgrading tourism industry chain, and promoting deep integration of culture and tourism, so as to realize the mutual empowerment of cultural inheritance and tourism development.

Enriching the Supply of Tourism Products and Solving the Problem of Homogenization

Traditional regional tourism often suffers from product homogeneity and limited diversity. The integration of Five-Animal Exercises can enrich tourism offerings and create differentiated products. First, developing Five-Animal Exercises-themed attractions: Leveraging Bozhou's Five-Animal Exercises heritage site, museum, and theme park, we create intangible cultural heritage routes that showcase the art's historical roots, lineage, and cultural significance. The Lingxi Lake Five-Animal Exercises Sports & Wellness Theme Park exemplifies this approach, blending Five-Animal Exercises elements with ecological landscapes and fitness facilities to become a premier destination for leisure and wellness (Bozhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Tourism and Sports, 2025). Second, experiential tourism: Activities like Five-Animal Exercises wellness workshops, masterclasses with inheritors, performances, and competitions allow visitors to practice and experience the art's health benefits. Third, combining with emerging trends like educational and wellness tourism: We develop Five-Animal Exercises study programs incorporating TCM culture, wellness experiences, and health packages. The “Five Tones & Five Colors Wellness Package + Five-Animal Exercises Practice” caters to diverse needs. Bozhou's differentiated courses—competitive, senior-friendly, and school-based versions—benefit all age groups, further diversifying tourism offerings.

Shaping Regional Tourism Characteristics and Enhancing Core Competitiveness

In 1961, American advertising scholar Rother Reeves systematically developed the USP theory in his seminal work *Effective Advertising*. He asserted that every product or brand must present consumers with a unique selling proposition (USP) that offers a distinct advantage—something competitors either lack or cannot replicate—thereby compelling them to make a purchase (Reeves,

1999). As a unique intangible cultural heritage resource of Bozhou, Anhui, the Five-Animal Exercises can become a “symbolic sign” for regional tourism, shaping distinctive tourism features. The core competitiveness of regional tourism lies in its uniqueness. Bozhou relies on the Five-Animal Exercises to build the brand of “China's Wellness Tourism City,” integrating the culture of the Five-Animal Exercises with Bozhou's TCM culture and ancient city culture, forming a tourism feature of “intangible cultural heritage + wellness + ancient city + medicinal cuisine.” This distinguishes it from traditional mountain-water and ancient village tourism products like Huangshan and Hongcun in Anhui, achieving differentiated development of regional tourism. Meanwhile, by hosting events such as the Five-Animal Exercises Cultural Tourism Festival, the International Five-Animal Exercises Wellness Forum, and the Five-Animal Exercises Performance Competition, the visibility and influence of the Five-Animal Exercises are enhanced, attracting more tourists to experience it and further strengthening the core competitiveness of regional tourism. As of May 2025, Bozhou has cumulatively held 13 thousand-person Five-Animal Exercises performances and 5 ten-thousand-person events, receiving over 100 reports from mainstream media such as CCTV, effectively boosting the visibility of regional tourism (Bozhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Tourism and Sports, n.d.).

Promote the Upgrading of Tourism Industry Chain and Increase Economic Income

The development of Five-Animal Exercises tourism is not merely about creating a single scenic spot or activity, but rather a strategic approach to foster coordinated growth across the entire tourism industry chain. This is demonstrated through three key aspects: First, upgrading tourist attractions. This involves systematically enhancing infrastructure and service facilities at Five-Animal Exercises-themed scenic areas to improve visitor reception capacity and service quality. A prime example is the Bozhou Five-Animal Exercises Sports Lottery Health Theme Park, which features fitness trails, basketball courts, and children's play areas to meet diverse needs of locals and tourists (Bozhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Tourism and Sports, 2025). Second, boosting related industries. The development of Five-Animal Exercises tourism naturally drives growth in catering, accommodation, transportation, and retail sectors. This includes creating themed dining experiences, cultural products (such as Five-Animal Exercises dolls, practice manuals, and wellness tea sets), and apparel, thereby extending the tourism value chain and increasing economic benefits (Bozhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Tourism and Sports, 2025). Currently, Bozhou has five manufacturers specializing in Five-Animal Exercises clothing and equipment, with the industrial chain becoming increasingly mature. Notably, the city's health-focused medicinal cuisine transforms traditional Chinese herbs into delightful culinary delights that leave a lasting impression. Third, creating employment opportunities. The operation of Five-Animal Exercises scenic areas, performance events, and cultural product sales generate numerous direct and indirect jobs, helping to employ local residents, increase income, and contribute to rural revitalization and regional economic development.

Promote the Deep Integration of Culture and Tourism, and Promote the Living Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

Sports tourism in China remains a new type of tourism product and a new product under an industrial integration model, requiring strong professional knowledge systems to support tourism planners, travel agencies, and others in the marketing service process. However, China's sports tourism is currently unable to meet this requirement, thereby affecting tourists' sense of participation in sports tourism experiences. How to integrate resources and market integration with sports resources as the core and tourism services as the carrier is an important issue that China's sports tourism urgently needs to address at this stage. The integration of sports and tourism is based

on the tourism industry, where the convenience of transportation, the completeness of supporting facilities, and the comfort of services are all important prerequisites for industrial integration (Yang & Mao, 2024). The protection of tangible heritage focuses on restoration and maintenance, aiming to delay the physical demise of its form; the protection of intangible cultural heritage focuses on inheritance and development, aiming to ensure that its knowledge system and vitality are passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, inheritance is the best form of protection. The key is to build cultural identity in the process of inheritance, making inheritance a source of innovation, and striving to achieve creative inheritance. In this sense, the core of China's intangible cultural heritage autonomous knowledge system lies in living inheritance and innovation (Pan, 2026).

The integration of Five-Animal Exercises with the tourism industry is not only an excellent path for the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), but also a solid and vivid practice in the fusion of culture and tourism. Since tourism itself is a highly effective medium for cultural dissemination, the culture of Five-Animal Exercises can thus break free from the dilemma of “niche inheritance” and truly reach the masses (Li, 2025). Tourists can understand the cultural connotations and current inheritance status of Five-Animal Exercises during their travel experiences, thereby more easily enhancing their awareness of ICH protection and being more willing to actively participate in its preservation efforts. More remarkably, the economic benefits gained from tourism development can directly and fully support the inheritance of Five-Animal Exercises, being used for the training of ICH inheritors, the innovation and refinement of Five-Animal Exercises techniques, and the promotion of ICH culture. Bozhou has a clear and robust plan for this: strengthening the team of Five-Animal Exercises inheritors, forming a guidance team of over 10,000 members, conducting more than 300 “Five Advances” services annually, and receiving over 100 positive reports from mainstream media such as CCTV (Bozhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Tourism and Sports, n.d.). Additionally, leveraging TikTok as a new media platform, they have created “Five-Animal Exercises Classes,” which have surpassed ten million views, truly achieving a two-way empowerment of ICH inheritance and tourism development. This leads to a broader significance: the integration of Five-Animal Exercises and tourism facilitates the deep integration of culture and tourism, endowing tourism with cultural depth and culture with the vitality of dissemination, thus forming a virtuous cycle of “culture promoting tourism and tourism spreading culture” (Li, 2025).

Mechanism Analysis: How the Activation of Five-Animal Exercises Promotes Regional Tourism Development

This paper takes the Five-Animal Exercises in Bozhou City, Anhui Province as a case study to systematically propose a “cultural connotation + tourism promotion” mechanism model. It provides an excellent exposition on the issue of revitalizing intangible cultural heritage (ICH) to promote regional tourism development. Specifically, it argues against treating ICH merely as cultural symbols or tourist attractions, but rather examines the dynamic processes of activating, transforming, and integrating cultural resources into the tourism system, along with the resulting regional development outcomes.

The Activation of ICH and the Reinterpretation of Cultural Value

The activation mechanism of the International Heritage Conservation Committee (ICH) serves as the foundation of this framework, adhering to the requirements of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism (2021) to revitalize and develop tourism resources within reasonable parameters (International Council on Monuments and Sites, 2021). Taking the Five-Animal Exercises as an example, its activation process extends beyond

heritage preservation, focusing instead on reinterpreting its cultural value in contemporary contexts. Through systematic exploration of its historical origins, traditional medical philosophy, and embodied cultural significance, the Five-Animal Exercises has evolved from a traditional health practice into a resource with cultural depth and social value.

Because this process will transform the abstract cultural elements of TCM theory, philosophy of harmony between man and nature, and embodied movement aesthetics into narrative symbols that are easy to accept and experience by modern audiences, it is not only conducive to the improvement of the communication effect of Five-Animal Exercises, but also naturally creates conditions for the integration of Five-Animal Exercises into the tourism industry.

Reinterpretation of Cultural Value and Tourism Product Innovation

The reinterpreted cultural value facilitates the modernization and innovation of tourism products. As tourism products have evolved from traditional single offerings to diversified structures, it is essential to consider the development and utilization of natural resources. More importantly, cultural value must be proactively and systematically explored, with its presentation effectively enhancing the overall value of tourism products. Wang Desheng provides a clear and insightful analysis of the cultural value of scenic areas from the perspective of tourism product transformation (Wang, 2020). The Five-Animal Exercises in Bozhou have been successfully integrated into experiential learning, health tourism, public fitness, and themed cultural tourism products, transforming passive cultural appreciation into active participation. This enables tourists to interact naturally and fully with cultural heritage in physical, emotional, and cognitive aspects.

Tourism product innovation serves as a highly effective intermediary mechanism linking ICH revitalization with tourism development. The Hua Tuo section in Anhui Province's Celebrity Museum exemplifies this approach by incorporating the Five-Animal Exercises into an interactive experiential tourism model. This integration transforms the cultural heritage of the Five-Animal Exercises from static displays and textbooks into tangible tourism experiences that can be consumed, experienced, and shared. Such diversified tourism product development not only addresses regional market homogenization but also directly enhances destination appeal.

Tourism Product Innovation and Tourist Experience Improvement

The tourism products developed from Five-Animal Exercises enhance travel experiences, contrasting with traditional sightseeing. This cultural tourism emphasizes participation, immersive engagement, and health improvement. Visitors are not mere spectators but active practitioners of Five-Animal Exercises, gaining deeper insights into ancient wisdom. Through this practice, they can better align with heritage programs that promote physical movement.

Enhancing tourist experiences fosters emotional connections with destinations, thereby boosting satisfaction and engagement. Undoubtedly, in today's tourism industry, experiential value has surpassed material consumption as the most crucial attraction factor. Thus, Five-Animal Exercises creates memorable travel experiences through immersive methods, shaping positive impressions of tourism.

Tourist Experience Improvement and Regional Brand Building

Tourism experience participation is beneficial to the construction of regional tourism brand, so Bozhou Five-Animal Exercises as a clear and unique cultural symbol, makes Bozhou tourism brand

different from other areas, and Five-Animal Exercises and Three Kingdoms culture, health-preserving culture and other elements continue to be strong connection, which is conducive to the shaping of regional identity.

The regional brand construction is fundamentally derived from the actual experience of tourists and their deep cultural identity. Therefore, after Bozhou connects the Five-Animal Exercises, health-preserving culture and other elements with its own characteristics, the local brand image becomes unified and distinct, which naturally enhances Bozhou's reputation and competitiveness in the tourism market.

Regional Brand and Industrial Chain Extension

The regional brand can be built with the Five-Animal Exercises as the fulcrum, and the scope of involvement is relatively strong. Therefore, the Five-Animal Exercises can effectively promote the extension of the tourism industry chain. In addition to traditional tourist attractions and activities, it naturally drives the development of cultural and creative products, health services, and other industries.

The extension of cultural industry chain is the embodiment of the economic dimension of this mechanism. Therefore, after introducing ICH resources into various economic fields, the value of Five-Animal Exercises can be improved, its contribution to regional development is more sustainable, and it can create employment opportunities, which is conducive to local people's livelihood, and thus consolidate the social and economic foundation of tourism development.

Integrated Mechanism and Regional Tourism Development Results

The ICH activation mechanism advances through interconnected phases including cultural reinterpretation, product innovation, experiential enhancement, brand development, and industrial extension, thus naturally and effectively promoting regional tourism growth. The ICH-based tourism development of Five-Animal Exercises is far from a simple process—it is fundamentally a systematic framework that holistically integrates cultural elements, local characteristics, experiential projects, and economic factors.

The existing mechanism model demonstrates that activating ICH requires coordinated efforts across cultural preservation, tourism development, and regional economic growth. While Bozhou's practices exhibit local characteristics, their government-led initiatives with public participation, school collaboration, and shared cultural prosperity set a strong example. This model proves particularly effective in transforming intangible cultural heritage into a sustainable driver for tourism development.

The Existing Problems of Anhui Five-Animal Exercises Tourism Development

While Anhui's Five-Animal Exercises has achieved notable success in boosting regional tourism development, with its resources having spawned distinctive tourism products that drive economic and cultural growth, field research and literature analysis reveal persistent challenges in its implementation. These issues, primarily manifested in four key aspects, ultimately limit the practice's potential to further enhance regional tourism.

Product Development Homogenization and Insufficient Cultural Exploration

Anhui's Five-Animal Exercises tourism products currently focus on sightseeing, basic experiences, and performances. Most offerings remain at the superficial level of "watching the Five-Animal Exercises and learning a few movements," resulting in insufficient understanding of its historical culture, TCM health preservation concepts, and philosophical ideas. Moreover, there is a lack of integration between the cultural essence of the Five-Animal Exercises and modern tourism demands or regional cultural characteristics. Consequently, existing tourism products have low cultural added value and limited appeal (Li, 2025). Specifically, many current Five-Animal Exercises experience programs mechanically teach movements without systematic explanations incorporating TCM health preservation theories, failing to truly meet tourists' deeper needs for health preservation culture. The more fundamental issue lies in the insufficient natural integration of the Five-Animal Exercises with Bozhou's TCM culture and ancient city heritage, which has yet to form a distinctive and substantive tourism product system.

Insufficient Promotion Efforts Result in Limited Brand Influence

Although the Five-Animal Exercises are a national intangible cultural heritage, it is objectively necessary to acknowledge the various shortcomings in their current promotion and publicity: First, their brand influence is still limited to Anhui Province and surrounding areas, and their nationwide recognition and influence need to be improved. More importantly, the Five-Animal Exercises originated in Haozhou, where Bozhou City indeed has a good atmosphere for practicing the exercises. However, beyond Bozhou, the actual popularity of the Five-Animal Exercises still has significant room for improvement (Guo, 2017). In stark contrast, the current promotional methods are overly traditional, focusing mainly on offline cultural tourism festivals and performances, while online promotion is weak. Modern promotional tools such as short videos, live streaming, and new media platforms are not fully utilized, and the selected content is monotonous and outdated, making it difficult to naturally and effectively reach a broader tourist audience (Li, 2025). The more fundamental issue is the lack of systematicness and targeted promotion, with no practical and tailored promotional plans developed for different tourist groups (young people, elderly, and study tour groups), resulting in poor promotional effects. Finally, the English translation of the Five-Animal Exercises has two obvious defects: inconsistent translations and inadequate transmission of cultural connotations, which are the most direct and prominent obstacles in their international promotion (Guo, 2017).

The Industrial Chain is Not Perfect and the Added Value is Low

The tourism development of Five-Animal Exercises remains in its infancy, with an underdeveloped tourism industry chain. Current efforts primarily focus on sightseeing and basic experiential activities, while cultural and creative product development, wellness services, and educational training programs exhibit significant gaps, resulting in low tourism value-added. Specifically, cultural products lack innovation and practicality, mostly being simple replicas of regional offerings with severe homogenization, failing to meet tourists' genuine consumption demands and leading to poor sales. The wellness service system remains immature, lacking professional Five-Animal Exercises health instructors and standardized, replicable service protocols, thus failing to provide tourists with truly high-quality and guaranteed wellness experiences. Educational training programs also suffer from systemic deficiencies, with poorly designed courses that lack a complete "experience-learning-inheritance" framework, diminishing their educational value. Most critically, Five-Animal Exercises tourism has not established genuine synergies with

catering, accommodation, and transportation industries. The fragmented links across the industrial chain naturally hinder the maximization of economic benefits.

Deficiency of Inheritors and Professional Talents, Insufficient Supporting Capacity

The tourism development and living inheritance of Five-Animal Exercises depend on the support of inheritors and professional talents. However, Anhui currently faces a dual shortage of both inheritors and tourism professionals. On one hand, the number of Five-Animal Exercises inheritors is limited, with a severe aging trend and a lack of young inheritors. Some inheritors lack awareness of tourism development and market thinking, making it difficult to effectively integrate Five-Animal Exercises culture with the tourism industry, which hinders the innovation and development of Five-Animal Exercises tourism products. Although Bozhou has established a team of over 10,000 Five-Animal Exercises instructors, there remains a scarcity of professionals with both inheritance capabilities and tourism service skills (Bozhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Tourism and Sports, n.d.). This has prevented Five-Animal Exercises from achieving the same level of recognition as martial arts and Tai Chi.

On the other hand, the lack of professional talents in tourism development, planning, publicity and operation, and the low professional quality of the existing practitioners, make it difficult to meet the needs of high-quality development of Five-Animal Exercises tourism, resulting in unreasonable tourism product planning, poor publicity effect and non-standard operation management.

Optimizing Tourism Development of Five-Animal Exercises in Anhui Province and Promoting Regional Tourism Development

In view of the existing problems of Anhui Five-Animal Exercises tourism development, combining its cultural connotation and tourism value, based on the actual situation of regional tourism development, this paper puts forward the following optimization strategies to promote the deep integration of Five-Animal Exercises and tourism industry, further play its role in promoting regional tourism development, and achieve a win-win situation of cultural inheritance and tourism development.

Digging into the Cultural Connotation and Building a Differentiated Tourism Product System

Firstly, starting from the historical culture of Five-Animal Exercises, the health culture of TCM , and philosophical connotation, the culture of Five-Animal Exercises is naturally and appropriately combined with the culture of Bozhou TCM , the ancient city culture, and the ecological culture, so as to develop a variety of differentiated tourism products of “intangible cultural heritage + health preservation + ancient city + ecology”.

Bozhou's designation as the birthplace of Five-Animal Exercises stems from its centuries-old tradition of cultivating, processing, and trading Chinese medicinal herbs. The Western Jin Dynasty's Records of the Three Kingdoms: Wei Annals: Biography of Medical Experts documents Hua Tuo's medical practices and herbal medicine promotion in area of Qiao, establishing this as the earliest official historical evidence of Bozhou's connection to TCM . Bozhou now hosts a thriving medicinal herb market with over 30,000 vendors, offering more than 2,800 varieties daily and annual transactions reaching 60 billion yuan. Remarkably, the city has developed a complete TCM industry chain seamlessly integrating cultivation, herbal processing, patent medicine production, and research. In 2024, the industry scale reached 210.26 billion yuan, marking 11.9% year-on-year growth. This foundation has enabled Bozhou to systematically develop its “Bozhou Wellness” labor

brand (Luo, 2025). It underscores society's unique advantages for Five-Animal Exercises' development.

Furthermore, Bozhou has effectively integrated various activities such as the Medicinal Cuisine Wellness Competition, Medicinal Cuisine Wellness Food Festival, and the "World Medicine Capital Wellness Experience Tour." Consequently, during the 2025 Dragon Boat Festival holiday, Bozhou received a total of 1.838 million tourists, representing a year-on-year increase of 2.1%, with tourism revenue reaching 846 million yuan, up 3.9% year-on-year (Zhu & Li, 2025).

The development of Five-Animal Exercises wellness study products seamlessly combines TCM wellness theories with Five-Animal Exercises training, TCM wellness lectures, and medicinal cuisine experiences, precisely catering to the needs of study groups and wellness enthusiasts. More notably, Bozhou has successfully aligned intangible cultural heritage (ICH) with wellness branding, returning to the cultural core while adapting to market demands. The "preventive treatment" concept of Five-Animal Exercises has been organically and comprehensively integrated into medicinal cuisine development and wellness services, leading to the creation of wellness products and experiential programs suitable for diverse demographics (Guo, 2017). This has naturally and organically advanced the deep integration of "ICH + study + tourism," with Five-Animal Exercises inheritance and experience centers established in scenic areas, schools, and communities, bringing traditional wellness practices into daily life. A perfect complement to this is Bozhou's immersive Five-Animal Exercises experience, which uses VR/AR technology to recreate Hua Tuo's original choreography, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the historical roots and cultural charm of the exercises (Li, 2025). More importantly, Bozhou has implemented precise market segmentation for different tourist groups: trendy fitness classes and cultural landmarks featuring Five-Animal Exercises for young people, wellness retreat packages and chronic disease management programs for seniors, and systematic educational courses for study groups (Bozhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Tourism and Sports, n.d.). Each product caters to specific demographics with distinct strengths. Finally, Bozhou consistently innovates its Five-Animal Exercises tourism offerings, introducing new projects, performances, and cultural creations in a planned and rhythmic manner to avoid homogenization, ensuring these products stand out in the market with renewed vitality.

Strengthen the Publicity and Promotion to Enhance the Brand Influence

To better promote the Five-Animal Exercises, both the government and non-governmental organizations should collaborate and unite to support its promotion: Firstly, innovate promotional methods by combining traditional publicity approaches with modern new media platforms to build a comprehensive and diversified promotional system (Li, 2025). Offline, continue to organize events such as the Five-Animal Exercises Cultural Tourism Festival, the International Five-Animal Exercises Health Forum, and the Five-Animal Exercises Performance Competition, strengthen cooperation with neighboring cities and tourist attractions, and carry out joint promotions and mutual tourist exchanges (Bozhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Tourism and Sports, n.d.). Online, fully utilize new media platforms such as short video platforms (TikTok, Kuaishou), live streaming platforms, WeChat official accounts, and Xiaohongshu to produce popular science videos, health tutorials, and travel guides about the Five-Animal Exercises, creating popular check-in spots for the Five-Animal Exercises to attract young tourists. Secondly, standardize the English translation of Five-Animal Exercises by adopting a 'transliteration + annotation' approach to unify the transliteration names, such as "Wu Qin Xi (Five-Animal Exercises the exercise imitating the tiger, deer, bear, ape and bird)", While preserving the traditional cultural connotations of China, it also takes into account the acceptability

of readers, which is conducive to the international dissemination of Five-Animal Exercises (Hu, 2013). Thirdly, targeted publicity plans should be formulated to meet the needs of different tourist groups, pushing personalized publicity content to enhance the effectiveness of publicity. A linkage mechanism between intangible cultural heritage and the health industry should be established, integrating cultural, agricultural, and tourism resources to create a complete industrial chain from product development to market promotion, enabling Bozhou's intangible cultural heritage to "preserve its roots" while "living in the present (Zhao, 2026)." Fourth, strengthen the brand development of Five-Animal Exercises by establishing the core brand "Anhui Five-Animal Exercises Wellness Tourism". Design a unified brand logo and promotional slogan to enhance brand recognition and influence, promoting the Five-Animal Exercises tourism brand nationwide and globally (Li, 2025). Through collaboration with Confucius Institutes, conduct Five-Animal Exercises training worldwide to pave the way for its global dissemination (Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2025). Simultaneously, organize competitions to facilitate the learning and dissemination of Five-Animal Exercises.

Perfecting Tourism Industry Chain and Increasing Product Value-added

First, we will extend the Five-Animal Exercises tourism industry chain by systematically developing cultural and creative products, wellness services, and educational training programs. For cultural products, we will seamlessly integrate Five-Animal Exercises cultural elements with modern design concepts to create wellness tea sets, exercise manuals, trendy apparel, and collectible dolls. This initiative will help build brand recognition, boost sales, and enhance product value. In wellness services, we will leverage the dynamic inheritance of intangible cultural heritage by collaborating with universities and schools to develop standardized wellness protocols. We will establish Five-Animal Exercises-themed resorts and wellness clubs, offering comprehensive services including health maintenance, chronic disease rehabilitation, and health management. For educational training, we will partner with academic institutions to design structured courses and practical training bases, creating a seamless "experience-learning-inheritance" system that fully demonstrates the program's value. Notably, we will integrate Five-Animal Exercises tourism with catering, accommodation, transportation, and logistics sectors to maximize economic benefits through coordinated industry development. Specifically, we will develop themed restaurants featuring Five-Animal Exercises-inspired medicinal dishes, upgrade accommodation and transportation facilities in related scenic areas, and optimize visitor experiences. Therefore, Bozhou will leverage its premium cultural heritage, including the Five-Animal Exercises, as a cornerstone to regularly host cultural exchange and experiential activities (Xinhua News Agency, 2025). These initiatives aim to attract domestic and international tourists to practice wellness and tourism-based health care in Bozhou, effectively transforming cultural resources into a sustainable driving force for industrial development. This approach will pave a new path for high-quality cultural, tourism, and sports development in Bozhou—one that is rooted in tradition, distinctive in character, and promising for the future.

Cultivate Professional Talents and Strengthen Supporting Capacity

On one hand, efforts should be intensified to select, certify, train, and support inheritors of Five-Animal Exercises. Existing inheritors should receive enhanced policy support and official recognition, with multi-channel mobilization and training programs to improve their professional competence and strategic awareness. Encouraging their participation in tourism development, product innovation, and promotional campaigns will enhance their market insight and tourism development capabilities. Promoting Five-Animal Exercises learning across all age groups will cultivate young

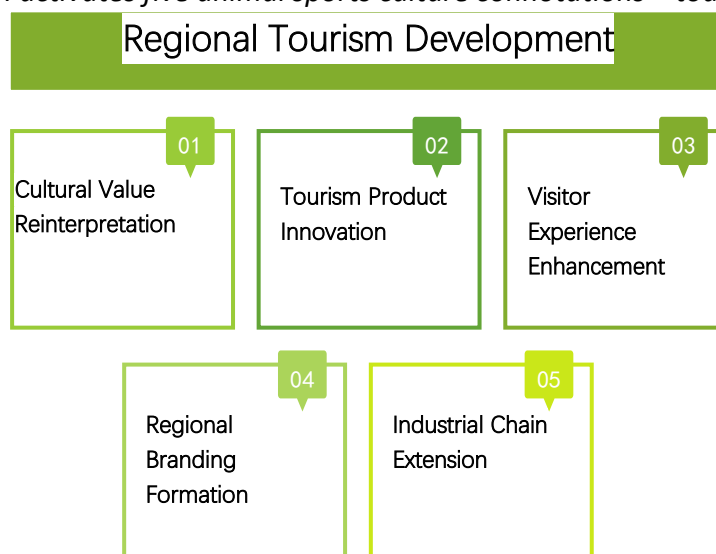
inheritors, optimize the age structure of inheritors, and ensure the sustainable inheritance of Five-Animal Exercises culture. Mobilizing university faculty and graduates to become inheritors will provide teaching support for effective cultural transmission. On the other hand, specialized tourism talent cultivation should be strengthened. Collaborating with universities and vocational colleges to establish Five-Animal Exercises-related tourism programs (such as tourism management, cultural and creative design, wellness services) will train professionals in tourism planning, promotion, operations, and wellness guidance. Existing practitioners should receive enhanced training to improve their professional skills and service quality. Attracting outstanding tourism development and operational talents will provide human capital support for the high-quality development of Five-Animal Exercises tourism. Simultaneously, improving incentive mechanisms will attract more professionals to engage in Five-Animal Exercises tourism development and inheritance initiatives.

Conclusion and Implications

Conclusion

As a national intangible cultural heritage, Anhui Five-Animal Exercises embodies profound historical and cultural significance while integrating elements of TCM and sports, making it a prime candidate for tourism development. This study examines the revitalization of Five-Animal Exercises in Bozhou City, Anhui Province, as a case study to analyze how intangible cultural heritage can boost regional tourism. Through qualitative case analysis, it transcends conventional descriptions of cultural tourism integration and constructs a mechanism model demonstrating how heritage revitalization drives tourism and regional development.

ICH activates five animal sports culture connotations + tourism promotion mode combination



The results of the present study clearly and hierarchically show that the activation of Five-Animal Exercises is based on five interrelated and mutually reinforcing dimensions to promote regional tourism development, namely, the reinterpretation of cultural values, the innovation of tourism products, the improvement of tourist experience, the shaping of regional brand, and the extension of industrial chain. Therefore, Five-Animal Exercises naturally transforms from a traditional health-preserving technique into a comprehensive resource for regional development.

The case of Five-Animal Exercises demonstrates clearly that ICH-based tourism development is neither spontaneous nor linear. It requires first activating strategies and then establishing

coordinated governance mechanisms to naturally and appropriately integrate cultural, experiential, and economic elements. Thus, intangible cultural heritage can serve both as cultural assets and economic drivers, both of which contribute to sustainable tourism development.

Theoretical and Practical Significance

Although this paper starts from the local background of China, the proposed mechanism model does not adhere to the specific institutions or cultural conditions of China. Instead, it organically integrates various elements such as the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage and the reinterpretation of cultural value, innovation in tourism products, enhancement of tourist experiences, shaping of regional brands, and extension of industrial chains. As a result, it clearly and powerfully demonstrates the general process of transforming heritage resources into regional tourism momentum.

This mechanism naturally aligns with East and Southeast Asia's regions rich in cultural heritage resources, as well as destinations where traditional wellness practices, embodied cultural activities, and living heritage forms are central to local identity. It is therefore particularly suitable for analyzing how regions developing wellness tourism, cultural tourism, or experiential tourism based on local intangible cultural heritage can genuinely and appropriately integrate such heritage into their tourism systems, rather than merely showcasing it superficially.

Since the model is based on processual association rather than specific policy instruments, it can provide a transferable analytical perspective for comparative study and practical planning. Therefore, it is advisable to use this framework to examine different cultures and regions in the future.

This study presents a clear and systematic analysis from a theoretical perspective, thereby opening new avenues for academic research on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and tourism development. Existing literature predominantly focuses on the cultural value or economic potential of ICH, yet rarely provides systematic arguments on how heritage revitalization can be translated into tangible tourism outcomes. The mechanism model constructed in this study effectively addresses this gap, clarifying the process-oriented characteristics and intrinsic connections in ICH tourism development, which holds demonstrative significance for subsequent research.

This study provides a clear and systematic analysis from a practical perspective, offering valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners. The case of Five-Animal Exercises demonstrates that activating ICH resources requires experiential product design, unified regional branding, and industrial chain integration—rather than isolated cultural displays. Therefore, governments, intangible cultural heritage inheritors, cultural practitioners, and tourism enterprises must collaborate to protect cultural heritage while achieving sustainable tourism development.

Meanwhile, this study proposes optimization strategies to address contradictions and challenges in the coordinated development of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) protection and tourism development. These insights provide targeted yet universally applicable references for countries and regions worldwide seeking to integrate cultural tourism through ICH resources, achieving cultural preservation while fostering regional economic synergy. The approach effectively balances authentic cultural heritage conservation with market-oriented development, creating a win-win scenario of promoting ICH transmission, revitalizing tourism industries, and driving sustainable regional growth.

Theoretical Contributions and Innovations

The innovations of this study are reflected in three aspects:

Mechanism innovation: constructing a five-dimensional mechanism model “cultural reinterpretation–product innovation–experience enhancement–brand formation–industrial chain extension” to systematically explain how ICH promotes regional tourism development.

Perspective innovation: introducing the theoretical lens of “ICH activation” to integrate cultural studies with regional development research.

Methodological innovation: employing a case-mechanism analytical approach that moves beyond descriptive research toward theory-building combined with empirical explanation.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study makes modest contributions, its findings remain highly context-dependent as a single-case qualitative analysis. Therefore, the current results should not be directly generalized to all regions or heritage types. Future research should adopt comparative case studies or mixed methods to systematically validate the proposed mechanism models across diverse cultural-geographical contexts. Additionally, quantitative assessments of visitor experiences and economic impacts are essential to enhance the reliability of international cultural heritage tourism research.

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