

# Research on the Impact of Non-Heritage Industrialization on the Economic Empowerment and Social Status of Rural Women

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**Abstract.** Intangible cultural heritage is an important path for the transformation of traditional cultural resources into modern economic momentum, and it is also a key grasp to promote rural development under the background of rural revitalization strategy. This article takes rural women as the research object. Through literature research methods and case analysis methods, it explores the economic empowerment role of non-heritage industrialization on rural women in terms of job creation, income improvement, skill literacy cultivation, etc., as well as rural women's family decision-making power, social participation and self-identification in the process. Changes, and then analyze the mechanism of improving its social status. The study found that the industrialization of non-heritage effectively breaks the traditional development dilemma of rural women through the transmission chain of "skills-employment-income-rights", but at the same time, it faces challenges such as balance between industrialization and inheritance, uneven distribution of interests, and conflict of family roles. Based on this, this article puts forward countermeasures from the four levels of the government, enterprises, social organizations and women themselves, aiming to promote the positive interaction between the industrialization of non-heritage and the development of rural women, and help the comprehensive revitalization of rural areas.

**Keywords:** Non-heritage Industrialization; Rural Women; Economic Empowerment; Social Rural Revitalization.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, China has attached great importance to the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. The promulgation of policy documents such as the "Law of the People's Republic of China on Intangible Cultural Heritage" and the "14th Five-Year Plan for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage" has provided institutional guarantees for the industrialized development of intangible cultural heritage. By the end of 2023, China had a total of 43 items on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List (Register), 1,557 national-level representative items of intangible cultural heritage, and 3,062 national-level representative inheritors of intangible cultural heritage. Among them, the proportion of intangible cultural heritage resources in rural areas exceeded 60%, making it an important birthplace of the industrialization of intangible cultural heritage.

Meanwhile, rural women, as an important part of the rural labor force, have long been confronted with problems such as narrow employment channels, high economic dependence, and insufficient social participation. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2022, the labor participation rate of rural women in China was 58.2%, lower than that of rural men at 72.1%. Moreover, nearly 70% of rural women were employed in low-value-added agricultural production or scattered labor fields, and their per capita annual income was less than 65% of that of rural men. Against this backdrop, the industrialization of intangible cultural heritage, with its characteristics of "local materials, flexible employment and strong cultural attributes", has provided rural women with a new option to balance family and work, and has become an important carrier for promoting the economic independence and social status improvement of rural women.

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integrating the industrialization of intangible cultural heritage with the development of rural women, the deficiency of "emphasizing macro policies over micro practices" in the research on rural women can be made up. The analytical framework from the industrialization of culture to the empowerment of women and then to the improvement of their social status can enrich the theoretical research in the fields of intangible cultural heritage protection and gender equality. Meanwhile, the research findings can provide references for policies promoting the development of rural women, help enterprises optimize the interest connection mechanism with rural women, guide social organizations to better pay attention to rural female intangible cultural heritage practitioners, disseminate intangible cultural heritage, and achieve multiple goals for the development of rural women and rural revitalization.

## **2. Research Methods**

This article comprehensively employs the methods of literature research and case analysis. In the literature research section, through systematic retrieval of mainstream academic databases at home and abroad such as CNKI, Google Scholar, and Web of Science, Chinese and English literatures related to "Industrialization of Intangible Cultural Heritage", "Empowerment of Women's economy", and "Social Status of Rural Women" during the period from 2019 to 2025 were selected. Through the review and analysis of these literatures, this paper clarifies the core concepts and theoretical basis of the research, summarizes the main achievements, academic disputes and research deficiencies of the existing studies, and constructs a solid theoretical framework for this research.

Meanwhile, this paper selects three typical cases of intangible cultural heritage industrialization, namely Miao embroidery in Qiandongnan, Guizhou Province, tie-dyeing in Dali, Yunnan Province, and paper-cutting in Xunyi, Shaanxi Province. It collects secondary data to analyze the changes in the economic and social status of rural women under different industrialization models, enhancing the empirical and persuasive nature of the research.

## **3. The Economic Empowerment Path for Rural Women through the Industrialization of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

### **3.1 Create Flexible Employment Opportunities**

The employment choices of rural women are often restricted by factors such as family care and geographical limitations. However, intangible cultural heritage industries (such as embroidery, tie-dyeing, paper-cutting, and weaving) have the characteristics of home-based production and flexible working hours, which can effectively adapt to the time arrangement of rural women. Take the Miao embroidery in Qiandongnan, Guizhou Province as an example. More than 200 Miao embroidery cooperatives have been established in the local area. They adopt the "cooperative + farmer" model, distributing raw materials for embroidery to rural women's homes. Women can complete the embroidery during their spare time from farming or household chores, and the cooperatives will then collect and sell them uniformly. Research shows that rural women involved in the Miao embroidery industry work an average of 20 to 25 hours per week. They can balance their children's education and elderly care while also obtaining stable employment opportunities. 85% of the respondents said, "We no longer worry about not being able to take care of our families by working outside." [1]

Besides, the industrialization of intangible cultural heritage has also driven employment in the upstream and downstream sectors, such as raw material procurement, product design, packaging and logistics, and e-commerce operation, providing rural women with diversified employment options. The tie-dye industry in Zhoucheng Village, Dali, Yunnan Province, has not only absorbed over 3,000 rural women to engage in tie-dye production, but also trained more than 20 female e-commerce live-streamers responsible for the online sales of tie-dye products. Some female live-streamers can earn 8,000 to 12,000 yuan per month, far exceeding the average income level of rural women in the local area. [4]

### **3.2 Increase Income Levels**

To determine whether a rural woman has achieved economic empowerment, the most crucial criterion is to see if her income has increased. The industrialization of intangible cultural heritage can precisely help them increase their income through two key ways, enabling them to earn more money than ordinary casual workers by relying on their unique skills or making their income more stable through large-scale industrial production. The actual research data clearly shows this change: Rural women engaged in intangible cultural heritages can earn an average of 32,000 yuan per year on average, which is 2.3 times higher than those who do not participate. If one masters the core skills of intangible cultural heritage, such as becoming an inheritor of intangible cultural heritage, the annual income can even reach 80,000 to 150,000 yuan. When their income increases, the economic say of rural women also becomes stronger. Ms. Wang, who does paper-cutting in Xunyi, Shaanxi Province, once said that in the past, all the money at home was managed by her husband. If she wanted to buy something, she had to discuss it with her husband. Nowadays, I can earn over 3,000 yuan a month by paper-cutting. I have the final say on my own money. I can buy school supplies for my children and health products for my parents. I no longer have to look at others' faces.

The research data also confirms this point: among the women involved in the intangible cultural heritage industry, 78% have their own independent bank accounts, 65% can decide for themselves how to spend their income, and 42% can participate in the decision-making of major household expenses such as buying a house or a car. These three proportions are 45%, 38% and 27% higher respectively than those of women who have not participated in the intangible cultural heritage industry. [3]

## **4. The Impact Mechanism of Intangible Cultural Heritage Industrialization on the Social Status of Rural Women**

### **4.1 From Dependence to Contribution, Decision-Making Power Has Been Significantly Enhanced**

In traditional rural families, men often hold the decision-making power of the family due to their status as the "main economic force", while women are in the position of "dependents". The industrialization of intangible cultural heritage has made rural women important contributors to the family economy, and their say in the family has accordingly increased. Specifically, it is manifested as follows: First, in daily expenditure decisions, the proportion of decision-making power over "children's education expenses" and "household daily necessities purchases" by women engaged in intangible cultural heritage is 72% and 68% respectively, which is 35% and 29% higher than that of non-participating women. Second, in major decision-making, 28% of women engaged in intangible cultural heritage are involved in decisions such as "home renovation" and "land transfer", and some women have even become the dominant force in family decision-making.

The case of Ms. Wu, a Miao embroidery practitioner from Qiandongnan, Guizhou Province, is representative: "In the past, when our family was building a new house, my husband only discussed it with his brother and never asked for my opinion." Now I can earn over 40,000 yuan a year from Miao embroidery. When we were building our new house, my husband took the initiative to discuss it with me and finally adopted my suggestion of "reserving a display area for embroidery works". In addition, the participation of women engaged in intangible cultural heritage in their children's education has also significantly increased. 83% of the women indicated that they "can independently decide on their children's extracurricular interest classes", a 41% increase compared to non-participating women. This reflects the transformation of family roles from "caregivers" to "educational decision-makers".

## **4.2 Social Roles Are Diversified from Within the Family to the Public Domain**

The industrialization of intangible cultural heritage has broken the traditional lifestyle of rural women who "stayed at home", gradually bringing them into the public domain and significantly increasing their social participation. First, they participate in community affairs. Many women engaged in intangible cultural heritage have become members of village women's federations and heads of cooperatives, participating in the management of village collective affairs. For instance, the director of the Miao embroidery cooperative in a certain village in Qiandongnan, Guizhou Province, also serves as the director of the village women's federation, leading over 200 rural women to participate in the construction of "Beautiful Courtyards" and promoting the improvement of the community environment. Second, they participate in industry activities. Women engaged in intangible cultural heritage frequently attend intangible cultural heritage expos, cultural and art festivals and other events, and exchange and cooperate with practitioners from other regions. Some women have even become national and provincial-level representative inheritors of intangible cultural heritage. For instance, Ms. Duan, a tie-dye practitioner from Dali, Yunnan Province, has represented the Dali tie-dye industry in national intangible cultural heritage protection conferences many times after becoming a provincial-level intangible cultural heritage inheritor. Offer suggestions and strategies for the development of the intangible cultural heritage industry; Thirdly, they participate in public welfare activities. Some female practitioners of intangible cultural heritage use their skills to conduct public welfare training, helping poor and disabled women master intangible cultural heritage skills. For instance, Ms. Zhang, an inheritor of paper-cutting in Xunyi, Shaanxi Province, offers free training to over 50 disabled women every year, encouraging them to achieve employment and income growth through paper-cutting. This reflects the transformation of social roles from "beneficiaries" to "contributors".

Research data shows that women engaged in intangible cultural heritage participate in community activities 2 to 3 times a month, which is 3.5 times that of non-participating women. Among them, 15% of women hold positions in community organizations and industry associations, an increase of 12% compared to non-participating women, significantly enhancing their social influence.

## **4.3 From “Self-Denial” to “Self-Affirmation”, the Mental Outlook Has Been Completely Renewed**

In traditional concepts, rural women are often defined as "housewives" with a relatively low sense of self-worth. The industrialization of intangible cultural heritage has enabled rural women to gain a sense of achievement in both the inheritance of skills and economic income, significantly enhancing their self-identity. On the one hand, the learning and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage skills have enabled rural women to feel the charm of traditional culture and enhance their cultural confidence. For instance, Ms. Li, a tie-dye practitioner in Dali, Yunnan Province, said, "I used to think that tie-dyeing was just an 'old craft' and nothing remarkable." Now I can turn tie-dye into fashionable items and sell them all over the country. I can also explain the culture of tie-dye to foreigners. I feel extremely proud. On the other hand, economic independence and social recognition have enabled rural women to break away from the self-perception of being "dependents" and form an identity as "independent individuals". 89% of women engaged in intangible cultural heritage work said, "Now I feel that I am not only a wife or a mother, but also an inheritor of intangible cultural heritage and an entrepreneur, with my own value."

In addition, the industrialization of intangible cultural heritage has also promoted mutual assistance and cooperation among rural women, creating a community atmosphere of "sisters helping each other". In the Miao embroidery cooperative of Qiandongnan, Guizhou Province, female practitioners make progress together through the methods of "experienced leading new" and "strong helping weak". Many women said, "I have met many sisters in the cooperative. When encountering difficulties, we solve them together and no longer feel lonely." This kind of community support has further enhanced the self-identity and happiness of rural women.

## **5. The Challenges Faced by Rural Women in Empowering the Industrialization of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

### **5.1 The Distribution of Benefits is Uneven, and Rural Women Are at the Weak End of the Industrial Chain**

In the intangible cultural heritage industry chain, middlemen often control core resources such as design, marketing and channels, but rural women mainly engage in low-value-added production links, and the distribution of benefits is seriously uneven. Research shows that in the profit distribution of intangible cultural heritage products, the production link (rural women) only accounts for 15% to 20%, while the design and marketing links account for over 60%. In the Miao embroidery industry of Qiandongnan, Guizhou Province, for a Miao embroidery garment priced at 1,000 yuan, rural women can only earn 150 to 200 yuan as processing fees, while the rest of the profits are occupied by enterprises and middlemen. In addition, some enterprises also have problems such as delaying payment for goods, which further harm the economic interests of rural women. For instance, a certain tie-dyeing enterprise in Dali, Yunnan Province, once owed processing fees to over 50 rural women for three months, forcing some of them to withdraw from the tie-dyeing industry.

### **5.2 Family Role Conflicts and the Constraints of Social Concepts Pose Significant Obstacles to the Development of Rural Women**

Although the intangible cultural heritage industry has the feature of "flexible employment", rural women still face the dual pressure of work and family. Research shows that 62% of women engaged in intangible cultural heritage (ICH) work say, "We often feel exhausted as we have to balance household chores, family care and ICH production every day." Some male family members are opposed to women's participation in the intangible cultural heritage industry, believing that "women should do housework at home and engaging in intangible cultural heritage is 'not doing a good job' ". 18% of women have reduced their production time for intangible cultural heritage due to their family's opposition. In addition, traditional gender concepts have also led to a "promotion bottleneck" for rural women in the intangible cultural heritage industry. For instance, in the management and core design positions of intangible cultural heritage enterprises, men account for over 70%, making it difficult for rural women to enter the high-end links of the industrial chain and limiting their development space.

### **5.3 Shortage of Funds, Technology and Talents, and Insufficient Capacity to Empower the Industrialization of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

One is the shortage of funds. Rural women generally lack start-up capital and have narrow financing channels (such as difficulty in obtaining bank loans without collateral), which leads to many women being unable to expand their production scale or start their own businesses. Second, the technology is backward. Some intangible cultural heritage industries still adopt traditional production methods and lack modern design, production and marketing technologies, resulting in insufficient product competitiveness. Thirdly, there is a shortage of talents. Rural areas lack professional design and marketing talents, making it difficult for intangible cultural heritage enterprises to develop products that meet market demands and effectively connect with the market.

## **6. Countermeasures and Suggestions for Promoting the Industrialization of Intangible Cultural Heritage to Empower Rural Women**

### **6.1 At the Government Level, Strengthen Policy Guidance and Support, and Improve the Guarantee Mechanism**

First, formulate special policies, incorporate the industrialization of intangible cultural heritage and the development of rural women into the rural revitalization plan, and introduce policies such as "Subsidies for female practitioners of intangible cultural heritage" and "Interest Subsidies for Loans

for female Entrepreneurs of intangible cultural heritage" to alleviate the financial pressure on rural women. Second, we should strengthen the protection and supervision of intangible cultural heritage, formulate quality standards for intangible cultural heritage products, standardize the industrialization process of intangible cultural heritage, prevent "homogenization" and "superficiality", and protect the technical value of rural women. Third, improve the benefit distribution mechanism, establish a benefit connection mechanism of "enterprises + cooperatives + female practitioners", require enterprises to pay reasonable remuneration to female practitioners, and establish a collective wage negotiation system to safeguard the economic interests of rural women. Fourth, enhance publicity and education. Through media, community promotion and other means, transform traditional gender concepts and create a social atmosphere that "supports women's participation in intangible cultural heritage industries".

Guizhou Province has strived for the All-China Women's Federation to issue the "Implementation Plan on Supporting Women and Children's Causes in Guizhou to Open Up a New Situation in Rural Revitalization", and has strongly supported Guizhou in promoting the innovative transformation and creative development of ethnic cultural handicrafts such as the "Brocade Plan". The Postal Savings Bank of Sandu County has launched a combined plan of "intellectual property pledge + small credit loan", and in conjunction with the government's interest subsidy policy, it provides low-threshold and high-efficiency financing support for intangible cultural heritage enterprises. It also issued the first 150,000 yuan government-subsidized loan to Pan Xie, a returnee embroiderer who started a business. [8]

## **6.2 At the Social Organization Level, a Bridging and Linking Role Should Be Played to Provide Diversified Services**

Carry out public welfare training and guidance, organize professional talents to provide training for rural women in intangible cultural heritage skills, entrepreneurship management, legal knowledge, etc., to help women improve their overall quality. Second, provide legal aid and psychological support, offering legal services such as labor rights protection and family conflict mediation for rural women to alleviate the psychological pressure brought about by "family role conflicts". Third, build platforms for exchanges and cooperation, organize rural women to participate in intangible cultural heritage expos, cultural and art festivals and other activities, and promote mutual assistance, cooperation and experience sharing among women. Fourth, promote the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, carry out activities to bring intangible cultural heritage into schools and communities, help rural women better understand the connotation of intangible cultural heritage, and achieve a dual improvement in "skill inheritance" and "cultural identity".

The Department of Culture and Tourism of Yunnan Province has publicized and reported on intangible cultural heritage projects, inheritors or brands participating in large-scale events such as the Chengdu International Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival and the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Expo, providing a platform for rural female intangible cultural heritage practitioners to exchange and cooperate. In addition, the Department of Culture and Tourism of Yunnan Province has collaborated with the Public Welfare Department of Xiaohongshu to create the "New Intangible Cultural Heritage" brand event. They have taken the lead in establishing an innovative cooperative relationship between "New Era Original Designers" and "Traditional Intangible Cultural Heritage artisans", promoting exchanges and cooperation among intangible cultural heritage practitioners [9].

## **6.3 Rural Women Should Enhance Their Overall Quality and Increase Their Initiative in Development at Their Own Level**

Take the initiative to learn intangible cultural heritage skills and modern knowledge, actively participate in training provided by the government, enterprises and social organizations, and constantly improve skill levels and market awareness. Second, enhance the awareness of cooperation and organizational capabilities. By joining cooperatives, establishing women's mutual aid groups and other means, develop together and increase the say in the industrial chain. Third, change traditional

concepts, establish an independent and confident self-perception, actively participate in family decision-making and social affairs, and strive for one's own rights and interests. Fourth, we should attach great importance to the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. During the process of industrialization, we should adhere to the core skills and cultural connotations of intangible cultural heritage to achieve the unity of "economic benefits" and "cultural value".

For instance, the "Star Embroidery Future: Seeking Beauty in Yunnan" project in Yunnan: The Department of Culture and Tourism of Yunnan Province and the Beijing Starbucks Foundation have jointly launched the "Star Embroidery Future: Seeking Beauty in Yunnan" intangible cultural heritage inheritance and rural women empowerment project, investing 5 million yuan. The project aims to help rural women engaged in intangible cultural heritage master "good skills", cultivate "good teams", design "good products", and promote "good markets", thereby empowering rural women. "Enhance their skill levels and market awareness" [10].

## 7. Conclusion

The industrialization of intangible cultural heritage, as an important carrier for the integration of traditional culture and modern economy, provides a new path for the economic empowerment and social status improvement of rural women. By creating flexible employment opportunities, raising income levels and cultivating skills and qualities, the industrialization of intangible cultural heritage has effectively alleviated the "employment-family" conflict for rural women, broken the predicament of "economic dependence", and enhanced their sustainable development capabilities. Meanwhile, by enhancing family decision-making power, expanding social participation and strengthening self-identity, the social status of rural women has undergone a transformation from "dependent" to "independent individuals".

However, the industrialization of intangible cultural heritage in empowering rural women still faces challenges such as an imbalance between industrialization and inheritance, uneven distribution of benefits, conflicts in family roles, and resource shortages. To this end, it is necessary for the government, enterprises, social organizations and rural women themselves to form a joint force: the government should strengthen policy guidance and supervision, enterprises should fulfill their social responsibilities, social organizations should provide diversified services, and rural women should enhance their comprehensive quality and initiative. Only in this way can a positive interaction be achieved between the industrialization of intangible cultural heritage and the development of rural women, making intangible cultural heritage not only a "living fossil" of traditional culture, but also a "golden key" for rural women to realize their self-worth and promote rural revitalization.

Future research can further expand the analysis of regional differences in the industrialization of intangible cultural heritage, compare the impact of industrialization models of different regions and types of intangible cultural heritage on the empowerment of rural women, and provide references for formulating more targeted policies.

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