Article

Research on Innovative Development Paths for the Jiangsu Lacquer Art Industry from the Perspective of Intangible Cultural Heritage Activation

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Abstract: ***Background:*** Jiangsu is a core region for the preservation and development of lacquer art in China. Yangzhou, Suzhou, Nanjing, and other areas have developed regional lacquer art systems with distinct styles and characteristics rooted in their rich historical and cultural foundations. Amid shifting consumer demands, the diffusion of digital technologies, and the transformation and upgrading of cultural industries, traditional lacquer art in Jiangsu has encountered development bottlenecks. Prominent problems remain in talent reserves, technological innovation, brand building, and industrial coordination, constraining the long-term development and dynamic preservation of the lacquer art industry. ***Purpose:*** This study systematically examines the development challenges facing the Jiangsu lacquer art industry and explores development paths and optimization strategies suited to its preservation, innovation, quality improvement, and upgrading. This approach provides a theoretical reference and practical support for the dynamic preservation and high-quality industrial development of local lacquer art. ***Methods:*** This study integrates a literature review, field research, and case analysis. From June 2025 to April 2026, researchers conducted field research involving 30 lacquer art enterprises in Jiangsu and Fuzhou. This primary research was supplemented by industry association data and a comparative analysis of typical cases. ***Results:*** The findings show that Jiangsu lacquer art currently faces multiple practical problems. These include disruptions in the transmission of skills, an imbalanced talent structure, insufficient innovation in traditional techniques, weak brand influence, a low degree of industrial integration, and an inadequate collaborative development mechanism among multiple stakeholders. These factors make it difficult for the industry to meet the evolving demands of cultural industries in the modern era. ***Conclusion:*** A four-dimensional (4D) driving model comprising talent, technology, brand, and application scenarios should be established. Through differentiated regional strategies and industrial chain integration, Jiangsu lacquer art can achieve dynamic preservation and industrial upgrading.

Keywords: Jiangsu lacquer art; cultural industries; living inheritance; industrial upgrading; four-dimensional driving model

1. Introduction

Jiangsu lacquer art possesses a rich history. The lacquered bone dagger unearthed at the Baojia site in Liyang, Changzhou, confirms that the Jiangsu region had mastered basic lacquering techniques in the prehistoric period. During the Han dynasty, lacquerware handicraft production flourished in Yangzhou, Lianyungang, and other parts of Jiangsu; lacquerware from northern Jiangsu was especially noteworthy (Feng, 2025). In modern times, archaeologists have unearthed large quantities of Han-dynasty lacquerware objects in these areas, further confirming this historical development. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, driven by the prosperity of the Jiangnan economy and the development of

urban commerce, Jiangsu gradually formed a lacquer art industrial pattern represented by Yangzhou, Suzhou, and Nanjing. Because these three regions were rooted in different socioeconomic conditions, their stylistic features were markedly different: Yangzhou, supported by the strong financial resources of the salt-merchant economy and a prosperous literary culture, developed lacquer art styles that combined courtly magnificence with literati elegance (Liu, 2024); Suzhou, deeply influenced by literati culture, formed a distinctive craft style characterized by classical elegance, ethereal refinement, and delicacy (Li & Jin, 2023); and Nanjing, relying on court craft traditions, accumulated distinctive technical strengths in gold painting, imitation foreign lacquer, and related fields. Although the three regions exhibit different styles, they complement one another and together constitute the diverse and symbiotic cultural ecology of Jiangsu lacquer art.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Jiangsu lacquer art underwent a socialist transformation and a transition toward a modern craft system. As an outstanding representative of Chinese traditional crafts, Yangzhou lacquer art developed the exquisite technique system of "Yangzhou craftsmanship" and a profound literati aesthetic style, becoming an important representative of national intangible cultural heritage projects (Zhao, 2025). Nanjing followed a different path: although the scale of its traditional lacquerware industry continued to shrink, Nanjing University of the Arts and Nanjing Normal University became important national forces in modern lacquer art education. These institutions promoted a contemporary and experimental character in Nanjing lacquer art by emphasizing academy-based and contemporary exploration. Suzhou, drawing on its literati tradition, continued a development path centered on life aesthetics and refined craftsmanship. The historical differentiation among the three regions means that contemporary development should not follow a uniform model but should adopt locally adapted and differentiated strategies. The current challenges of disruptions in the transmission of skills and market contraction in Jiangsu lacquer art are not simply a matter of the loss of techniques; rather, they reflect structural contradictions accumulated over a long period within the industry.

Current academic research on lacquer art mainly focuses on lacquer art history, technical preservation, design transformation, and regional industrial development. However, systematic comparisons of differentiated development paths within Jiangsu Province remain insufficient, and the discussion of industrial coordination mechanisms is still inadequate. Based on this situation, this article raises two core questions: What structural challenges does the Jiangsu lacquer art industry face? How can traditional lacquer art achieve living inheritance and industrial upgrading through the 4D drivers of talent cultivation, technological innovation, brand building, and consumption scenarios? It should be noted that the perspective of "intangible cultural heritage activation" adopted in this study differs from static heritage protection. It advocates returning traditional crafts to modern production and everyday life through production innovation, market cultivation, cultural communication, and scenario reconstruction, thereby completing the transformation from a "passively protected object" into a "living cultural resource."

2. Research Methods

2.1 Research Materials and Analytical Methods

This study employs a literature review to systematically examine research on Jiangsu lacquer art, intangible cultural heritage activation, the transformation of traditional crafts, and digital innovation. It draws on specialized journals such as Chinese Lacquer and *Zhuangshi*, and integrates industry association materials, local industrial policies, and publicly available industry data. These sources clarify the development trajectory of the industry and provide a solid theoretical and documentary foundation for the analysis.

2.2 Field Research and Data Collection

From June 2025 to April 2026, the researchers conducted field research in Yangzhou, Nanjing, and Suzhou in Jiangsu Province and Fuzhou, visiting a total of 30 lacquer art-related entities, including state-owned enterprises, private studios, and individual workshops. The researchers conducted 23 interviews, including 15 on-site interviews and 8 online interviews, involving approximately 60 practitioners and operators. These semi-structured interviews focused on topics such as production, technology, talent, and markets. Additionally, the research team distributed two types of questionnaires. A total of 230 consumer questionnaires were issued, of which 218 valid responses were collected, yielding an effective response rate of 94.78%. Furthermore, 30 enterprise questionnaires were distributed, and all were returned. The data on the age of lacquer art masters, graduate retention rates, and enterprise technology application rates cited in this article derive from the present field research and publicly available materials from the Jiangsu Arts and Crafts Industry Association. Industrial data on Jingdezhen and Yixing were respectively sourced from local government public documents and Xinhua industry statistical reports (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

Table 1. Data Sources and Survey Statistics

Data source type	Acquisition method	Sample size/frequency	Time span	Applicability judgment
In-depth field interviews	Face-to-face interviews and on-site observation	15 sessions	2025.06–2026.03	Enterprise operation, production process, and market sales
Supplementary telephone interviews	Telephone and video interviews	8 sessions	2026.03–2026.04	Industry trends, technology application, and practitioner experience
Consumer questionnaire survey	Online and offline distribution	230 copies	2026.01–2026.02	Consumer preferences and young people's willingness to enter the industry
Enterprise questionnaire survey	Targeted distribution and collection	30 copies	2025.06–2026.03	Enterprise operation, development dilemmas, and transformation demands
Enterprise case research	Field visits and document collection	30 enterprises	2025.12–2026.04	Product structure, brand operation, and digital application
Industry document compilation	Association materials and government public reports	21 documents	2025.04–2026.04	Industrial scale, talent structure, and industry development data

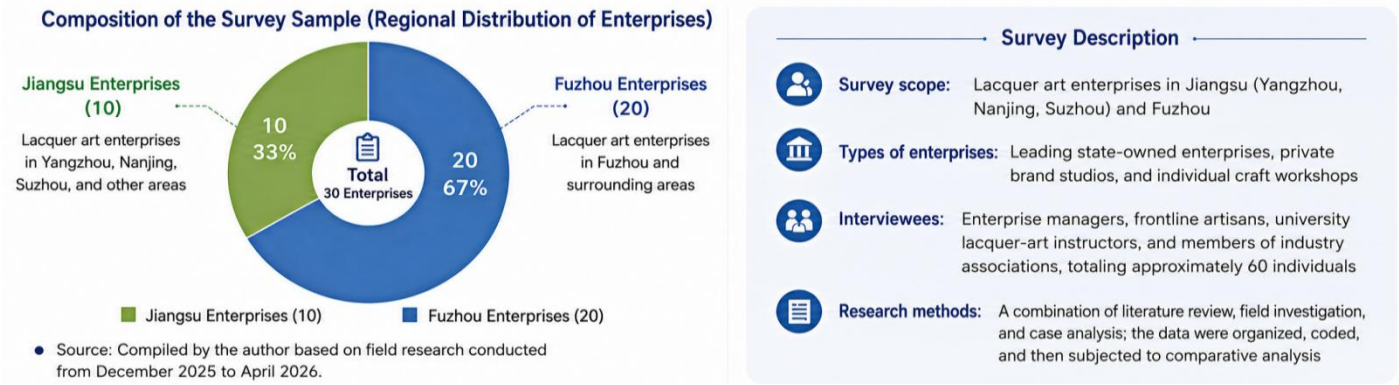


Figure 1. Composition of Survey Samples
Note. Author's own drawing

2.3 Case Selection and Comparative Logic

This study selected the Yangzhou Lacquerware Factory, the Fuzhou brand "Wulun," Jingdezhen ceramics, and Yixing Zisha as comparative cases, analyzing them from the dimensions of industrial structure, brand operation, cultural-creative development, and cultural tourism integration. These cases, like Jiangsu lacquer art, belong to the field of traditional crafts and therefore have strong comparative value. However, because of differences in regional culture, industrial foundations, and consumer environments, their

development models cannot be directly copied. This study therefore extracts transferable experiences while distinguishing the boundaries of applicability.

3. Practical Dilemmas in the Development of the Jiangsu Lacquer Art Industry

3.1 Inheritance Discontinuity and Imbalance in Talent Structure

Disruptions in the talent pipeline and an imbalance in the personnel structure are core challenges constraining the transformation and upgrading of the Jiangsu lacquer art industry. According to the researchers' March 2026 field research and publicly available industry data, the average age of national- and provincial-level lacquer art masters in Jiangsu has exceeded 60 years. Some unique lacquering techniques are at risk of being lost, and the pool of young talent is critically inadequate.

Structural biases in the education system have further intensified the mismatch between supply and demand. More than 10 provincial institutions offering lacquer art programs commonly demonstrate a tendency to "emphasize lacquer painting while neglecting lacquerware." Courses in lacquer painting account for more than 70% of curricula, resulting in an inverted structure characterized by "too many artists, too few craftsmen, and a serious shortage of designers." For example, over the past five years at Nanjing University of the Arts, annual undergraduate enrollment in lacquer art averaged 12 students, while graduate enrollment totaled 15 students; the retention rate of graduates in the past three years was less than 25% (data Note. compiled from the research team's December 2025 interview records with the university's craft department). A considerable number of graduates have moved into visual communication fields such as graphic design and illustration. This reveals a structural mismatch between university training and industrial demand: students learn "how to paint with lacquer," whereas the industry needs professionals who know "how to make and sell lacquerware." This finding aligns closely with Cai's (2024) argument that the discipline of arts and crafts must transform toward cultivating industry-oriented talent; however, this transformation has not substantially begun in the field of Jiangsu lacquer art.

In addition, the long-term absence of an incentive mechanism for industry talent has further limited the career growth opportunities of young practitioners. The selection of Jiangsu Provincial Arts and Crafts Masters has been suspended for nearly a decade since 2016, and the closure of this honorary pathway has seriously weakened the professional motivation of young technical talent. Combined with the long training cycle and delayed economic returns characteristic of lacquer art, this situation conflicts sharply with the employment pace and income expectations of modern society, making young people willing to devote themselves to lacquer art increasingly scarce.

3.2 Insufficient Innovation and Difficulties in Industrial Transformation

Over a period of long-term development, the Jiangsu lacquer art industry has formed a nationally renowned system of manual techniques. In the current industrial environment, however, the limitations of traditional production methods regarding efficiency, cost, and market adaptability have become increasingly apparent. The researchers' survey of 10 Jiangsu lacquer art enterprises and 20 Fuzhou enterprises shows that Fuzhou enterprises have an overall application rate of modern technologies—including digital modeling, laser engraving, and intelligent temperature control—that is about 20% higher than that of Jiangsu. Behind this gap lies a deeper structural reason: the Fuzhou lacquer art industry entered market competition relatively early, forcing enterprises to introduce modern technologies to improve efficiency. Today, Fuzhou lacquer art, while rooted in traditional techniques, integrates contemporary design, advanced technologies, and diversified application scenarios, thereby maintaining developmental vitality (Shi & Yang, 2024). By contrast, Jiangsu lacquer art has long relied on government-led intangible cultural heritage protection mechanisms, resulting in relatively insufficient momentum for technological renewal.

From the perspective of product transformation, the Jiangsu lacquer art market has long been dominated by traditional categories such as screens, furniture, display objects, and business gifts, while original design products that fit contemporary living scenarios occupy a relatively small market share. Fuzhou lacquer art has a more diversified product system. In addition to daily-use products such as furniture, tableware, and interior decoration items, as well as religious objects such as Buddhist statues and shrines, it has also developed specialized businesses for lacquer art raw materials and production tools (Zhou, 2024). According to field interviews with large Jiangsu lacquer art enterprises, local flagship products are concentrated in traditional display objects priced between 10,000 and 50,000 RMB, and their target customers are mainly collectors and high-end gift buyers (see Figure 2). This differs markedly from the preferences of younger consumers for simple, lightweight, and practical products. The consumer questionnaire in this study shows that people under the age of 35 account for less than 15% of Jiangsu lacquer art consumers, indicating a homogenous target audience. Fuzhou has now developed an integrated path of ”traditional craft + modern design + digital technology.” Brands such as Wulun use modern equipment in more than 65% of their production process. By combining lacquer with wood, ceramics, metal, and other materials, these brands create tea wares, flower vessels, lamps, and other daily-use products and art objects with modern aesthetics, promoting the shift of lacquer art from collectible display objects to everyday consumer goods (see Figure 3) (Zhao, 2024). By comparison, while upholding the value of traditional techniques, Jiangsu lacquer art still needs to strengthen the application of digital technologies and original design capabilities, thereby promoting transformation toward more lifestyle-oriented, youth-oriented, and diversified products.



Figure 2. Field Visit to the Yangzhou ”Qihua” Flagship Store
Note. Photograph by the author(s).



Figure 3. Cloud Residence - High-footed Dou (lacquer high-footed dou fruit plate/tea ware)
Note. Reproduced from Cloud Residence - High-footed Dou, by Rong Library, n.d. Retrieved June 30, 2026, from https://www.ronglibrary.com/rematerializehigh-value-residential/designers/rf9dl9a3s9b17f2dsj83gy7a.

3.3 Insufficient Brand Awareness and Ambiguous Market Positioning

While product innovation and transformation have proceeded relatively slowly, Jiangsu lacquer art has also failed to form a brand influence commensurate with its craft value. Taking the "Qihua" brand under Yangzhou Lacquerware Factory as an example, the enterprise established an innovation studio in 2020, actively developed lifestyle-oriented products, and used short-video platforms for communication. However, innovative products still account for only a limited proportion of the overall production structure, and the share of products targeting young consumers in online sales has not yet reached scale. Brand influence remains concentrated among traditional craft enthusiasts and gift-consumption circles; expansion among young consumer groups is weak, and the effects of brand upgrading have not been fully realized.

Weak brand building, insufficient publicity, and a single communication channel are common problems in the lacquer art industry (Wang, 2024). This phenomenon is not an isolated case for Qihua, but reflects the overall brand dilemma of Jiangsu lacquer art. From a brand economics perspective, "Jiangsu lacquer art" has not yet formed effective collective action as a regional public brand. Even when consumers have some knowledge of Yangzhou lacquerware, they find it difficult to establish an overall cultural identification with "Jiangsu lacquer art." Most small enterprises and workshops still rely on traditional offline retail channels; their digital marketing capabilities are weak, and consumers' fixed perceptions of lacquer art products as "expensive, traditional, and not practical enough" are difficult to correct. These factors further constrain the expansion of brand influence.

This dilemma contrasts sharply with the successful path of Jingdezhen's brand as the "ceramic capital." Jingdezhen has used government-led regional brand building and incorporated young creators into the brand narrative through the "Jingpiao" phenomenon, thereby achieving an effective connection between traditional crafts and contemporary cultural consumption (Yang, 2025). The core of this mechanism is not the brand marketing activity of a single enterprise, but the systematic construction of regional cultural identity, in which government, industry associations, enterprises, and creators participate together to form a mutually reinforcing brand ecology. By contrast, Jiangsu lacquer art still shows obvious gaps in brand storytelling, visual identity system construction, and intellectual property (IP) operation. The systematic construction of regional cultural identity has not yet started, and this is currently the core capability that Jiangsu lacquer art lacks most. Therefore, the fundamental path for promoting the brand upgrading of "Jiangsu lacquer art" does not lie in the breakthrough of a single enterprise, but in relying on representative brands such as Qihua to integrate the resources of Yangzhou, Suzhou, and Nanjing and to build a collaborative mechanism for the regional public brand of "Jiangsu lacquer art." Such systematic construction of cultural identity can drive the overall transformation of products toward everyday use, communication toward digitalization, and brands toward younger audiences.

3.4 Insufficient Industrial Chain Coordination

At present, Jiangsu lacquer art lacks sufficient integration across the entire supply chain, from raw material supply and design research and development to brand marketing and cultural tourism experiences. Small and medium-sized handicraft workshops lack modern marketing concepts and scalable operation plans. In the market, integration with local cultural-creative and cultural tourism industries remains superficial. Lacquer art experience centers and study-tour programs have not yet developed mature business models. At the same time, the industrial digital layout remains relatively backward, and the market reach of online marketing and e-commerce channels is limited.

Compared with similar domestic traditional craft industries, Jiangsu lacquer art shows a relatively obvious development gap. According to an official report issued by the Jingdezhen Municipal People's Government in February 2026, the total output value of Jingdezhen's ceramics industry exceeded 100 billion RMB in 2025, forming a complete industrial ecosystem covering production, cultural creativity, cultural tourism, and

exports. According to Xinhua data from May 2025, the annual transaction volume of Yixing Zisha exceeded 25 billion RMB, with more than 100,000 practitioners, and its e-commerce livestreaming and cultural tourism integration formats have matured. By contrast, according to the researchers' March 2026 interview records with the management of Yangzhou Lacquerware Factory, the factory's annual output value exceeded 100 million RMB in 2015 but then declined sharply. In the past three years, its annual output value has remained below 50 million RMB, and the whole industry lacks leading enterprises to drive development.

The choice of Jingdezhen ceramics and Yixing Zisha as references does not mean that Jiangsu lacquer art can simply replicate their paths. Jingdezhen ceramics is selected because both industries are regional traditional crafts and face the common task of upgrading from a single product category to a cultural brand. Yixing Zisha is selected because, after the contraction of the gift market, it rebuilt its output value through three new channels: collection, cultural tourism, and livestreaming e-commerce. This experience has strong structural similarity to the current difficulties faced by Jiangsu lacquer art. In recent years, with the rapid development of information transmission and logistics, the Zisha industry has also entered a period of rapid growth (Cao & Qian, 2023). However, both Jingdezhen ceramics and Yixing Zisha have more mature collection-market foundations and higher consumer awareness—conditions that Jiangsu lacquer art cannot directly replicate in the short term. Their experience must therefore be transformed in light of Jiangsu's actual conditions. The deeper reason for the decline in Yangzhou Lacquerware Factory's output value lies in the direct impact of the contraction of official consumption on the high-end gift market after 2012, as the enterprise failed to open new market space through industrial chain integration in a timely manner. Yixing Zisha completed its transformation fundamentally because it had earlier formed a collaborative ecology among producers, cultural institutions, and distribution platforms. Jiangsu lacquer art, by contrast, precisely lacks this ecological foundation.

4. Innovative Development Paths for the Jiangsu Lacquer Art Industry

The high-quality development of the Jiangsu lacquer art industry requires the construction of a four-dimensional collaborative model comprising talent, technology, brand, and application scenarios. These four dimensions are not merely parallel; rather, they share an internal logic of interdependence and mutual reinforcement. Talent is the foundation and provides support for technological innovation; technological innovation transforms talent advantages into product competitiveness; brand building amplifies product value and expands market awareness; and scenario integration embeds brand value in cultural tourism consumption and supply chain coordination. There is a systematic dependence among the four pathways: talent accumulation deepens craft cognition and forms the knowledge basis for technical improvement (talent -> technology); technological breakthroughs expand product boundaries and strengthen market competitiveness (technology -> market); and market recognition feeds back into capital investment, which then further incentivizes talent cultivation (market -> capital -> talent). This process forms a self-reinforcing closed loop (see Figure 4).

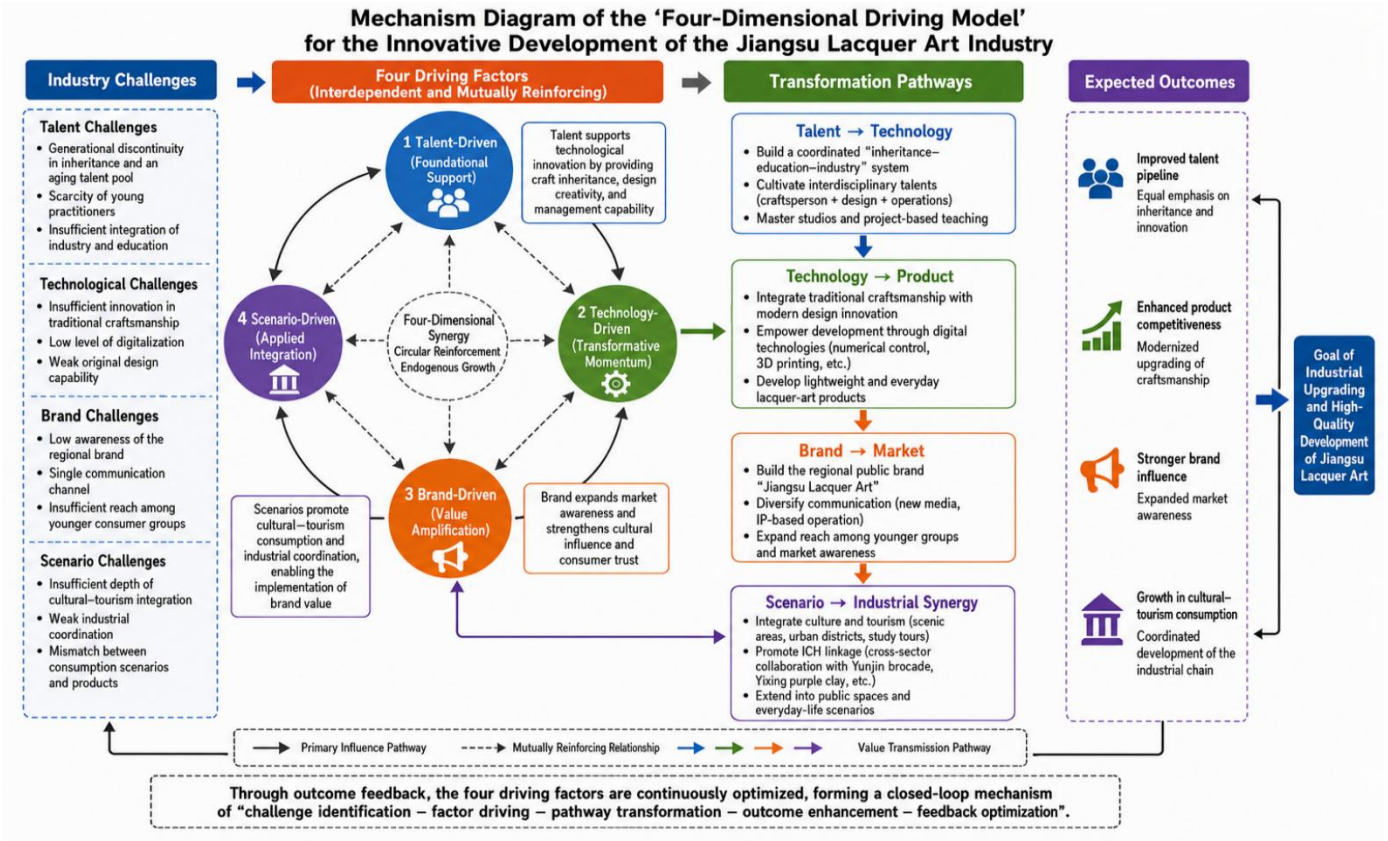


Figure 4. Mechanism Diagram of the Four-Dimensional Driving Model
Note. Created by the author(s).

4.1 Building an "Inheritance-Education-Industry" Collaborative System

Traditional lacquer craft is an important component of China's intangible cultural heritage, and its preservation and protection are facing severe challenges in the context of globalization (Wen & Li, 2025). To realize the dynamic revitalization of Jiangsu lacquer art, it is first necessary to resolve the crisis of talent discontinuity and build a modern talent training system integrating "heritage, education, and industry." Although the traditional master-apprentice system can preserve the original form of techniques, its long training cycle and small scale can no longer meet industrial demand. A systematic and modernized education path must therefore be explored.

To analyze the talent training challenges of Jiangsu lacquer art, it is necessary to distinguish between two different types of industry-education disconnection. One is "information disconnection," meaning that universities do not understand industrial demand. The other is "interest disconnection," which can be analyzed from the perspective of incentive compatibility in institutional economics: university performance evaluation systems are oriented toward research publications and artistic awards, while industry values product transformation and market revenue. These value demands are fundamentally misaligned. The main problem in the current integration of production and education in Jiangsu lacquer art belongs to the second type. Simply "building training bases and offering joint courses" is not enough; the key is whether institutional arrangements can be established that allow university teachers and lacquer art enterprises to share outcomes—for example by allowing teachers to participate in enterprise revenue distribution through technical guidance, or by including jointly developed university-enterprise products in teaching achievement evaluation systems. Only when this interest barrier is removed can industry-education integration move from "project-based cooperation" to "sustained symbiosis."

In curriculum development, universities need to break away from the entrenched tendency to "emphasize technique while neglecting industry." While teaching traditional lacquering techniques, they should incorporate product design, digital technology application, cultural and creative development, and market operation. In university-enterprise cooperation, the Yangzhou Lacquerware Factory has established partnerships with the Jiangsu College of Tourism, Yangzhou University, Nanjing Forestry University, and other institutions. However, the participation of top provincial art academies remains low, modern industrial courses such as digital lacquer art and brand operation are insufficiently integrated, and cooperation is mostly short-term and project-based, lacking long-term coordination. To address these shortcomings, cooperation should be expanded, a "master studio + project-based teaching" model should be promoted, dual-teacher appointment and outcome-sharing systems should be improved, and supporting policies such as special subsidies and professional certification should be introduced. It is worth noting that talent training paths in the three cities should not be uniform. Yangzhou should emphasize the cultivation of industry-oriented talent and traditional craft artisans; Nanjing, relying on resources such as Nanjing University of the Arts, is suitable for cultivating contemporary lacquer art creators and experimental design talent; and Suzhou can focus on cultivating interdisciplinary talent with literati aesthetic literacy and life aesthetic product development capabilities.

In summary, lacquer art education needs to transform from single-track artistic training to the cultivation of industry-oriented talent. It should cultivate academy-based talent dedicated to artistic creation as well as industry-oriented talent who understand products and are skilled in operation, thereby forming a multi-level and comprehensive talent ladder and providing strong talent support for the long-term development of Jiangsu lacquer art.

4.2 Promoting Craft and Design Innovation to Activate Core Industrial Momentum

Lightweight, personalized, and rapidly iterated products have become the core consumer demand for innovation in lacquer art (Cui et al., 2025). To break through its traditional bottlenecks, Jiangsu lacquer art must strengthen design leadership and promote deep integration between traditional techniques, modern aesthetics, and frontier technologies. Local exploration has already begun. For example, the Jiangsu Young Artists Association has cooperated with universities to hold the "Lacquered Object Narratives: Jiangsu University Lacquer Art Creation Competition," encouraging the industry to move beyond traditional object thinking and promote cross-material integration of lacquer art with ceramics, metal, and other materials, thereby developing cultural and creative products with both cultural connotation and practical value.

The practical experience of outstanding domestic lacquer art brands provides valuable references, and the Fuzhou brand Wulun is a typical example. Its design team refines complex patterns such as dragon-scale motifs into concise lines, preserving the charm of Eastern aesthetics while meeting contemporary aesthetic preferences. It also emphasizes functional implementation, developing products such as tea wares, screens, and small household objects, thereby bringing lacquer art back from "high-end unique pieces" to everyday goods that young consumers can afford. At the craft level, the brand insists on using natural lacquer, paired with simple forms and delicate textures, improving production capacity while retaining traditional material qualities (see Figure 5). The core of its success lies in a key design transformation: it turns the consumer experience from "seeing the complexity of the technique" into "feeling the aesthetic value of the craft." In this way, the product shifts from something that "must be explained before it can be appreciated" to something that "can be loved at first sight," greatly lowering the threshold for consumption. It should be noted that Wulun's success also depends on Fuzhou's existing group of lacquer art enthusiasts as an initial market foundation, and that Fuzhou lacquer art differs from Jiangsu in material attributes and consumer ecology. The relevant experience must therefore be transformed according to local conditions.

Nanjing and Suzhou in Jiangsu have the conditions to establish similar initial markets based on university art circles and cultural and creative consumer groups, making them the most feasible entry points for promoting design transformation.



Figure 5. Works from the Dragon-Scale Pattern Series and Exhibition View
Note. Reproduced from Works from the Dragon-Scale Pattern Series and Exhibition View, by Toutiao, n.d. Retrieved June 30, 2026, from http://m.toutiao.com/group/7033568507765719564/.

In terms of craft and technological innovation, leading Jiangsu enterprises have already taken active action. The Yangzhou Lacquerware Factory has cooperated with Nanjing Forestry University and Yangzhou University to establish a provincial-level research and development platform and carry out technical research on topics such as the integration of modern design and the improvement of natural lacquer materials. It has also introduced three-dimensional engraving machines and laser marking machines for numerical-control production, and established an innovation studio composed of practitioners born in the 1980s and 1990s. Each year, it launches more than 200 new products, including high-end art objects and mass-oriented cultural and creative products such as lacquer bookmarks and tea wares.

Overall, however, design innovation remains superficial. Most works are still limited to traditional themes, cross-field integration often stays at the level of formal collage, coordination in craft research and development is weak, and universities, enterprises, and workshops largely work independently. Digital technologies are mostly used for product display and are not closely integrated with creation and production processes. To address these problems, a design-empowerment mechanism linking universities and cultural and creative enterprises should be implemented, guided by the accurate identification of young consumers' aesthetic needs and the development of lightweight, everyday cultural and creative products. Provincial-level research and development centers should be strengthened by relying on leading enterprises to tackle key technologies such as digital lacquer art. High-quality domestic and international lacquer art institutions should also be actively connected to build an integrated innovation chain of "design, research and development, and production." The innovation focuses of the three cities should also differ: Yangzhou should promote mass production and digital technology integration; Nanjing should focus on contemporary lacquer art installations and experimental design; and Suzhou should concentrate on the modern transformation of literati aesthetics and everyday objects.

4.3 Strengthening Brand Communication and Cultural-Creative Transformation to Expand Market Space

To break through the limits of niche circles, Jiangsu lacquer art must establish a modern brand communication system and open a transformation channel from traditional craft to mass consumption. According to a 2025 survey by the Nanjing Vocational College of Information Technology, traditional large-scale lacquerware has long been trapped in a situation where it is "praised but difficult to sell" because of complex processes and high pricing. By contrast, lightweight products such as lacquer

fans and lacquer cultural and creative items have rapidly gained popularity on short-video platforms, indicating that young consumer groups have a high acceptance of simple and practical lacquer art products. Brand building should therefore work in two directions. First, existing brand resources should be integrated, with old and established brands such as Qihua as the core, to refine the overall characteristics of Jiangsu lacquer art as warm, elegant, and finely crafted, and to promote the collaborative construction of the regional public brand of "Jiangsu lacquer art." Second, cultural and creative transformation should be deepened by focusing on the needs of young consumers and developing products that combine cultural value with practical use.

The core challenge of brand communication lies in the tension between the "slow craft" of lacquer art and contemporary fast communication. The solution is to transform "slowness" into communication content. By displaying the complete production process of objects and the changing light and shadow of lacquer films, emotional connections between consumers and lacquer art can be established. The Yangzhou Lacquerware Factory has already formed a professional e-commerce team to conduct more than eight hours of livestreaming sales every day, using demonstrations of craft details and artisan stories to narrow the distance with consumers. Future brand communication should focus on transforming the tension between "slow craft" and contemporary communication. It should take the visualization of craft processes as a core strategy, build emotional connections between consumers and lacquer art through digital platforms, and gradually expand public awareness through cross-field event marketing and scenario placement.

In cultural and creative implementation, the Yangzhou Lacquerware Factory has already made useful explorations. It has combined traditional mother-of-pearl inlay and flat-polishing techniques with modern design to launch lightweight cultural and creative products such as Su Chao co-branded badges, lacquer bookmarks, and car fragrance boxes. It has also incorporated Yangzhou elements such as Wuting Bridge and the qionghua flower into product design, retaining traditional texture while adapting to everyday use scenarios. In addition, local IP resources such as the Jiangsu Grand Canal, Jiangnan gardens, and salt-merchant culture can be further explored. By drawing on the IP-based operation of Palace Museum cultural-creative products and the lifestyle-oriented transformation of Fujian lacquer art, a series of lacquer art cultural and creative products can be developed to truly integrate traditional crafts into modern home and everyday-life scenarios.

4.4 Promoting Integrated Development of "Industry + Cultural Tourism + Intangible Cultural Heritage"

Zhou (2025), in the article "Distinguishing handicrafts, intangible cultural heritage, and cultural creativity: Reflections based on an investigation of Yangzhou handicrafts," argues that relying solely on conventional protection and cultural and creative development is insufficient to help Yangzhou handicrafts break through their development bottlenecks. The same is true for the broader Jiangsu lacquer art industry. The industry urgently needs to move beyond the conventional model of workshop production and single-product sales, and to connect deeply with cultural tourism consumption and urban cultural spaces. Through collaborative linkage among "industry + cultural tourism + intangible cultural heritage," the contemporary value of traditional crafts can be activated.

Jiangsu has a rich foundation in cultural tourism. Resources such as the Yangzhou section of the Grand Canal, Suzhou gardens, and Nanjing historical districts provide excellent carriers for the dynamic preservation of lacquer art. Differentiated cultural tourism forms can be created according to the cultural features of the three cities. Yangzhou can rely on Grand Canal culture and salt-merchant culture to build an immersive lacquer art-themed district. Drawing on the "theatre-village symbiosis" model of Jianhu Huai Opera Town, it can connect lacquerware workshops, experience spaces,

and themed homestays, allowing visitors to observe traditional processes such as carved lacquer and mother-of-pearl inlay at close range and to participate personally in making lacquer fans and small lacquer objects. Suzhou can draw on the refined literati atmosphere of its gardens by setting up lacquer art aesthetic experience centers in garden scenic areas and launching lacquer paintings and small ornaments that match the artistic conception of gardens, enabling lacquer art to naturally integrate with the charm of Jiangnan. Nanjing can take advantage of its university art resources and modern artistic atmosphere to create academy-based lacquer art exhibition spaces in Laomendong and art parks, focusing on modern lacquer art installations and cross-field cultural and creative products to attract young tourists and art enthusiasts. Differentiated development among the three cities can avoid homogeneous competition and create regionally recognizable lacquer art cultural tourism brands.

The industrialization of intangible cultural heritage cultural and creative products is currently a widely discussed development direction in the industry. It integrates technology, creativity, and industrial development, constructs a complete industrial chain, and can achieve a win-win outcome for intangible cultural heritage preservation, economic benefits, and social benefits (Chen, 2025). In the "Six Entries of Intangible Cultural Heritage" campaign launched by the Jiangsu Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism in 2025, intangible heritage workshops and handicraft experience courses attracted large numbers of visitors. The Nanjing Laomendong Intangible Heritage Market recorded more than 15,000 visitors in a single day (data Note. the author's 2025 field observation records and public data from the Nanjing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism). However, increased visitor flow does not necessarily mean a synchronous increase in industrial revenue. The author's field research found that most tourists remain at the stage of viewing and taking photographs, while the proportion who actually complete purchases is not high. In particular, large lacquer art products that are expensive and lack clear everyday uses are difficult to convert into immediate consumer goods in tourism scenarios. This indicates that the current problem of Jiangsu lacquer art is not a lack of exhibition channels, but the absence of effective adaptation between products and consumption scenarios. Therefore, the key to cultural tourism integration is not merely to "display intangible cultural heritage," but to reconstruct the product system around the characteristics of tourism consumption. Compared with high-end display lacquerware, small cultural and creative products with transparent pricing, portability, and everyday functions are more likely to enter mass-consumption scenarios. The co-branded badges and car fragrance boxes launched by the Yangzhou Lacquerware Factory already reflect the trend of transforming traditional crafts toward younger and more lifestyle-oriented products.

In addition, Jiangsu lacquer art can further strengthen cross-field collaboration by creating co-branded works with local intangible cultural heritage resources such as yunjin brocade, zisha, and Jinling sutra engraving, thereby building a "Jiangsu Intangible Heritage Study Tour Route" and realizing resource sharing and visitor-flow exchange. At the same time, it can draw on lacquer art applications in hotel soft furnishings in Taicang and integrate traditional lacquer art elements into urban public space construction, allowing citizens to experience the beauty of lacquer art in everyday life.

5. Conclusion

From the perspective of intangible cultural heritage activation, this study uses literature analysis, field research, and comparative case analysis. The findings show that the development challenges of Jiangsu lacquer art are not simply a matter of disruptions in the transmission of skills, but rather comprehensive structural problems caused by insufficient coordination among talent, technology, brand, and application scenarios. The four-dimensional driving model of "talent, technology, brand, and application scenarios" proposed in this article is not a simple juxtaposition of elements; rather, its components form an internal operating logic of progressive development and cyclical empowerment.

The industrial foundations and development orientations of lacquer art in Yangzhou, Nanjing, and Suzhou differ from one another; therefore, a homogeneous development model should not be adopted. Construction should proceed according to local conditions: Yangzhou should focus on the industrial preservation of traditional techniques; Nanjing should deepen contemporary experimental lacquer art; and Suzhou should promote lifestyle-oriented product transformation based on literati aesthetics. This study clarifies the two types of problems in the integration of production and education in Jiangsu lacquer art: "information disconnection" and "interest disconnection." By benchmarking against cases such as Fuzhou lacquer art, Jingdezhen ceramics, and Yixing zisha, it identifies the boundaries of applicability for different development experiences and proposes differentiated development paths for the three cities. This addresses the limitation of previous studies that treated Jiangsu lacquer art as a single undifferentiated whole, and it also provides practical reference for the transformation and upgrading of similar regional traditional crafts.

Due to objective constraints, this study still has certain limitations. It is difficult to obtain comprehensive operational data from small and medium-sized lacquer workshops and enterprises; the fieldwork sample is mainly based in Yangzhou, while the breadth and depth of research in Nanjing and Suzhou remain limited; and some conclusions are derived from typical case analysis. Future research may use larger-scale questionnaires and multi-regional panel data to improve empirical analysis, test the operating logic of the four-dimensional driving model, explore the internal relationship between brand and market, and use quasi-experimental designs to evaluate policy effects, thereby further enriching research on regional intangible cultural heritage industries.

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