

From Symbolic Recognition to Limited Public Visibility: Field Isolation and Capital Conversion in the Digital Transformation of Jialu Oil-Paper Umbrellas

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Article

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Abstract

National ICH status provides cultural authority for a craft, but authority alone rarely brings attention, purchase interest or online participation. This paper takes the Jialu oil-paper umbrella in Wuyuan County as an example to explore why this national-level craft is only partially visible in consumption, tourism and digital media. Based on field observations, interviews with inheritors, and online and offline questionnaires, Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital are used to conduct this research. Based on the evidence, the umbrella has substantial cultural and symbolic capital in the fields of politics and heritage, but this capital is poorly realised in terms of public awareness, economic benefits and digital dissemination. Inheritors work from a craft-centred logic, institutions focus on protection and legitimacy, and consumers or tourists often seek aesthetic experience, utility and shareable stories. These different demands keep the relevant fields somewhat separate. Therefore, the digital field can be regarded as a possible mediation space for this system; it may spread craft knowledge more widely, encourage public participation, and link cultural narratives with market activities, but it should not be viewed simply as a tool for technology application. By examining limited public exposure and incomplete capital mobilisation, this study contributes to the sociological study of ICH in the digital age. The focus is therefore on how value moves between fields, rather than on digital promotion as a technical add-on alone.

1. Introduction

Since the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003, attention from academia has turned to the protection, promotion and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) (Kurin 2004). In China, the protection of intangible cultural heritage has gradually moved away from emergency rescue, archival preservation and database construction towards digital exhibitions, online dissemination, development of cultural and creative products and intelligent management (Peng et al. 2006; Han and Zhou 2022; Ma et al. 2019; Liu and Zhong 2025). Under the combined influence of urbanisation, industrialisation and changing consumer lifestyles, many traditional craft practices still rely on oral transmission and small-scale apprenticeship systems, which may lead to a decline in practitioners and a weakening of the mechanism for intergenerational transmission (Lu 2024). Digital technology is gradually being used to create virtual museums, 3D models, online platforms, short videos, augmented reality (AR), and AI-generated cultural products to boost the spread and recognition of intangible cultural heritage (Liu et al. 2017; Gao and Xu 2022; Zhang et al. 2023; Chen and Wang 2025).

Digitalisation of intangible cultural heritage should be viewed more broadly than just a problem of technology and communication. Firstly, although these heritage projects have received official recognition and possess cultural value, they have not garnered broad public attention or market recognition and have not been widely disseminated online. According to the above studies, digital technology can be used to support the preservation, exhibition, dissemination and product innovation of traditional culture (Chen et al. 2017; Li 2024; Chen and Shen, 2025; Xie et al. 2025). However, little

attention has been paid to the social mechanisms by which recognised heritage value is converted into public awareness, tourism consumption, market demand and digital participation. In other words, although official heritage status offers symbolic legitimacy, it does not guarantee that cultural and symbolic capital will be disseminated in all parts of society.

Jialu oil-paper umbrellas of Wuyuan County provide a good case study for studying this contradiction. As nationally designated intangible cultural heritage items, they have a long history of craftsmanship and local culture, and are also highly symbolic. Most previous research on Jialu oil-paper umbrellas has focused on craftsmanship techniques, inheritance problems, development conditions, geographical constraints, conservative design philosophies, and cultural and creative product design (Yu 2016; Song and Du 2025). Although the above studies have provided some information on the craft, they have not fully explored why a national intangible cultural heritage craft does not receive equal attention in current consumption, tourism and digital media. Therefore, the problem is not whether the Jialu oil-paper umbrella should be digitised, but rather why its accumulated cultural and symbolic capital has not been effectively converted into widespread public attention, market recognition and digital accessibility.

Bourdieu's field theory can be applied to this problem. Field, habitus and capital help explore how actors define and employ cultural values in specific social spaces (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004; Li 2002; Li 2003). A field is not a passive setting; it is an organised space of positions, rules and conflicts over recognition and resources. Therefore, heritage values are not received by society in one single way. The same craft can be presented in different ways for different purposes in different areas. Field theory thus helps explain why cultural and symbolic capital that is effective in one field may be weak when applied to another (Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Husu 2022).

Jialu oil-paper umbrellas are typical of the above. Value in the cultural-craft field is often associated with hand-made skills, authenticity, local knowledge and history. Political and cultural heritage areas add official recognition and symbolic significance. Markets and tourism, on the other hand, judge the craft by price, appearance, convenience, travel experience and souvenir value. This craft needs to be noticeable, interactive and shareable in the digital age to reach more people. These are field logics, not simply individual wishes. When inheritors, institutions, consumers, tourists and platforms do not align their expectations, the craft is out of touch with the public, and capital circulation is thus obstructed.

Based on field observations, interviews with heritage inheritors and online and offline questionnaires, this paper explores the reasons for the relatively low public awareness of the Jialu oil-paper umbrella despite its designation as a national heritage item. The three research problems are:

RQ1: Why does the symbolic capital of a nationally recognised intangible cultural heritage project fail to translate into public attention and market recognition automatically?

RQ2: How do the different stakeholders in the cultural-craft field, politics, the market, tourism, and the digital economy perceive and evaluate the Jialu oil-paper umbrella?

RQ3: Through what functions can digital space connect craft knowledge, user participation, visual experience and market communication?

Based on the answers to the above questions, this paper proposes a new conception of the digital transformation of ICH as a process of field reconnection and capital conversion, rather than solely a technical solution. It adds to the study of intangible cultural heritage by changing the focus from the tools for digitalisation to the social system that determines whether heritage value can spread. It can be seen that field isolation and a mismatch in habitus explain why the state-recognized traditional craft activities have little public awareness in the digital era, thus extending Pierre Bourdieu's analysis.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 ICH Digital Transformation and the Problem of Public Visibility

Digitisation is now a central issue for ICH safeguarding research. Generally speaking, digital tools refer to ways of recording, protecting, displaying, spreading and promoting heritage resources. Early works in Chinese literature provided a new way of protection through digital preservation, such as databases and digital archive resources (Peng et al. 2006; Chen et al. 2017). Later studies have explored online transmission, digital exhibitions, virtual museums, cultural-creative design, smart management, networked communication and other digitally mediated ICH practices (Han and Zhou 2022; Ma et al. 2019; Liu and Zhong 2025; Li et al. 2025a; Xiao 2025).

Recent research has expanded this discussion. Research abroad has applied semantic web reasoning, computational modelling and ontology methods to study cultural transmission and intercultural communication in digital heritage (Adamou et al. 2023). Virtual museum technology has been used in China to promote the inheritance of Tujia instrumental music culture (Liu et al. 2017), and digital simulation has been applied to Guangzhou ivory carving (Gao and Xu 2022). Other studies have examined ICH emojis (Chen and Shen 2025), Nixing Pottery culture under culture-tourism convergence (Li 2024), and youth-oriented ICH brand redesign in the digital field (Xie et al. 2025). Work on AIGC, multimodal storytelling, and human-machine co-creation also considers digital creative ICH products (Li et al. 2025b), and research on AI-generated art asks whether such tools can support the sustainability of ICH, including Yangliu New Year paintings (Zhang et al. 2023). These examples are used here not as a catalogue of tools, but as evidence that digital heritage work often moves between documentation, display, design, and participation.

In short, the above studies have shown that digitalisation is now a necessary direction for promoting ICH. However, most of this work is still limited to technology application, visual presentation, platform communication and product design. The social systems that determine whether recognised heritage value can be spread publicly, marketed, consumed by tourists and disseminated online are not widely studied. Therefore, although existing research has explored how heritage may be presented or

redesigned, it has paid less attention to why some state-recognized ICH projects remain poorly known in daily life and online. Traditional crafts are especially likely to face this gap; their value often lies in tacit knowledge, manual skills, local memory and symbolic meaning that cannot be transmitted through finished products alone.

Jialu oil-paper umbrellas can be used to study this problem because research on them is still limited. Yu (2016) studies technique and development conditions, and Song and Du (2025) examine new Chinese-style cultural and creative product design. Their work provides technical guidance, development impetus and design references, but it does not explain why national ICH status and symbolic value have not brought broad public awareness, tourist recognition, market acceptance or digital dissemination. Therefore, the present paper does not focus only on how to digitise ICH, but asks why recognised heritage value fails to spread across sectors.

2.2 Bourdieu's Field Theory: Field, Habitus and Capital Conversion

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of a field can also be used to explore the problems listed above. Bourdieu believes that a field is an organised system of social relations based on different positions. Actors in a particular field vie for resources, legitimacy, recognition and other forms of capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004). Thus, a field is not just a background or context, but a social field with its own rules, value logic and power relations. Fligstein and McAdam (2012) also believe that a field is a place for strategic behaviour where people aim to preserve or change the social order. Actors are both constrained by the field and able to change it through practice; thus, field theory can be used to study the connection between structural conditions and actor agency (Wang 2020). This View is very suitable for studying heritage, and it can help explain why the value of intangible cultural heritage is not fixed but changes according to the definition and recognition in different social environments.

Pierre Bourdieu's system also has the characteristic of habitus. It is a relatively stable and transferable system of values that guides people in their thinking, feeling, and behaviour in society. Habitus does not mechanically determine behavior, but it guides its direction and makes certain forms of perception and action seem natural to participants. Given that actors have creative and historical agency, habitus is not fixed but changes along with changes in society and practice (Li 2002). Different actors may develop various forms of habitus based on their field positions in the context of intangible cultural heritage. Heritage inheritors may focus on craftsmanship, authenticity, manual skills and historical inheritance. The government or institutions may prioritize protection, certification, cultural legitimacy and public cultural responsibility. Consumers and tourists may be more interested in aesthetics, price, convenience, experience and souvenirs. Digital users and platforms may judge heritage based on visibility, interactivity and shareability. These are not just the individuals' own choices, but also the different spheres and applications for different groups.

Capital provides the resources for the inheritance-value network described above. Bourdieu's four kinds of capital are economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital. Capital serves as

both the object of competition and the means by which participants in a certain field can attain status and recognition (Li 2003). For projects of intangible cultural heritage, the cultural capital may be craft knowledge, historical connotations, local memory and aesthetic traditions, and symbolic capital can be generated by official recognition, heritage status and cultural legitimacy. However, capital recognised in one area is not automatically available for use elsewhere. Translate, recognise and accept according to the rules of the receiving field.

This will help us better understand the changes in traditional craft culture under digitalisation. If the cultural and symbolic capital of a traditional craft practice is only recognised in the cultural, artisanal or political spheres, it may not be given social recognition, economic benefits or digital dissemination. Capital Turnover Needs Inter-sectoral Cooperation. For example, Husu (2022) has applied Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of field, capital and habitus to explore power relations and institutional changes in the energy transition. Cai and Lai (2025) have also shown that the application of social media and cross-cultural adaptation can be understood through the interaction of field positioning, capital and habits. Although these studies do not focus on intangible cultural heritage, they have shown that Pierre Bourdieu's system can help us understand how actors, resources and perceptions are distributed in society. The Jialu oil-paper umbrella is a representative case of the above phenomenon; that is to say, national heritage designation does not automatically attract public attention or boost market demand.

Chinese scholarship has also used Bourdieu's framework to examine cultural reproduction and institutional practice, including rural revitalization (You 2025), school social work (Tian and Li 2011), and the employment of overseas returnees (Qi et al. 2022). Zhang (2022) further shows that field, habitus, and capital are useful for analyzing educational and cultural power structures.

2.3 Applications of Bourdieu's Theory and the Need for an ICH-Oriented Mechanism

Pierre Bourdieu's ideas have been applied by many scholars in the study of culture, education, social identity and employment, etc. Bourdieu's field theory has been applied to studies on rural revitalization and the dissemination of Marxism in rural areas (You 2025), school social work and group counselling (Tian and Li 2011), and the job-seeking challenges faced by returning overseas students (Qi et al. 2022) in Chinese academia. Lu and Takayama (2024) have also used Bourdieu's field theory to study the social identity problems of vocational undergraduate education. Therefore, field theory can be used to study actors' positions and social reproduction, as well as struggles for knowledge and the connection between individual practice and structural constraints.

At the same time, research on the dissemination and reception of Pierre Bourdieu's work in China shows that his concepts have been applied in many fields, but the problem is how to avoid a mechanical application of these concepts (Zhang 2022). This is the problem of the current study. If "field", "habitus" and "capital" are used only as descriptive labels, they will fail to explain the social mechanisms of change in intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, this study will not only identify the Jialu oil-paper umbrellas in relation to different "fields" but also apply field theory to explain how various field logics and

forms of habitus interfere with the transformation of cultural and symbolic capital into public visibility, economic value and digital engagement.

The existing applications of Pierre Bourdieu's theory offer some theoretical references, but their application to the digital transformation of ICH is relatively limited. In particular, few studies have employed field theory to explain why state-recognized heritage crafts may have strong cultural and symbolic capital but are weak in terms of market recognition and digital visibility. Therefore, this study has constructed an Intangible Cultural Heritage-oriented analytical system: national ICH status generates symbolic capital, and this capital needs to pass through various stages to achieve public visibility, tourism consumption, market value and digital sharing. If the evaluative logic of these fields is not connected, capital conversion will fail.

2.4 Conceptual Framework: Field Isolation and Capital Conversion

Based on the above studies, this paper proposes a concept system based on field isolation and capital transfer. Field isolation is a situation where several fields of a heritage object are related but governed by different rules, actor positions and value logics simultaneously. For the Jialu oil-paper umbrella, the cultural-craft field, the political field, the market field, the tourism field, and the digital field are all related to determining the value of the craft, but their interpretations of this value may differ.

The Jialu oil-paper umbrella in the cultural-craft area is understood as craft knowledge, technical skills, local culture and handmade authenticity. In politics and culture, it has been listed as a national intangible cultural heritage item and is therefore more legitimate and symbolic. Consumers in the market will consider price, convenience, aesthetics and the desire to buy. Umbrellas in tourism can be souvenirs, decorations, local cultural symbols, or visual experiences. In the digital world, a good asset should be able to spread through visibility, interaction and sharing. Therefore, the same heritage object is interpreted in several field logics instead of one stable norm.

Habitus mismatch explains the mechanism of isolation. Inheritors' craft-oriented habitus values technique, authenticity and continuity. Government and heritage institutions operate under a safeguarding logic of certification, preservation and legitimacy. Consumers and tourists often come to the craft for aesthetics, practical applications, emotions and souvenirs. Digital platforms reward attention, interaction and sharing. If these orientations are left isolated, the cultural and symbolic capital will fail to spread into other areas.

In this framework, digital space is not only a technical channel but also a possible mediating field. Digitalisation can show the craft process, present official recognition in accessible forms, encourage participation, and connect inheritors, institutions, consumers, tourists, designers and platforms. For the Jialu oil-paper umbrella, the point is not to attach digital tools for their own sake, but to use digital space to link fragmented fields and convert cultural and symbolic capital into recognition, value and visibility.

This distinction matters because a platform or display can raise visibility only when it changes relations among actors, not merely when it stores images or videos.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

The paper will use an exploratory mixed-methods case study. It does not test a causal model. Instead, it asks why the cultural and symbolic capital of a state-recognized ICH item has not been given public attention, market recognition, tourism consumption and digital engagement. As shown in the field isolation and capital conversion analysis, various types of evidence were collected to understand how inheritors, consumers, tourists and digital users perceive the Jialu oil-paper umbrella.

The three sources of the empirical data are: field surveys and interview materials, an online questionnaire for the public, and an offline questionnaire for tourists. Through fieldwork and interviews, this paper studied the cultural-craft field, craft activities, historical and current circulation, and expectations for digital transformation. Online Questionnaire Survey on Public Awareness, Consumer Attitude, Purchase Intention, Communication Demand and Digital Acceptance. The offline questionnaire collected tourists' in-situ impressions of Jialu oil-paper umbrellas, tourism experiences, purchase behaviour and evaluations of Jialu oil-paper umbrellas in a tourism environment.

This design enables the study to compare the different definitions of the same heritage object across the fields of cultural-craft fieldmanship, politics and heritage, the market, tourism, and digital fields.

3.2 Case Selection

Jialu Oil-Paper Umbrellas were selected for the study because they offer a typical case of how official heritage designation affects public awareness and capitalisation. As a national-level intangible cultural heritage item, it has rich cultural and symbolic value. The production process, local history and artisanal techniques of this place are rich in content and provide a case study for exploring how the value of traditional craft practice is recognized in contemporary society.

At the same time, this case also shows the conflict between heritage protection and modernisation. Although the Jialu oil-paper umbrella has been designated as a national intangible cultural heritage item, problems such as a lack of public awareness, market recognition, tourism consumption and digital dissemination have yet to be solved. Therefore, a suitable object of study is to explore why the symbolic capital conferred by official recognition does not necessarily translate into social recognition, economic benefits or digital exposure.

The cases cover all these areas: cultural-craft fields, politics and heritage, tourism, marketing, the digital world, etc. Heritage inheritors, government and cultural tourism agencies, tourists, consumers, designers and digital platforms all participate in determining its value, but they do so according to the field logic of

their respective areas. Therefore, this case serves as a reference for studying field isolation, habitus mismatch and capital conversion.

3.3 Fieldwork and Interview Materials

Field research was carried out in Jialu Village, the hub of oil-paper umbrella production in Wuyuan County, Jiangxi Province, and at various tourism-related retail outlets that manufacture, display, sell or represent Jialu oil-paper umbrellas. The production environment, craftsmanship process, workshop display, retail space, tourism consumption scenario and visibility in the local cultural and tourism area were all included in this study.

Interview materials included an in-depth interview with a representative inheritor, supplementary field notes from the umbrella-making site, and an additional interview with a salesperson at a tourism-related retail store. The main content of the key informant's interview included the heritage inheritor's learning experiences, craft inheritance and transmission, technical characteristics, historical uses, production processes, market changes, innovative practices, expectations for digitalisation, and future plans for inheritance. Based on the theoretical system presented in Section 2, some questions for the interview were designed to explore the concepts of field, habitus and capital.

Questions on learning experience and craft practice were used to explore the construction of the heritage inheritor's craft-oriented habitus. Questions on the history of use and production process and material selection were employed to explore cultural capital. Questions on the recognition of intangible cultural heritage, exhibitions, tourism sales and brand collaborations were used to investigate symbolic, social and economic capital. Apps, mini-programs, augmented reality, 3D displays and university cooperation were used to explore possible applications of the digital field in the questions.

With the consent of the interviewees, the research team recorded, transcribed and thematically organised the main interviews. Field notes and shop interview notes were coded based on field, habitus, capital and digital transformation. The above materials can be used to explore the culture-craft area, changes in circulation, conflicts between craft value and tourist/consumer perception, and the possible role of digital media in spreading craft knowledge to the public and boosting market awareness. The interview themes, data sources and corresponding analytical focus are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1
Interview and fieldwork materials

Data source	Interview theme	Main interview content	Analytical focus
Inheritor interview	How the inheritor began learning the craft	The inheritor's previous work as a blacksmith, return to his hometown, and decision to learn oil-paper umbrella making	Formation of the inheritor's craft-oriented habitus
Inheritor interview	Difficulties in learning and passing down the craft	Difficulties in learning the craft, long-term persistence, and responsibility after becoming an ICH inheritor	Why the inheritor values persistence, tradition, and transmission
Inheritor interview	Craft features and technical value	Bamboo selection, handmade process, more than one hundred production steps, durability, tung oil, paper, cloth and gauze materials	Materials, technique, and handmade quality as embodied cultural capital
Inheritor interview	Historical use and cultural meaning	Former users such as merchants, scholars and porters; wedding use; symbolic meanings such as reunion and prosperity	Symbolic capital attached to historical use and cultural meanings
Inheritor interview	Historical sales and circulation	Jialu Old Street, Huizhou merchants, custom orders, and the historical reputation of Jialu paper umbrellas	Past links between craft reputation and social or economic circulation
Inheritor interview	Current promotion and sales channels	Tourist shops, exhibitions, government support, Taobao, Pinduoduo, Douyin, Xiaohongshu and customer orders	Routes by which heritage value enters tourism, market, and digital fields
Inheritor interview	Modern design and product renewal	Modern patterns, fabric and gauze surfaces, Gucci collaboration, stage umbrellas, dance umbrellas and customised designs	How craft value is translated into market-recognisable forms
Inheritor interview	Views on digital development	Apps, mini-programs, AR, 3D display, step-by-step presentation of the craft process, and university cooperation	Digital media as a space for reconnecting craft knowledge and public visibility
Supplementary field notes	Workshop observation and production process	Bamboo selection, steaming, drying, assembling, threading, mounting the canopy, shaping, painting, oiling and inspection	Evidence of craft knowledge that is difficult for consumers to see directly
Tourist-shop interview	Tourist consumption and retail feedback	Best-selling umbrella types, price considerations, tourist recognition, souvenir use, and restrictions on cultural creative products in scenic-area shops	Difference between craft value and tourist or market evaluation

3.4 Questionnaire Design and Sample Recruitment

The survey component used one online public questionnaire and one offline tourist questionnaire. The two instruments were not designed for direct statistical comparison; they were used to capture views from different social contexts. The online questionnaire examined public visibility, consumer attitudes, purchase intention, communication preferences, and acceptance of digital experience. The offline questionnaire focused on tourists' on-site perceptions of Jialu oil-paper umbrellas as souvenirs, together with travel experience, purchasing behavior, and evaluation.

The questions in the online questionnaire covered the respondent's basic information, their awareness of Jialu oil-paper umbrellas, product knowledge, purchase intention, reasons for buying, sources of information, preferred communication methods, AR experience, and willingness to learn about or buy through digital channels. The tourist questionnaire included background, travel purpose, craft-related experience, information source, overall impression, purchasing behaviour, cultural identity, preferred communication method and expectations for future development. The two reports together cover the public's and online users' perceptions, as well as tourism sites. The structure of the online and offline questionnaires and their corresponding analytical focus are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2
Questionnaire dimensions and analytical purpose

Dimension	Online questionnaire	Offline tourist questionnaire	Analytical focus
Respondent background	Occupation and age	Age, residence, and travel purpose	Locate the social positions of online respondents and tourists
Awareness of Jialu oil-paper umbrellas	Familiarity with Jialu oil-paper umbrellas	Whether tourists learned about or experienced the craft during the trip; awareness of its ICH status	Examine whether official heritage recognition has become public visibility
Product perception	Product category, willingness to purchase, and purchase factors such as design, price, craft quality, practicality, cultural meaning, and brand image	Overall impression, attractive features, and purchase of Jialu paper umbrellas or related products	Compare craft value with consumer and tourist evaluation
Consumption purpose	Experience of purchasing ICH products; purpose of buying traditional handicrafts, such as decoration, collection, support for ICH culture, social media display, and gift giving	Purpose of purchase or intended purchase, such as commemoration, collection, gift, decoration, or use	Trace how cultural value becomes use value, souvenir value, and economic value
Actors in dissemination and development	Perceived actors in promoting Jialu paper umbrellas, such as government, inheritors, media platforms, schools, enterprises, and consumers	Key actors in Jialu paper umbrella development, including craftspeople, government, designers, enterprises, and platforms	Identify how different actors are positioned in heritage dissemination and capital conversion
Digital communication and participation	Preferred channels, AR/VR experience, and willingness to learn about or purchase through digital experiences	Preferred public communication methods, including short videos, documentaries, activities, school courses, and digital exhibitions	Assess whether the digital field can improve visibility and reconnect the craft with the public
Cultural meaning and recognition	Cultural significance, support for ICH culture, and social media display	Whether experiencing or buying Jialu paper umbrellas expresses cultural identity; whether activities are worth recommending	Assess whether symbolic and cultural capital can become social recognition

Dimension	Online questionnaire	Offline tourist questionnaire	Analytical focus
Future development expectations	Ideal form of traditional ICH in contemporary society, including handmade tradition, modern design, digital field, and tourist souvenir form	Expected directions, including design innovation, cultural education, market promotion, digital presentation, and collaboration	Identify possible pathways for field reconnection and capital conversion

Social media was used to spread the online questionnaire and to collect the offline questionnaires in the Wuyuan tourism area. Because the two samples were collected in different settings, they were not regarded as the same. The online sample was used to represent the attitude of digital and public consumption, and the offline sample was taken as the perception within the tourism industry.

The first set of data included 137 online responses and 114 offline responses. After data cleaning, there were 133 online questionnaires and 100 offline questionnaires; a total of 233 were valid. Given the purpose of description and exploration in a case study, and considering that the general recommendation of 5 to 10 respondents per questionnaire item (Tinsley and Tinsley 1987) had been exceeded, the sample size was regarded as acceptable.

3.5 Data Cleaning and Analytical Strategy

The original questionnaire exports were preserved before screening. For the online questionnaire, one response that failed the attention-check item and three responses showing a direct contradiction between complete unfamiliarity with Jialu oil-paper umbrellas and reported purchase during the previous year were excluded; 133 of 137 responses were retained. For the offline tourist questionnaire, 14 of 114 responses were excluded because of direct logical contradictions across the trip-specific exposure, information-source, and purchase items (Q4–Q5 and Q4–Q8); 100 responses were retained. The screening criteria, excluded record IDs, and variable transformations are documented in the supplementary materials.

The results of the questionnaires were compiled and examined through descriptive analysis. Because no regression or causal models were planned, the analysis did not test predictive relationships. Descriptive statistics were used to examine public awareness, product perception, purchase intention, travel experience, market assessment and digital acceptance.

The analysis uses triangulation. Interview and field survey materials reconstruct the cultural-craft scene and inheritors' practices. Online survey data clarify public perceptions of digital consumption, including awareness, purchasing factors, and preferences for dissemination. Offline questionnaires capture tourist-site perceptions, on-site experience, and souvenir-related evaluations. These materials are interpreted through field isolation, habitus mismatch, and capital conversion.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Reflexivity

This work is presented as a case study. Jialu oil-paper umbrellas were selected because they clearly show the tension between national heritage designation and limited public visibility. The results are not to be generalised to all ICH items. They are used to explain why sector separation and capital-conversion difficulties can appear in traditional craft production.

The interview evidence consists of a single in-depth interview with a representative inheritor, along with field notes and tourist-shop interviews. The materials provide direct evidence of craft inheritance, production logic, market changes, tourist consumption, and demands for digitalisation. They do not represent all inheritors, institutions, tourists, consumers or market participants, so they are interpreted together with field observations and questionnaires.

Questionnaire data also have certain deficiencies. The online sample may have a relatively high proportion of younger people, social media users, or individuals already interested in ICH and cultural products. The only offline samples were from tourists in Wuyuan. Therefore, the two samples are not considered directly comparable groups but rather as indicators of different perceptions in the context of digital/public consumption and tourism.

Finally, the paper only presents descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis without predictive modelling. Future studies may involve more practitioners and institutional stakeholders, and several cases of traditional crafts can be selected for testing of the mechanism presented here.

4. Results

4.1 Limited Public Visibility despite Official Recognition

The questionnaire results indicate that official recognition has not fully turned into public visibility for Jialu oil-paper umbrellas. Some of the online respondents were still unfamiliar with the craft, and the open-ended answers repeatedly asked for more publicity and brand awareness. According to the offline visitor survey, many tourists stated that they were not primarily interested in experiencing the craft of umbrellas in Wuyuan, and some had never heard of or been exposed to them before their visit. Therefore, heritage status does not automatically produce recognition or visibility in the tourism field.

Interview data help explain the discrepancy. Inheritors tell the long story of Jialu oil-paper umbrellas, including strict material selection, handmade production, durability and more than a hundred production steps. Most tourists and consumers are not aware of these forms of cultural capital. If the craft is shown only as an object in a shop or tourist area, then its technical and historical value can remain hidden. Therefore, the problem is not a lack of heritage value but rather that cultural and symbolic capital has not been translated into public visibility.

4.2 Mismatch between Craft Value and Consumer/Tourist Evaluation

The second is that, according to the feedback from consumers and tourists, the value of craftsmanship promoted by the inheritors of the tradition has been reinterpreted. Based on the online questionnaire, Design style, price, craftsmanship quality, practicality, cultural significance and brand image were all identified by respondents as considerations affecting purchase. It can be seen that nowadays consumers view oil-paper umbrellas as design products, functional items and possibly even cultural commodities, rather than just old relics. According to the tourist survey, many respondents connected Jialu oil-paper umbrellas with local features, culture, craftsmanship, souvenirs, collectibles, gifts and decorations, but the actual purchase volume was relatively small. Therefore, although tourists can appreciate the culture or aesthetics of oil-paper umbrellas, they do not always buy them as a result of this appreciation.

This discrepancy was also seen in the field and at the shop. Heritage inheritors describe oil-paper umbrellas in terms of materials, the handmade production process, durability and the sense of responsibility they carry, and interviews at tourist shops show that tourists usually consider price, size, practicality, souvenir value and scenic area regulations before making a purchase decision. Therefore, the cultural-craft area is disconnected from the tourism and market sectors. Although the cultural capital of oil-paper umbrellas is relatively rich in the craft area, it needs to be converted into forms that meet the expectations of consumers and tourists to generate economic benefits or achieve widespread market popularity.

4.3 Digital Field as a Possible Intermediary

The third is a problem of digitalisation. Online respondents considered craft markets, short videos, AR and VR experiences, apps or mini-programs, media and educational activities to be effective ways of reaching younger generations. Many people were more willing to learn about or buy Jialu oil-paper umbrellas if the craft were combined with digital experiences, such as AR displays or personalised apps. As shown in the above responses, digital media can convert craft knowledge into visible, interactive and shareable content.

The inheritors have also used digital promotion to show production steps through 3D and AR. It is worth noting that ordinary retail spaces do not usually show material selection, frame construction, rib threading, surface processing, colour application or oiling. Digital displays can therefore connect hidden craftwork with the public. They show how the skills are performed and link them with tourism, markets and the general public. The degree to which digitalisation can enhance visibility, participation and market coverage for traditional craft skills needs to be assessed. For visitors, this kind of presentation can make the time, materials, and labour behind the finished umbrella easier to understand before purchase or sharing.

In short, the results indicate that the Jialu oil-paper umbrella is not lacking in culture or symbolism. Rather, the primary problem is that this value cannot be used in all areas. The inheritor's craft-oriented habitus emphasises technique, materials, durability and inheritance; consumers and tourists evaluate the umbrella based on design, price, souvenir value, experience and visibility. Thus, there is a field

isolation and capital-transfer interruption. The digital field may offer a possible path to reconnect these fields, but only if digital tools are used to make craft knowledge visible, participatory and communicable.

Based on the theoretical system, Table 3 presents a summary of how the data from the interview, online questionnaire and offline tourist questionnaire indicate field isolation and barriers to capital transfer.

Table 3
Empirical evidence of field isolation and capital conversion barriers

Empirical evidence	Field reflected	Interpretation
Some online respondents remained unfamiliar with Jialu oil-paper umbrellas, and open-ended answers called for stronger publicity and brand awareness	Public / consumer field	Official heritage recognition has not yet become broad public visibility
Some tourists had not heard of or experienced Jialu oil-paper umbrellas during the trip, and awareness of ICH status was uneven	Tourism field	Local presence and heritage status do not automatically lead to tourist recognition
The inheritor stressed material selection, handmade procedures, durability, and responsibility for transmission	Cultural-craft field	The craft holds strong cultural capital inside the craft field
Online respondents considered design style, price, craft quality, practicality, cultural meaning, and brand image when evaluating purchase	Market / consumer field	Craft value needs to be converted into product value that consumers can recognize
Tourist-shop feedback showed attention to price, size, practical use, souvenir value, and scenic-area restrictions	Tourism / market field	Tourist evaluation follows a different logic from the inheritor's craft orientation
Respondents showed interest in short videos, AR/VR, apps, mini-programs, craft markets, and educational activities	Digital field	Digital media may turn craft knowledge into visible and shareable content
The inheritor supported 3D display, AR technology, step-by-step craft presentation, and university cooperation	Digital field / cultural-craft field	The digital field may reconnect craft knowledge with public visibility and market communication

5. Discussion

5.1 Field Isolation: Why Symbolic Recognition Does Not Become Public Visibility

Research shows that the main problem for Jialu oil-paper umbrellas is not a lack of cultural value, but rather a restricted cross-field circulation of this cultural value. Jialu oil-paper umbrellas are recognized as national intangible cultural heritage items and carry significant cultural and political meaning for the government and the people. They have a long history, are handcrafted by artisans, use high-quality

materials, and have been recognised as national intangible cultural heritage items. However, this authority does not automatically lead to public awareness, tourist recognition, market demand or digital interaction.

Symbolic Capital is domain-specific, as shown above. Official recognition provides political support and cultural status for the craft in the political and heritage areas. However, in the public and consumer sectors, people will not recognise this value unless it is shown in a conspicuous, easy-to-understand and attractive way. Based on the questionnaire, public awareness and tourist recognition have not been widespread; open-ended answers also suggest that promotion and brand-building efforts need to be intensified. Surveys of the tourists have also shown that some tourists are unfamiliar with the craft or its intangible cultural heritage status during their stay.

Therefore, the Jialu oil-paper umbrella has taken the form of "field isolation". Although its heritage value is well-known in the field of cultural-craft fieldmanship and political heritage, it has not been fully promoted through tourism, markets, or the Internet. Therefore, the official endorsement does not enhance the problem of public awareness. The question is not whether the craft has value, but whether this value can be recognised according to the rules of the field for other areas.

5.2 Habitus Mismatch: Different Actors Evaluate the Umbrella Differently

The second is habitus mismatch. The interview with the inheritor shows that the craft has been carried out for a long time; careful selection of bamboo and materials, hand production, durability, and a sense of responsibility for inheritance have all been emphasized. Jialu oil-paper umbrellas have thus acquired a certain value due to the craftsmanship, time and materials invested in their creation, and cultural inheritance.

Consumers and tourists evaluate Jialu oil-paper umbrellas according to different practical purposes. Reasons for purchase among online respondents included design style, price, craftsmanship, convenience, cultural connotations and brand image. Tourists often associate Jialu oil-paper umbrellas with local features, culture and tourism, craftsmanship, souvenirs, collectibles, gifts, decorations and tourist experiences. It does not mean that the public and tourists are indifferent to heritage. Instead, people encounter heritage through products, prices, souvenirs, visual form and experience.

There is a gap; thus, the cultural-craft area is disconnected from the market and tourism. Craftspeople consider Jialu oil-paper umbrellas to be sophisticated works of art, but for consumers and tourists, they are generally viewed as mere products, souvenirs, ornaments or visual elements. Therefore, the cultural capital of the craft does not automatically translate into economic capital. Capitalisation aims to turn the technical and symbolic values of handicrafts into forms that are perceptible, understandable and evaluable by consumers and tourists.

5.3 Digital Field as an Intermediary for Capital Conversion

The third is the problem of the digital realm. Based on the above studies, digitalisation should not be regarded as only the application of new technologies. Jialu Oil-Paper Umbrellas need to explore how to express the knowledge of craftsmanship in a visible, interactive and shareable form through digital media. The online survey showed that the respondents believe short videos, craft markets, AR, apps or mini-programs, and media and educational activities are all effective ways to attract a younger generation. Many of the respondents also said that they would be interested in learning about or purchasing Jialu oil-paper umbrellas if they were combined with digital experiences.

Interview records of heritage inheritors also show this trend. He supported digital promotion and, in particular, 3D displays and AR technology that can show the production process step by step. Many excellent parts of this craft, such as the selection of bamboo, frame construction, threading, shaping, painting and oiling, are not typically shown in a general-purpose shop. Thus, digital displays can help popularise this hidden craftsmanship for the public, tourists and young people.

Therefore, the digital fields can serve as intermediary fields. Craft knowledge is turned into visual experiences for users, and through their participation and sharing, the cultural-craft area connects with the public, tourism and the market. Digitalisation should be in line with the cultural logic of traditional crafts and meet the demands of modern users at the same time. Therefore, the purpose is not to replace traditional craft practice with digital technology but to use digital media to support on-site reconnection and capitalisation.

In short, the Jialu oil-paper umbrella case treats digitalisation as a social process rather than a technical optimisation. Although the craft has culture and symbols, these resources are mainly concentrated in the cultural-craft area and political/heritage places. Public awareness remains low due to the separation of related fields, and market conversion is hampered because inheritors, consumers, tourists and digital users have different practical focuses. The digital world can help give shape to craft knowledge in a way that people are interested in learning about, participating in and spreading.

6. Conclusion

This paper investigates why Jialu oil-paper umbrellas have not gained widespread public attention or market recognition and digital interaction as a national intangible cultural heritage item. Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital were applied to conduct fieldwork, interviews, and online and offline questionnaires to investigate how the craft is perceived in the cultural, political/heritage, tourism, market and digital fields.

Therefore, it can be seen that the Jialu oil-paper umbrellas have a long history, are handmade, use good materials, and have been officially recognised; thus, they are culturally and symbolically significant. However, this value will not automatically bring public attention, tourist recognition, economic benefits or digital promotion. The first two are field isolation and a mismatch in craft-oriented habitus. Practitioners focus on craftsmanship, materials, durability and the sense of inheritance; consumers and tourists are

more interested in the design, price, convenience, souvenir value, visual appeal and experience of Jialu oil-paper umbrellas.

Therefore, this paper believes that digitalisation should not be viewed merely as the application of new technologies. Thus, the digital space can be used to present the hidden knowledge of craft in a visible, interactive and shareable way. Digital tools can be used to combine craft knowledge with public communication, tourism experience and marketing, such as short videos, AR/VR, apps, mini-programs, 3D displays, etc.

Digitalisation is understood as a sociological process of field reconnection and capital reorganisation in the paper. It offers a research path for ICH that explores how Bourdieu's field theory can account for the lack of conspicuousness of heritage values in modern times. Future studies can add more practitioners and institutional stakeholders to compare several cases of traditional crafts to test and improve this framework.

Declarations

Data Availability Statement

The questionnaire datasets, bilingual survey instruments, data dictionaries, exclusion log, and documentation of the data-cleaning procedures and descriptive calculations supporting this study are provided in the supplementary files for peer review. The reviewer-use questionnaire files include raw and cleaned data; before any unrestricted public release, IP addresses and exact submission timestamps will be removed or generalised. De-identified interview records and additional fieldwork documentation may be made available by the authors upon reasonable request, subject to the scope of participant consent and applicable privacy restrictions. Identifiable photographs are not available for unrestricted public release.

Ethics Approval

This study was approved by the Academic Ethics Committee of the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology (Approval ID: 2025-11-03-AI) on November 03, 2025. All procedures involving human participants were conducted in full compliance with the ethical principles set forth in the Declaration of Helsinki and the relevant institutional guidelines.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all questionnaire respondents and interview participants before data collection. Questionnaire participants were informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, the anonymous treatment of their responses, and the academic use of the data. Submission of the online questionnaire and completion of the offline questionnaire were regarded as indications of informed consent. Prior oral consent was also obtained from the interview participant for participation, audio recording, and, where applicable, photographic documentation.

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