

# Contemporary Transformation of Pattern Inheritance: Analysis of Shandong Province, China

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DOI : <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.808078>

Received: 14 August 2024; Accepted: 23 August 2024; Published: 31 August 2024

## ABSTRACT

China's traditional patterns, deeply rooted in ancient farming culture, are an integral part of the nation's artistic heritage. As China enters a new era of global development, its traditional way of life and local cultures are undergoing significant transformations. This study focuses on the contemporary transformation of pattern inheritance in Shandong Province, a key cultural and economic region in China. Shandong, the second most populous province and one of the top three economically developed provinces, has long been a vibrant center of traditional pattern culture. However, the rapid development and modernization of Shandong have introduced new challenges to its traditional pattern art, while also creating opportunities for its evolution. The local government has implemented policies aimed at protecting and adaptively developing this cultural heritage, resulting in both positive outcomes and necessary adjustments in response to real-world conditions. Additionally, the integration of traditional culture with modern commerce, and the evolution of marketing strategies within the pattern culture industry, have reshaped the image of these traditional patterns. This paper employs qualitative field research to analyze the current state of pattern transmission in Shandong Province, offering new insights into the future trajectory of Chinese pattern inheritance and its adaptation in a rapidly changing world.

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage, Economic Development, Pattern Inheritance, Shandong, Traditional Art

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the transmission and modification of traditional cultural forms have been prominent subjects in discussions about human culture. Over the course of history, the development of human productivity, everyday living, and technical progress has been intricately connected with artistic invention. In the contemporary period, artificial intelligence (AI) has become a central area of interest, offering both prospects and obstacles—some widely comprehended, others still developing. The dissemination and transformation of traditional cultural expressions through digital communication are becoming more prevalent

as mankind advances into the information era. Among these, Chinese traditional patterns, an essential component of China's cultural legacy, have also been assimilated into the dynamics of this swiftly advancing society.

Through extensive field trips and research conducted in several locations of Shandong Province, China, this study has discovered significant changes in the transmission of these ancient patterns. While many patterns are still passed down through traditional techniques, new developing modifications indicate a substantial, albeit early, transition. These events underscore the conflict between upholding established customs and adopting contemporary innovations.

For the purpose to enhance the current discourse, this article utilises a blend of field research, in-depth interviews, and oral history to examine and evaluate the alterations in the transmission of Chinese traditional patterns. Through an analysis of the dynamics in Shandong Province, this research seeks to offer more profound understanding of the changing significance of traditional cultural forms in the era of information.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The discussion surrounding traditional Chinese patterns has been a longstanding focus in academic literature. Most studies concentrate on auspicious patterns, the application of specific patterns in particular fields, and the cultural origins and diffusion of these patterns. While some authors express concerns about the inheritance and protection of traditional Chinese patterns, these discussions are often brief and do not adequately address the complexities involved in preserving the vast array of patterns within China's cultural heritage.

### **Application of Traditional Chinese Patterns**

In the current era of rapid development and significant achievements across various sectors in China, there is a growing emphasis on the aesthetic appreciation of traditional national culture and art (Ding, 2023). Chinese traditional patterns, which embody deep cultural and aesthetic values, are increasingly recognized as vital elements in modern design. These patterns serve not only as decorative motifs but also as carriers of cultural identity and historical continuity (Xiao & Legino, 2022; Xiao et al, 2023). As China continues to modernize, the challenge of integrating these traditional patterns into contemporary design has become a critical concern for designers and cultural practitioners alike. The modernization of traditional Chinese patterns involves rethinking how these patterns can be applied in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences while preserving their cultural significance (Xuemin et al., 2023). This has led to a broad consensus that a transformation in the expression of these patterns is not only feasible but necessary. Scholars suggest that moving from two-dimensional representations to three-dimensional applications, along with the innovation of new production techniques, can create a new paradigm for the use of traditional patterns in modern contexts (Ge, 2023).

One key aspect of this transformation is the application of advanced technologies in the design and production processes. For example, digital tools and software now allow for the precise manipulation and adaptation of traditional motifs, enabling designers to experiment with scale, texture, and form in ways that were previously unimaginable. This technological intervention is particularly evident in the creation of pattern-themed cultural and creative products, where traditional motifs are reimagined in new materials and forms that appeal to modern sensibilities (Yang et al., 2022). Moreover, the rise of digital fabrication methods, such as 3D printing and computer-aided design (CAD), has opened up new possibilities for the application of traditional patterns. These technologies allow for the creation of intricate designs that can be produced at scale, making traditional

patterns more accessible to a broader audience. Additionally, these methods enable the customization of designs, allowing for the personalization of products that integrate traditional motifs with contemporary styles. This fusion of old and new not only preserves the cultural essence of the patterns but also makes them relevant to the modern consumer. Despite these advances, the application of traditional Chinese patterns in modern design is not without its challenges. One major issue is ensuring that the transformation of these patterns retains their original cultural meaning. It is not uncommon for designs to misinterpret or overlook the symbolic significance of traditional motifs, leading to products that lack depth and fail to connect with their intended audience. As Duan (2022) emphasizes, it is crucial to maintain a balance between innovation and tradition, ensuring that the transformation of patterns in shape is thoughtfully combined with their historical and cultural meanings.

This attention to meaning is particularly important in the context of cultural and creative products, where the cultural connotation of the design plays a significant role in its market appeal. When traditional patterns are misapplied or stripped of their cultural significance, the resulting products often suffer from low design recognition, a lack of audience identity, and a disconnect between the cultural essence of the patterns and the product itself. Additionally, this can lead to a homogenization of products, where unique cultural expressions are lost in a sea of indistinguishable designs (Yang et al., 2022). Another challenge is the potential commercialization and commodification of traditional patterns. As these patterns are increasingly used in mass-produced goods, there is a risk that their cultural significance may be diluted. This commercialization can lead to a superficial application of patterns, where the focus is more on aesthetics than on preserving the deeper meanings and cultural narratives that these patterns convey. To mitigate this risk, designers and cultural practitioners must engage in continuous dialogue with cultural historians, artisans, and communities to ensure that the use of traditional patterns in modern design remains authentic and respectful of their origins.

However, when applied correctly, traditional Chinese patterns offer immense potential for cultural enrichment and innovation in modern design. By carefully considering the cultural and historical context of these patterns, designers can create products that not only resonate with contemporary audiences but also enhance the overall cultural connotation of the design. This can help address current market challenges, such as the lack of cultural depth in Chinese creative products and contribute to a stronger sense of identity and recognition among consumers. The correct application of traditional patterns can play a pivotal role in preserving cultural heritage while simultaneously driving innovation. As China continues to evolve, the thoughtful integration of these patterns into modern design will be crucial for maintaining a connection to the past while embracing the future. This approach not only supports the sustainability of traditional arts but also enriches the cultural landscape, offering new possibilities for the expression and appreciation of Chinese culture in the modern world. The use of traditional patterns in contemporary design can also foster cross-cultural exchange and global appreciation of Chinese cultural heritage. As these patterns are adapted for use in international markets, they introduce global audiences to the rich symbolism and aesthetic principles of Chinese art. This cross-cultural exchange can lead to new collaborations and innovations, where traditional Chinese patterns are reinterpreted through the lens of different cultural contexts. Such exchanges not only promote cultural diversity but also highlight the universality of certain aesthetic principles, thereby enhancing global understanding and appreciation of Chinese cultural heritage.

### **Inheritance and Protection Mode**

The application of traditional Chinese patterns in modern design represents a dynamic intersection of cultural preservation and innovation. While challenges exist, particularly in maintaining the cultural significance of

these patterns, the opportunities for cultural enrichment and global appreciation are vast. Patterns exist dependent on certain carriers, and the status of each carrier of traditional Chinese patterns in the market and each end of the industrial chain are closely related to the inheritance and protection of traditional Chinese patterns (Lin, 2021). Cultural and creative products related to traditional Chinese patterns are hot spots in the current Chinese market, and the application of traditional patterns in the design of cultural and creative products has obvious advantages: Various forms and profound cultural connotations (Wu, 2022). In the design of cultural and creative products, the common place between ancient and modern aesthetics can be found, and good results can be achieved by adopting appropriate sales methods and series development methods. (Lin, 2021) The improvement of traditional patterns cannot be simply combined with the current casual clothing, and the westernization of colors requires deep exploration of ethnic elements and activation of social values through culture, active investigation of market demand, and design of marketing plans according to demand (Wan, et al, 2022). Moreover, the management system is another important part in the protection and inheritance of Chinese traditional patterns. After China acceded to the World Heritage Convention, it accepted the restriction of international rules, and established China's intangible cultural heritage system and the corresponding legal definition and protection according to Chinese cultural characteristics. However, because China is currently in the stage of rapid economic and social development, there are some incompatibility factors with traditional culture. Moreover, Chinese and Western management models need to be further adjusted and compatible between learning from and independent innovation (Gao, 2021).

### **Digital Utilization and Management**

In the context of increasing digitalization, the digitization of cultural heritage is advancing across multiple levels. Chinese scholars have categorized this digitization into four key levels: the experience level, which focuses on public engagement and cultural transmission; the management level, which addresses the management systems, characteristics, and development models; the data level, which involves data collection, processing, and sharing; and the technical level, which encompasses the new technologies applicable to cultural heritage preservation (Gao, 2021; Anuar et al., 2016). Digital technology and tools are becoming increasingly crucial in the extraction and design of traditional patterns (Zakaria et al., 2016). Advances in photography, particularly digital high-definition cameras, enable the long-term recording of patterns and their parameters with high precision (Legino et al., 2021; Al-Maqtari et al., 2015)). In digital image processing, software like Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator allows for the adjustment of images, splitting of patterns, and extraction of shapes (Zhang, 2023). Additionally, the creation of interactive displays and scenes can be achieved using 3D modeling software such as 3D Max, with mapping and rendering performed in Vray, followed by the animation setup (Zong, 2022).

This integration of digital tools not only enhances the preservation and adaptation of traditional patterns but also ensures their relevance in contemporary design contexts, offering new possibilities for cultural heritage management and innovation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a practice-based design research methodology to explore the contemporary transformation and application of traditional Chinese patterns, particularly within the context of Shandong Province. Practice-based design research is an approach that emphasizes the creation of new knowledge through the process of design practice itself. This methodology is well-suited for research that seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice, allowing for the exploration of traditional patterns through hands-on design experimentation and innovation.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

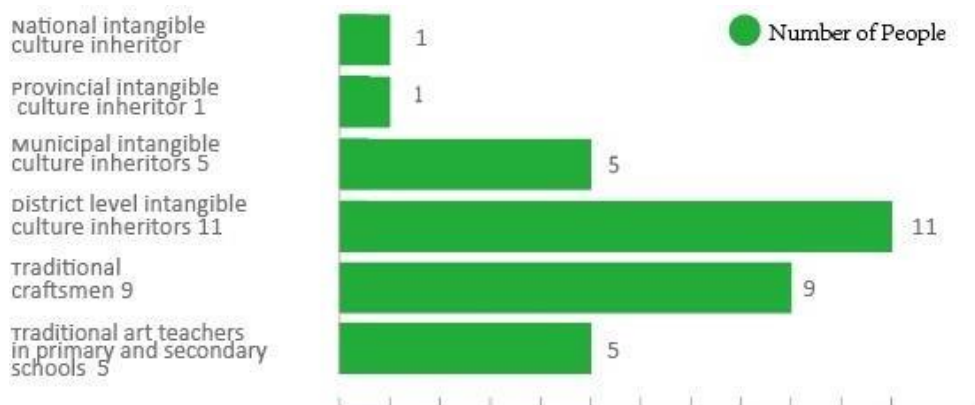
The research is structured around a cyclical process of design, reflection, and iteration. This process involves the active engagement of the researcher in the design practice, using traditional Chinese patterns as the central focus. The methodology is divided into several key stages:

1. **Initial Exploration and Literature Review:** The research begins with an extensive review of existing literature on traditional Chinese patterns, their historical significance, and their contemporary applications. This review informs the theoretical framework of the study and helps identify gaps in the current knowledge.
2. **Fieldwork and Data Collection:** Fieldwork is conducted in Shandong Province, where traditional Chinese patterns are still in use. The data collection includes ethnographic methods such as interviews with local artisans, observation of traditional crafting processes, and documentation of pattern usage in various contexts. This stage aims to gather a rich understanding of the cultural and practical aspects of traditional patterns (see Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1:** The city that visited for fieldworks process.

In this stage, the researcher engages in hands-on design practice, applying traditional Chinese patterns using contemporary design tools and technologies. This involves digital software for pattern extraction and manipulation, followed by the creation of modern prototypes. The design process is iterative, with each cycle refined through reflection. To support this work, 32 interviews were conducted with key cultural stakeholders, including 1 national, 1 provincial, 5 municipal, and 11 district-level intangible cultural heritage inheritors, as well as 9 traditional craftsmen and 5 traditional art teachers. Their insights were crucial in guiding the design experimentation. The interviewee composition is shown in Fig. 2.



**Fig. 2:** The Interviewee for this project.

1. **Reflection and Analysis:** The outcomes of the design practice are analyzed through reflective practice, where the researcher critically evaluates the design process and the resulting products. This analysis is informed by both the theoretical framework and the empirical data collected during fieldwork. The goal is to identify new insights into the transformation and application of traditional patterns in contemporary design.
2. **Synthesis and Dissemination:** The final stage involves synthesizing the findings from the design practice and analysis into a coherent narrative that contributes to the broader discourse on cultural heritage preservation and innovation. The research outcomes are documented and disseminated through academic publications, exhibitions, and presentations, aiming to share the knowledge gained with both the academic community and practitioners in the field.

## DISCUSSIONS

The discussion section delves into the implications of the findings from the fieldwork, design practice, and interviews, focusing on how traditional Chinese patterns are being adapted and reimagined in contemporary contexts. It examines the balance between preserving cultural heritage and embracing innovation, analyzing the challenges and opportunities that arise in this process. The discussion also explores the broader impact of digitalization and modernization on traditional crafts, considering the perspectives of cultural inheritors, craftsmen, and educators. By synthesizing the insights gained, this section aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the evolving role of traditional Chinese patterns in today's design landscape, offering recommendations for future practice and research.

### Natural State of Shandong Province

Shandong Province is in the east coast of China, the lower reaches of the Yellow River, rich in water systems, various landforms, four distinct seasons, and rich in natural resources. Shandong Province has a large population and is the second most populous province in China. Shandong Province is also one of the most economically developed provinces in China. Among the 41 industrial categories classified by the United Nations, China is the only country with complete 41 industrial categories, and Shandong is the only province in China with all 41 industrial categories. In recent years, Shandong Province has deepened the industrialization and informatization reform under the background of the new era. In 2021, the total scale of digital economy in Shandong exceeded 3.5 trillion yuan, and the scale of information technology industry exceeded one trillion yuan.

### Inheritance and Protection Status of Traditional Patterns in Shandong Province

This section explores the current state of inheritance and protection of traditional patterns in Shandong Province. It examines how these patterns are preserved, the challenges they face, and the effectiveness of ongoing protection efforts. Through fieldwork and interviews, this analysis provides insight into both the successes and limitations of cultural preservation in the region. As research documents that have a great impact on the activities of inheritors of intangible culture include the Special Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Yellow River Basin of Shandong Province, Opinions on the Implementation of the Protection and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage along the Yellow River Basin and the Grand Canal, etc. Government agencies at all levels also have other corresponding policies to assist them. In the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Shandong Province, the general requirements are redefined, and the contents such as the construction of a new era of artistic creation system, the improvement of the protection, inheritance and utilization system of cultural heritage, and the

optimization of the development layout of culture and tourism are made clear, and the policies are constantly adjusted to support and adapt to the new situation and changes of the inheritance and development of traditional culture. It can be seen from this that the recognition of the dynamic situation of traditional culture inheritance and protection of relevant administrative departments in Shandong Province is based on the continuous and profound observation of the actual situation of the development of traditional culture in Shandong Province, which is worthy of affirmation.

Through interviews and field observation of inheritors of intangible cultural heritage projects related to traditional pattern art and traditional handicrafts, some problems also appear under the framework of positive policy orientation. Nine out of 32 respondents, accounting for nearly one-third of the total, said that applying for official documents to qualify as inheritors was too cumbersome. In addition, 4 of the traditional handicrafts who are not inheritors at all levels revealed in the conversation that they had no intention to apply for inheritor qualification because of the complicated procedures for applying for inheritor. In the interview, respondents expressed positive views on relevant intangible cultural heritage policies overall, while only one person in the 32 interviewed held a completely negative attitude. Most respondents said that it is very convenient to communicate with management personnel of relevant government departments, and that inheritors and artisans will be notified or invited to participate in relevant exhibitions and publicity activities from time to time. In most activities, non-inheritors or artisans can display and sell their works, which plays a certain role in publicity and education. For capable inheritors and craftsmen, they are often invited to primary and secondary schools or even universities to give lectures on traditional culture and art or serve as guest teachers. Some inheritors or craftsmen with relevant professional education background can become official art teachers in primary and secondary schools. Moreover, in response to the needs of non-inherited inheritors, the government provides suitable Spaces free of charge for non-inherited inheritors to be used as intangible cultural heritage training centers for non-inherited inheritors to carry out various kinds of intangible cultural heritage publicity and teaching activities in this space. The activities here are often colorful, overseas students or Chinese traditional art lovers and other foreigners can experience Chinese traditional culture and art here, participate in cultural exchange activities; Citizens of all ages and occupations can learn traditional culture and art here; Even some special groups, such as autistic children or people with disabilities, can get mental art healing here. There are more activities than these. In fact, there will be more activities with different themes in the intangible cultural heritage study hall. Both the non-inheritors themselves and all kinds of people in the society will benefit from it, which is very meaningful. The government tends to encourage individual subsidies for non-inherited undertakings. The subsidy standard for non-inherited undertakings above the municipal level is 2,000 yuan a year, while there is no subsidy for those below the municipal level.

Despite this, the attitude of the interviewees is still positive. 29 out of 32 people think that even without too many subsidies, they will not affect their original intention to do non-inherited undertakings. In the interview, the author can feel that the interviewees love and cherish their intangible cultural heritage undertakings. Moreover, 21 out of 32 people believed that the content of study halls and exhibition information provided free of charge by the government could bring more adequate economic income. In addition, interviewees also mentioned that the works exhibitions and art exchange and learning activities held by the government for the exchange and learning of intangible cultural heritage techniques also benefited a lot. In such activities, non-inheritors and artisans can get in touch with senior experts and scholars in various fields invited by government organizations and facilitate the exchange and learning of non-inheritors' skills and the promotion and protection experience in the whole of China. In such activities, it is a good opportunity for people of various intangible cultural heritage skills and hand-inherited crafts to stimulate each other and broaden their knowledge. It is also a good time for experts and scholars in various fields to investigate and learn. Such

exchange activities are analyzed from a holistic perspective, which can effectively promote the development of the whole traditional cultural cause. Therefore, to sum up, the direction of policies formulated in Shandong Province is positive, featuring dynamic observation and real-time development, and a top-down linkage mechanism at all levels, which is helpful to guide the positive development of traditional culture and art, including pattern culture. However, from the Angle of the patterns collection and protection does not separate into a policy to protect system. The protection of Chinese traditional patterns does not take into consideration the nature and overall situation. It only plays an indirect role in protecting the relevant art forms of the traditional patterns, such as embroidery, paper cutting, ceramics and other categories.

Still in some troubles: However, even under the relatively good policy mechanism, the inheritance of traditional culture and art, including pattern art, will be hindered and show some problems. Especially in train the next generation inheritance issues. Among the 32 interviewed, 25 people said that there was no successor to the traditional skills, and among the other 7 people, one person proposed to pass on the intangible heritage skills to his son. The reasons for the idea that there is no successor are as follows: lack of economic benefits of intangible cultural heritage skills, difficulty in learning intangible cultural heritage skills, and poor quality of intangible cultural heritage apprentices. First, the economic benefit of intangible cultural heritage technology is a crucial issue. Intangible cultural heritage art forms such as traditional Chinese patterns originated from the ancient agricultural civilization of China. However, Chinese society, especially in Shandong Province, where the economy and society are rapidly developing, is facing a sharp transformation. Meanwhile, Chinese traditional culture and art forms are also facing the impact of globalization and modern art trends. The traditional market of intangible cultural heritage art has been greatly challenged. Secondly, non-genetic inheritors and traditional craftsmen lack marketing and market operation ability. Among the 32 interviewees, 27 are over 40 years old, with relatively weak learning ability and ability to contact with new marketing methods, so they can only use traditional sales methods to deviate from the market operation in line with the current era. In addition, similarly, the age of non-inheritors and traditional craftsmen is generally older, which is also an obstacle to the innovation of traditional patterns and other aspects. Life and their own learning experience have made the creative methods and contents of these inheritors mature to some extent or achievements. It is a common phenomenon that they are unwilling to pursue innovation or have no innovative ideas. In addition, in today's market, there are a variety of exquisite industrial handicrafts or daily necessities, while traditional skills or art forms are handmade. Although they are unique in charm, they are inevitably somewhat rough and accidental.

Therefore, the competitiveness of standardized products in the market is not obvious. In addition, skills and ingenuity are the key to success in the handmade process of traditional art forms, and the subject of the production is people, so people's own background has a great impact on the artistic and aesthetic value of traditional art. Among the 32 interviewees, only two have received higher education, which means that their personal quality and vision are generally limited. Among them, 5 have received professional art education in China from 1960s to 2020s, which was the period when western art concepts were strongly implanted (Wu, 2012). Therefore, it can be seen from the works of this part of inheritors that the concept of Western art education and aesthetics are reflected in the current traditional Chinese art, and the influence on Chinese patterns and the shape of some artworks is particularly prominent. For example, the face of the figure in Chinese papercut shows a half side Angle, and the perspective and composition methods of some Western art are integrated. Chinese raindrop glazes no longer stay in the tea sets and other daily necessities, but also appear some sculpting types, which can be included in the category of environmental pottery art. In traditional Chinese clay figurines, the patterns on the figures are transformed into modern styles, or the image production methods tend to Western realistic sculpture techniques. The state of traditional patterns presented in the current



traditional artworks is simplified, westernized, oriented by policies, and even cancelled. Shown as Fig.3 and Fig 4.



**Fig. 3: (left) and Fig. 4: (right)** A work of art combining traditional art forms with foreign ideas.

### **New changes in the pattern of inheritance**

During the interview, some completely different views emerged regarding the implementation and effect of relevant traditional culture protection policies. Among the 32 interviewees, 27 believed that the relevant help and support policies of the government were of great effect, but one of the other 5 people thought that they were completely useless, and 4 people suggested that the government's attention and strength were limited. And one person put forward the point of view that the relevant management personnel of Shandong Provincial Culture and Tourism Bureau lack relevant professional background. After searching the information on the official website, the author finds that although the professional background is indeed not related to art, since they are in the joint management of Shandong Province's culture and tourism, and the management cadres who publish information on the official website have long-term working experience in related fields, such personnel setting is not deviated from the specialized management field. However, it is true that a professional background in art is more beneficial to the management of traditional culture and arts.

Through field investigation and interview, it is found that there are many new changes in the inheritance of traditional art. One of the 32 people interviewed is a graduate from a top art school in China, with high artistic talent and young ideas. Her marketing channels are broader in comparison, and online and offline development goes hand in hand. Not only that, because she has a strong professional background, a strong team of experts to revise ideas and provide high-quality resources, as well as a young team of product designers with visual design skills, as well as her own production workshop, which is also capable of mass production and has her own brand related cultural and creative design. The innovative use of traditional Chinese patterns can be seen in their traditional cultural IP products, such as extracting and simplifying the traditional auspicious patterns to make them suitable for the new type and emphasizing the main vision. All these are beneficial and bold attempts. The study place of this inheritor is in the ancient city of Weifang, Shandong Province, which has a daily passenger flow of 1.778 million people. It can be imagined what kind of influence traditional culture can achieve here. Although such quality and background of non-genetic successors account for a relatively small number, but significant, it is a successful model worth studying and replicating.

In addition, through the interview survey of 32 people, it is found that 28 of them have used online publicity means, 9 of them have obtained income through online publicity means, and 5 of them have obtained objective income through online marketing means. Therefore, this is a relatively new and worthy of further research marketing method. On intangible pattern digital protection in Shandong Province, the survey found the work inadequate funding, a serious shortage of personnel engaged in the work of the government party does not have enough strength and attention, lack of overall decision-making and coordination.

## CONCLUSION

Through the investigation of the inheritance mode of traditional Chinese patterns in Shandong Province, the author has a deeper understanding of the various carriers that traditional Chinese patterns rely on, namely the inheritance mode of various traditional art forms. In addition, the author has collected and analyzed views on the management effects related to traditional Chinese patterns, and explored some problems that can be improved. Moreover, through the analysis of the case, it is found that the mode of introducing traditional culture and art into the campus has strong effect, and currently in Shandong Province, traditional culture and art courses only exist in the form of elective courses in colleges and universities, which is of the nature of experience. However, through this study, it is found that systematic and targeted traditional culture education in colleges and universities is very beneficial to the inheritance and re-creation of traditional Chinese pattern art. In the field observation and interview, I am pleased to find a relatively dynamic new pattern, which is not perfect in fact, but is a representative pattern worthy of further exploration and research on the whole, which can provide successful experience and motivation for the inheritance and revitalization of traditional Chinese patterns.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I sincerely thank the cultural heritage inheritors, craftsmen, and educators in Shandong Province for their invaluable contributions. Special thanks to my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Ts. Dr. Rafeah Legino (UiTM), and my colleagues for their unwavering support.

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