




Systematizing Protection Strategies for Lacquer Art as Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of Yangzhou Lacquerware Based on Value System

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Citation: Zhang, H., Hajianfard, R., & Xia, Y. (2026). Systematizing protection strategies for lacquer art as intangible cultural heritage: A case study of Yangzhou lacquerware based on value system. *Herança*, 9(2), 17-31.

<https://doi.org/10.52152/heranca.v9i2/1266>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 24 Mar 2026

Accepted: 15 Jun 2026

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to explore systematized protection strategies for Yangzhou lacquerware, focusing on its historical, artistic, social, and economic significance. **Method:** The qualitative case-based analytical approach was used to analyze the collected secondary data in the form of academic articles, books, policy documents and heritage case studies. This study uses the approach of values analysis to explore the interaction between historical, artistic, social and economic aspects in the protection of Yangzhou lacquerware. Using a case study method, the research investigates how value-based preservation strategies can sustain this intangible cultural heritage while promoting its cultural, social, and economic relevance. Thematic analysis was conducted to explore the historical, artistic, social, and economic dimensions of lacquerware preservation. Key themes such as community involvement, economic sustainability, and the role of cultural tourism in lacquerware's preservation were examined. The case study of Yangzhou lacquerware allowed for a detailed, context-specific exploration of how protection strategies can be applied in real-world settings. **Results:** The findings revealed that lacquerware's preservation is deeply tied to local artisans and communities. The integration of lacquerware into cultural tourism and global markets provides sustainable income, while the adoption of value-based protection strategies ensures its relevance. Additionally, community-based preservation efforts and educational programs are essential for intergenerational knowledge transfer. **Implications:** The study suggests that combining economic development with cultural preservation through sustainable management practices can ensure the long-term survival of Yangzhou lacquerware. This approach offers insights into the broader application of preservation strategies for other traditional crafts.

Keywords: Yangzhou Lacquerware; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Preservation Strategies; Cultural Tourism; Economic Sustainability; Artistic Value.

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

Lacquer art is a deeply rooted cultural expression in China, characterized by its refined techniques, aesthetic value, and complex craftsmanship. Among the diverse lacquer traditions, Yangzhou lacquerware stands out for its intricate inlay work, engraved decorations, and high-gloss finishes, reflecting a synthesis of artistry and cultural identity (Körber, 2019). With a lineage dating back to the Han Dynasty, it embodies not only technical excellence increasingly threatened by industrial production, cultural homogenization, and a generational decline in skilled practitioners (DongYu et al., 2024). These challenges call for a systematic and value-based strategy for protection, revitalization, and sustainable development. As Shi et al. (2025) stressed that, China's intangible cultural heritage

(ICH) protection policies often emphasize listing and formal recognition, but fall short in supporting dynamic cultural transmission and innovation.

Although some legal structures have been created and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention on the Safeguarding of ICH was adopted in 2003, a large part of the modern preservation process consists of purely passive documentation or exhibition. Though it is an important method of documenting techniques, it can ignore the living, dynamic nature of the traditional crafts. Alivizatou (2016) claims that preserving intangible heritage should also be infused with the voices of communities and practitioners and claims that the bottom-up strategies are required to sustain practice and adaptation. At Yangzhou lacquerware, it implies the involvement of local artisans, learning centres, and cultural establishments in the joint development of preservation projects.

The imperative part of heritage protection is the knowledge of the value system that is inherent in the craft and reflects it is historical, artistic, economic, and social aspects. Bortolotto (2010) points out that effective protection lies not just in the protection of the form of the heritage, but also in the identification of the meanings and functions of the heritage in both traditional and contemporary settings. An example of such products, Yangzhou lacquerware, has an artistic value in terms of aesthetics and artisanship, an economic value in terms of possible application in cultural industries, and a social value in terms of community identity and pride. In the absence of valuing such interrelated values, policy and preservation work is likely to remain disjointed or inefficient.

The recent literature has discussed the possibility of adopting traditional crafts in contemporary cultural and creative industries as a form of regeneration. Fu (2023) shows that innovation, being based on traditional aesthetics and cultural meaning, can be used to provide contemporary audiences with a chance to re-contextualize crafts without any erosion of their heritage value. In the case of Yangzhou lacquerware, this could involve partnership with designers, a new product line, or online platforms to access the younger markets. But this innovation should be facilitated by training, transmission, and institutional support. According to Zabulis et al. (2023), traditional crafts are not commonly taught as formal education, which results in the skills gap and the loss of cultural knowledge. Incorporating lacquerware in both vocational and cultural education may thus be one of the main components of a long-term protection strategy.

Hence, the lacquerware of Yangzhou, as an essential part of the Chinese ICH, has its challenges and opportunities. Its transmission, innovation, and sustainability in the modern world can be addressed with the help of a systematised, value-oriented mode that integrates cultural, educational, economic, and policy views.

Problem Statement

The traditional craft of Yangzhou lacquerware, an important expression of China's intangible cultural heritage, faces growing challenges from modernization, the decline of skilled artisans, and weak mechanisms of transmission. Although many studies have explored the preservation of ICH in general, like Mu and Aimar (2022), current heritage preservation practices in China often emphasize documentation and official recognition rather than fostering dynamic, community-oriented, and value-driven approaches. However, research specifically addressing value-based and systematized protection strategies for lacquer art remains scarce. This gap underscores the need to examine Yangzhou lacquerware through a comprehensive value system framework, enabling the development of sustainable strategies that ensure its effective preservation, cultural continuity, and adaptation to contemporary contexts.

Research Objectives

To analyze the value system embedded in Yangzhou lacquerware as a form of ICH, focusing on its historical, artistic, social, and economic significance.

To study the systematized protection strategies for Yangzhou lacquerware that integrate value-based assessment with sustainable heritage management practices.

Significance of the Study

This paper is valuable in the research area of intangible cultural heritage because it provides a systematic, value-based approach to the protection of the Yangzhou lacquerware, a traditional Chinese art that is on the verge of extinction. Through the exploration of its historical, artistic, social, and economic values, the research fills the gap in management planning in heritage management strategies that usually lack consideration of integrated and sustainable approaches. Cultural policymakers, heritage practitioners, educators, and local artisans will find the findings useful, as it will give them practical information to use in conservation and revitalization. Furthermore, this case study can be used as an example to the preservation of other at risk traditional crafts in China and other parts in the world, and as part of an overall protection of heritage in modern development in sustainability,

transmission of culture and community-based safeguarding.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of Value Systems in ICH Preservation

The preservation of ICH such as traditional crafts, oral traditions, and performing arts requires one more than technical preservation: it requires the information on the value systems which encompass these cultural practises. According to Vecco (2010), the concept of heritage has moved beyond the physical monuments it is currently the intangible form of heritage which is more attentive to the meanings, values and social roles the heritage is attributed. They are embedded values, historical, aesthetic, social and economic values that are critical in how communities recognise, uphold and transmit their heritage. Without these values, preservation plans are doomed to become top-down and unconcerned with the realities by which the communities that it claims to serve are existing.

The value based model of heritage preservation lays stress on the fact that heritage must be analysed as a cultural product and as a developing social process. Akagawa (2015) states that heritage is created according to political, cultural, and institutional decisions regarding the value determining what and how to if preservation. At that, in this regard, the inclusion and representation of the local communities in the process of defining and articulating the values of their heritage is of critical importance. This perception is particularly applicable among those crafts, like the lacquer art, which embody the powerful knowledge systems and domestic identities. It was through the assessment of values in communities that it is now possible to come up with ways of approach which are more responsive and sustainable and fulfil the changing cultural and social roles of the heritage.

In addition, the recognition of the economic value of ICH helps to make it viable in the long term. As pointed out by Bindra et al. (2020), it is possible to consider that both cultural preservation and local development can be achieved by integrating intangible heritage into creative industries and cultural tourism, without endangering its fundamental values. Revitalization of traditional crafts by means of design innovation and ethical commercialization may offer artisan livelihoods and support the intergenerational transmission. Nevertheless, according to Harrison (2012), heritage values do not remain constant; they change over time, depending on the needs and perceptions of society. Thus, preservation should be value-based and flexible, reflective, and participatory, and it should be able to adjust to the current circumstances without violating cultural authenticity.

Systematizing Protection Strategies for Traditional Crafts

As an essential part of ICH, traditional crafts represent centuries of knowledge, creativity, and identity of the community. Nevertheless, these crafts are under growing threats of globalisation, industrialization, and the reduction in interest of younger generations. This has led to an increasing academic and policy-based interest in the creation of systematic protection measures that can keep traditional crafts more than well-documented. Guo and Ahn (2023) state that protection of ICH needs combined models that extend beyond preservation to involve community involvement, learning, and sustainable development. A methodical process would facilitate a more concerted response to the compound problems that traditional crafts are currently experiencing.

The other vital element of systematised protection is the incorporation of the traditional crafts into the governing systems of cultural policy and heritage management. Blake (2016) attaches significance to the equalisation of national heritage policies with the principles of the UNESCO 2003 Convention when developing the legal and institutional framework to enhance the processes of transmission, innovation, and community engagement. Instead of perceiving the old crafts as fixed cultural items, the policy regimes need to encourage their flexibility and applicability to modern times. This involves the identification and institutionalisation of the functions of great artisans, the creation of schools of crafts or apprenticeship programmes, and the promotion of innovation based on customary aesthetics and craftsmanship.

In addition, economic sustainability is a key point in any holistic protection strategy. The conventional crafts may also be used in creative industries, cultural tourism, and the digital market. Suriyankietkaew et al. (2025) emphasises that traditional crafts can be supported through cultural tourism projects which place a high value on authenticity and community good. The same can be said about innovative businesses, online craft marketplaces, or designer-artisan partnerships that might provide artisans with new platforms without sacrificing cultural integrity. These measures are useful not only in the generation of income but also in raising social awareness and appreciation of traditional skills.

Finally, long-term preservation depends on education and intergenerational transmission. Bortolotto (2010) explains that most protection efforts are ineffective due to their failure to consider the dynamic nature of traditional crafts, which are living. The systematic strategies would thus consist of educational programmes in

both formal and informal areas, whereby the older generations of knowledge can be taught and modified by the younger generation. In the absence of active transmission and of possibilities of creative participation, even those crafts that are well-documented run the risk of being forgotten into oblivion.

Community Involvement and Education in the Transmission of Intangible Heritage

Local communities and the facilitation of both formal and informal systems of education play a critical role in the transmission of ICH. As ICH is frequently transmitted orally or by practice, community intervention would be essential in maintaining its originality and survival. According to Loulanski (2006), the protection of ICH should be beyond documentation and incorporation of participation strategies, which consider communities as active participants in the heritage process. With the direct involvement of local bearers in decision-making and transmission, heritage can be seen as a living and developing practice, and not a particular cultural commodity.

According to Sani and Ahmad (2017), education has been the key to the existence of ICH, particularly in societies where the younger generations are becoming more distant from the traditional practices. Their ideas include the incorporation of traditional knowledge in schools and vocational education to overcome the generational distance. This is especially so in the case of traditional crafts and performing arts, where the transmission is a skill-based and very contextual activity. Apprenticeship programmes and craft workshops are community-based educational programmes that have worked out to facilitate intergenerational learning. Such informal systems are more likely to be more culturally ingrained and flexible than institutional education and need institutional support in order to be sustainable.

Besides education, there is another socio-cultural environment that influences the sustainability of ICH. Gfeller (2017) explains that most of the national policies do not reflect the reality lived by cultural communities, thus leading to top-down policies that do not believe in the social processes involved in heritage transmission. He states that ICH should be recognised with an effort to reinforce the cultural ecosystems in which these traditions flourish. These involve facilitation of community networks and artisan associations as well as community engagement programmes. Moreover, Hafstein (2008) urges against over-reliance on listing and classification (UNESCO heritage lists), which has the effect of decontextualizing heritage and giving it a symbolic value. But rather, he endorses participatory forms of protection that are more focused on local jurisdiction and practice.

In general, cultural interpretation of communities as agents and producers of cultural meaning is a condition of the long-term transmission of ICH. The protection measures should focus on education, involvement, and empowerment so that the intangible heritage is not stagnant, rigid, and useless to the upcoming generations.

Theoretical Framework: Values-Based Approach to Heritage Conservation

The research is rooted in the Values-Based Approach to Heritage Conservation that highlights the importance of heritage being protected not just in terms of its material properties but also based on a number of values it conveys to communities, including historical, cultural, social, and economic values. McClelland et al. (2013) state that this framework is particularly applicable to ICH, meaning that its meaning is not reflected in its physical form, but is embedded in practices, relationships, and community identity. According to Mason (2012), conservation should be approached with a broad range of values of the stakeholders in mind, as opposed to professional expert-related importance. Such an outlook is critical when considering the situation with Yangzhou lacquerware, whereby artisans, local people, cultural institutions, and markets assign various values to the craft which are interrelated in ways that are not always predetermined. It is in this perspective that the study will be based, and therefore, more inclusive and sustainable methods of conservation of lacquer art in its changing cultural environment can be identified.

Not elaborating on this point further, Maags (2020) criticises more conservative top-down heritage discourses, which she calls the so-called authorised heritage discourse, and which tends to increase the exclusion of the voices of the community and living practices. This is disputed by the values approach, which makes community engagement and interpretation the core of heritage management. This opinion may also be supported by De la Torre (2013), who underlines that the interpretation of heritage values allows taking more flexible and adaptable approaches to conservation, especially of living, dynamic traditions such as lacquerware. Such a structure will enable the work to transcend its preservation as an impartial protection and instead will address the question of how heritage can stay alive in contemporary society, practised and economically sustainable. In addition, Winter (2013) emphasises the necessity to incorporate education, transmission, and local engagement into the system of heritage principles, which are the tenets of the study that focus on the systematised methods of preserving the Yangzhou lacquerware. Overall, the value approach can serve as both a holistic and context-specific approach to the analysis and development of protection strategies based on practical meaning and application of intangible heritage.

Theoretical Framework: Values-Based Approach to Heritage Conservation

For the purpose of this study, the Values Based Approach was operationalized by creating four interrelated analytical dimensions (historical value, artistic value, social value, and economic value) from the literature. These dimensions serve as the conceptual framework for the analysis of preservation strategies of Yangzhou lacquerware. Every dimension is a separate but interrelated component of heritage significance, which can be assessed by the effectiveness of the protection measures in supporting the sustainability of ICH. Table 1 represents the summary of theoretical framework.

Table 1. Summary of Theoretical Framework

Value Dimension	Analytical Focus	Indicators Examined in the Study
Historical Value	Heritage continuity and cultural legacy	Historical significance, dynastic development, traditional knowledge transmission
Artistic Value	Craftsmanship and aesthetic identity	Design techniques, symbolic motifs, artistic innovation, aesthetic characteristics
Social Value	Community participation and cultural identity	Artisan involvement, intergenerational learning, local identity, educational activities
Economic Value	Sustainability and economic viability	Cultural tourism, market adaptation, commercialization, sustainable livelihood generation

Literature Gap

Themes of heritage preservation by values, community involvement, cultural tourism, and sustainable management of traditional crafts and ICH have been treated in previous studies, but most of the literature treats the problems under consideration separately or in larger contexts of heritage. The discussions of heritage values, sustainability and craft preservation by several researchers like Bortolotto (2010), Guo and Ahn (2023), are important; yet there are few studies which have incorporated these elements into a comprehensive and systematised protection framework for Yangzhou lacquerware. Specifically, few studies exist that focus on the historical, artistic, social and economic values of lacquerware and that attempt to apply these values to a single case study context in order to produce practical solutions for its preservation. Therefore, this study is an improvement to the previous research by analyzing the ICH of Yangzhou lacquerware and using value-centred and holistic analytical framework.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

This research follows a qualitative research design to explore and learn about the preservation and protection measures for the Yangzhou lacquerware, which is a significant Chinese ICH. A qualitative approach was selected as it provides the possibility to investigate the values, which are tied to this craft in detail, and presents a full picture of socio-cultural, historical, artistic, and economic aspects, which favour its protection. Although quantitative research is appropriate in the context of measurement of numerical data or results, such techniques might not wholly reflect the perceptive cultural connotations and values that lie at the heart of comprehending the meaning of ICH. As the research aimed to interpret the cultural, historical, social and economic aspects of Yangzhou lacquerware, a qualitative design was chosen, which allowed for in-depth discussion and analysis of the research situation, using existing scholarly works and documented case studies. This study does not gather first-hand accounts from artisans or community members, but it does examine previous research, policy documents, and heritage reports to gain insight into the way community participation, artisan practices, and institutional protection strategies are discussed in the context of ICH preservation. This method can be used as a tool for discovering repetitive themes, values and protection frameworks that are suitable for the sustainable protection of Yangzhou lacquerware.

As the study has been based on the secondary qualitative literature, the research was seen as being an analytical, case-based study, rather than an empirical field study. The study is not designed to yield new empirical data, but to provide a critical synthesis and interpretation of the current literature, policy debates, and documented preservation activities and experiences, using a values-based approach to heritage. Through this approach, the study can have a conceptual understanding of the sustainable preservation of Yangzhou lacquerware from the perspective of ICH.

Data Collection

The data used in this study was secondary sources, which was academic articles, books, reports, and case studies on the preservation of ICH and the protection of traditional crafts. The secondary data usage is justified because it gives a wide range of existing research studies, policies, and theoretical frameworks that could be used in contextualising the current state of lacquerware preservation. The secondary sources are especially useful in this study due to the opportunity to gather historical, theoretical, and cultural knowledge without the limitations of primary data collection, which include time and the availability of artisans. Additionally, the literature on other traditional crafts and intangible heritage conservation will also be used as a comparative source in determining the problems facing Yangzhou lacquerware.

For analytical rigor, secondary sources were selected for this study that are relevant to the ICH preservation, traditional craft sustainability, cultural policy, and lacquerware studies. Peer reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy reports and case studies in recognized academic databases were given priority. The literature selected was assessed based on its thematic relevance to the study's analytical framework, including discussions about the significance of the past, artistic practices, community involvement, and heritage preservation and economy.

Relevant Databases for Data Collection

The data is sourced from several reliable academic databases, as shown in the table below. These databases were selected for their comprehensive coverage of relevant studies in heritage conservation, art history, and cultural policy are given below in the [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Databases

Database	Description
Google Scholar	Provides access to a wide range of academic papers and articles across disciplines, including cultural heritage, art conservation, and policy studies.
JSTOR	An extensive digital library offering scholarly journals, books, and primary sources related to heritage conservation, art history, and sociology.
Scopus	A multidisciplinary database that includes research on conservation strategies, cultural studies, and heritage management.
Project MUSE	Offers access to journals in the humanities and social sciences, particularly relevant for heritage management and cultural policy.
ProQuest	A comprehensive database offering dissertations, books, and articles in cultural heritage and arts management.

These databases are selected because they provide access to peer-reviewed journals and publications relevant to the protection of ICH and the value-based approaches that will guide this research.

Study Sample

This research employs a case study approach with special emphasis on the Yangzhou lacquerware as an exemplification of an old Chinese craft experiencing preservation issues. Yangzhou lacquerware is used because of its historical importance and its inclusion in the first batch (2006) of items on China's National Intangible Cultural Heritage List. With the help of the case study, it is possible to perform a precise analysis of the cultural, social, and economic aspects which shape the preservation and protection strategy of lacquerware. By focusing on this particular craft, the research will be able to determine how the value-based protection strategies can be systematised to be sustainable. The case study approach is especially appropriate due to the fact that it delivers in-depth, contextual information and a practical case scenario of how theoretical solutions can be utilised in the management of heritage.

Data Analysis

The collected secondary data is analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that allows for the identification, examination, and interpretation of patterns within the textual data. Thematic analysis is suitable for this study as it helps to reveal key themes and concepts that emerge from the literature on lacquerware preservation. The themes for analysis are directly derived from the research objectives, which focus on understanding the historical, artistic, social, and economic values embedded in Yangzhou lacquerware and how these values can inform systematic protection strategies. The themes were presented and organized systematically in relation to the four analytical dimensions of the study: historical, artistic, social and economic value.

Thematic analysis begins with familiarizing the researcher with the data by reading the sources multiple

times. Initial codes are then developed, focusing on the major themes related to the value system and preservation strategies. These codes are refined, reviewed, and grouped into broader categories that reflect the study's objectives. Finally, the data is interpreted, and key themes are extracted to provide a nuanced understanding of how Yangzhou lacquerware can be protected through a value-based approach.

To increase the methodological transparency, the analytical process had several steps. First, the literature which had been selected was systematically reviewed and classified as per the four analytical dimensions of this study-Historical, Artistic, Social and Economic value. Second, for each category, underlying concepts, preservation problems and sustainability solutions were coded. Third, the linkage between the themes was analyzed by the Values-Based Approach to Heritage Conservation, to try to understand the interaction among the various values in the preservation of Yangzhou lacquerware. Through this process, the study was able to transcend the descriptive summary and to construct a comprehensive understanding of the various value-based preservation strategies that could be used for the long-term sustainability of ICH.

This method is particularly appropriate because it enables the researcher to explore the multidimensional nature of the values that define the heritage of Yangzhou lacquerware, ensuring a comprehensive analysis that aligns with the study's aim of developing practical protection strategies.

Ethical Standards

This research follows the accepted ethics in qualitative research. Although the research is based on secondary data, all literature is properly referenced, and academic integrity and plagiarism are avoided. Moreover, the study adheres to ethical standards as far as fair usage of published works is concerned, as well as all sources were utilised with respect to the intellectual property rights. Only confidentiality is ensured, and where possible, anonymity is also observed. Even though no primary data is being compiled among people, the study will be dedicated to ethical transparency in the matter of source, interpretation, and presentation of data. Moreover, the cultural sensitivity of people engaged in the production of lacquerware is observed in the study, which makes the image of Yangzhou lacquerware respectful and correct.

RESULTS

The results are analyzed and interpreted from the values based analytical framework of the study to discuss the interaction of historical, artistic, social and economic aspects in lacquerware preservation of Yangzhou. These dimensions are not considered separately, but rather as interrelated, and how they are managed is dependent on the ability to balance sustainable protection strategies between cultural continuity, community participation, artistic authenticity and economic adaptability.

Historical and Cultural Significance of Yangzhou Lacquerware

Chinese art, Yangzhou lacquerware, is a representative of significant historical and cultural importance. It was formed in the Han Dynasty and thrived in the Tang and Song Dynasties, and it has always been used as the representative of the elegant artistic traditions and high craftsmanship of China. According to Zhai et al. (2022) the lacquerware of the Yangzhou region is not only known based on some technical aspects but also has its peculiarities to reflect cultural values and preferences of each time. The art of lacquer is the complex combination of inlaying techniques, decorations, and skills, which often are related to symbolism and cultural performance, which are specific to the history of the Chinese (Wang, 2017). This ancient art was used on all purposes in the daily life and also in the ceremonies and imperial presents; it is an evidence that this art was a highly diverse tool in terms of cultures and a symbol of status. It is possible to trace the history of development of the Yangzhou lacquerware by the way of the evolution of the utility art to the symbol of the status and belonging to the culture. Local arts, such as lacquerware, were also enriched as a result of the historical spread of the empire, since it represented a powerful area, as can be seen in [Figure 1](#), as a result of the Han Dynasty territory. The interactions also led to the creation of advanced methods that would be known to be iconic of Yangzhou lacquerware (Lyu et al., 2025). The results are reported along the four dimensions of values that were determined in the analytical framework, so as to show how each value plays a role in the systematic preservation of Yangzhou lacquerware.



Figure 1. Han Dynasty Map Showing Territorial Influence on Lacquerware Development [Source: (Wang et al., 2025)]

Moreover, the historical accounts of the Yangzhou lacquerware demonstrate its contribution to the formation of local identity and the progress of local pride. Altenburger, Wan, and Bodehald (2015) state that the tradition of the lacquerware in Yangzhou is strictly connected with the active cultural tradition in this city, and its evolution is dependent on the social and political changes in the region. Lacquer art tends to be mixed up with historical events, including the trade relations on the Silk Road, which brought outside influences but preserved the traditional Chinese craftsmanship. As noted by Fan and Li (2020), Yangzhou lacquerware was an important element of the cultural exchange in the Qing Dynasty, as it was a home treasure and commodity at the same time. As depicted in Figure 2, the picture of an artisan closely working at the lacquer carving shows the careful and time-consuming work that has been ensured by the generations. The mixture of Chinese traditional elements with the impact of foreign artists helped to create the more cosmopolitan style that enhanced the tradition of lacquerware in Yangzhou. As a mirror of the history of the region of China in general and the overview of the artistic history, in particular, the Yangzhou lacquerware can shed light on the social, political, and economic environment, which defined the development of the Chinese art and material culture (Suo and Noknoi, 2025).



Figure 2. Craftsman Carving Yangzhou Lacquerware, Highlighting Traditional Techniques [Source: (Lyu et al., 2025)]

Artistic and Aesthetic Values of Lacquerware

Jewellery of lacquer, and particularly the Yangzhou type, is recognised due to its multifaceted labour and the particularity of its appearance. Lacquerwork is the art which needs accuracy, creativity and technical enhancement, and this fact is the reason why this art object may be considered as one of the most important cultural artefacts in the historical and contemporary art world. According to Zhang and Liu (2021), the beauty of the ornamentation and the method of inlaying the lacquerware with a touch of gold, floral figures, and smooth shapes characterise the design of the object as such and symbolise harmony and prosperity in Chinese culture. This aesthetic value is not just visual; the multiple layers of the lacquer, the fine carvings are treated as the indicator of the dominance of the form, and the material. These items as shown in Figure 3 which depicts vases of Yangzhou lacquerware demonstrate how colour, texture, and symbolic patterns have been intelligently grouped together to form the visual signature of Yangzhou lacquerware. De Gregorio, Marras and Garcia (2025) still comprehend how the lacquerware integrates different arts including, but not restricted to the calligraphy, painting and sculpture, which are reflected in the abstracted designs either as figurative or abstract. The aesthetic beauty of the lacquerware also rests on the reflective surfaces to which the aesthetic appeal of the pieces is added, as well as indicates the art in the medium of inclusion, which has been mastered over the centuries.



Figure 3. Yangzhou Lacquerware Vases, Highlighting Intricate Designs and Reflective Artistic Qualities
[Source: (Jing, 2023)]

Lacquerware is deeply related to the cultural symbolism and identities, aesthetic and artistic values. The designs of the Lacquerwares are usually interlaced with the images and patterns that represent beauty of the nature, mystical animals, and philosophies that may have significant cultural implications. Such designs according to Wang et al. (2025) are more of visual representations, which signify cultural tales, such as feng shui, Confucian, and common beliefs in unity with nature. The aesthetic value of the lacquerware is also the tactile and visual balance, as it has been achieved through the balance of the colour contrast, the texture, and the symmetry (Zhang and Mohamed, 2025). It is a material that is in a very smooth surface creating an impression of reflectiveness, which as Olmaz, Dozden, and Parlar Kılıç (2025) note, is meant to portray both the unity of the physical and spiritual. Also, the fashionable adaptability of the lacquerware that has ensured that it has time and again been able to keep in pace with both the traditional and contemporary trend in art and design has helped it to remain in touch with the modern art and design. Today, the lacquerware may be regarded as both the traditional craft, and as an active form of art that permits to establish the linking of the past and the present.

Social and Community Dimensions of Lacquerware Preservation

The conservation of the lacquerware, particularly in localities like Yangzhou, is intertwined with its locality and social aspects. This ICH can only be preserved with the role of local artisans and other cultural stakeholders.

Hung, Chen, and Lee (2021) propose that intergenerational skills and knowledge transmission in a community is a key dependable factor of the continuation of traditional crafts such as lacquerware. Artisans are not mere producers of lacquerware but also major guardians of cultural activities that identify localities and link communities. These crafts, in most instances, are highly associated with family traditions, and the continuity of the skills from one generation to another is part and parcel of the craft. Moreover, Qiqi and Bin (2024) write that local populations can be the basis of keeping the cultural legacy of lacquerware alive since they are the ones who offer the social background that makes the art relevant and significant. Lack of community involvement means that lacquerware will turn into an artefact, which does not associate itself with culture and its real-life uses.

The activities of the wider society in the preservation of lacquerware are also not limited to the artisan communities. According to Jiawei and Sangiamvibool (2025), cultural tourism and educational programmes are community-based programmes, which can motivate people to revitalise their interest in such traditional crafts as lacquerware. Once the locals are aware of the economic and cultural importance of lacquerware, they will be more willing to preserve it. In this respect, the economic role of lacquerware as a cultural product as well as a marketable craft holds importance. As noted by Zhou, using lacquerware in cultural tourism not only assists in raising the awareness of people but also creates an economic advantage that can support the production of the craft. The involvement of the younger generation in the learning process on the techniques of lacquerware and its cultural meaning is also essential through educational programmes. Virutamawongse et al. (2024) argue that such educational initiatives guarantee that lacquerware will not be forgotten by younger generations, as it makes them highly educated and enthusiastic about the continuation of the practice. Finally, there are social and community aspects of lacquerware conservation that focus on the role of involving the local people, providing financial resources, and training in order to make the craft sustainable.

Economic Impact and Sustainable Management Strategies

The economic contribution of the traditional crafts, such as lacquerware, goes beyond the aspect of cultural heritage in the local economies as well as the international markets. In the example of Yangzhou lacquerware, the art gives means of livelihood to the artisans, cultural tourism chances, market development, and other attendant trades like design and sales. Eseagwu (2023) emphasises that the inclusion of lacquerware into the cultural tourism industry not only boosts the economic sustainability of the craft but also generates sustainable sources of income for the local communities. Through the showcasing of lacquerware in museums and cultural festivals, the communities will be able to make a profit and also enhance the aesthetic value of the craft. By doing so, the lacquerware will be the major contributor to local economic growth as well as cultural tourism. In addition, Ma (2025) states that properly sold lacquerware in the world markets represents a kind of cultural diplomacy, which promotes the prestige of the nations and provides them with possibilities to export and trade. Economic gains of lacquerware are, however, pegged on the introduction of sustainable management practices that will make the venture viable in the long run and reduce the environmental effects it poses.

To be able to sustainably manage lacquerware, it is necessary to find a compromise between preserving the traditional craftsmanship and changing the production in relation to the modern market. Sobko et al. (2024) argue that environmentally friendly materials, less energy-consuming production processes, and encouragement of local craftsmanship with the help of education and governmental directions must be included in the list of sustainable management practices. Also, Sobko et al. (2024) conclude that the collaboration of the artisans with government agencies and enterprises plays an important role in creating the policies that will foster sustainable production and enhance the economic merit of lacquerware. Market diversification through fostering partnerships with designers to design modern products of the lacquerware can also help the company to increase its reach and relevance in a globalised market. Moreover, the establishment of certification schemes of the environmentally friendly production techniques might also contribute to the improvement of the image and marketability of lacquerware as one of the luxurious goods, which are sustainable. According to Ji (2025), these strategies are able to secure the economic sustainability of lacquerware, besides conserving the environmental and cultural value of the craft. To sum up, the lacquerware can be optimised in terms of economic values by encouraging sustainable management practices that will connect the old artistry with the modern market needs.

DISCUSSION

The results of the research are discussed in terms of the Values Based Approach to Heritage Conservation, based on the interaction of historical, artistic, social and economic values in determining sustainable methods for the conservation of Yangzhou lacquerware. Based on this, the study not only points to the need to preserve the lacquerware culture of Yangzhou, but also to understand it as a dynamic cultural heritage system that is formed through the interaction between the process of cultural continuity, social participation, institutional governance,

and economic adaptation. The findings indicate that lacquerware is not merely the symbol of traditional craftsmanship, but a valuable cultural asset, which introduces financial gain to the neighbourhood. Lacquerware has a direct association with the historical and artistic aspects of the region and identity. It is also in line with the findings of Rusu (2011), who believed in a close interconnection of the economic impact of traditional crafts with cultural and artistic significance. These crafts not only support the local artisans, it also facilitates cultural tourism and international trade, as well as bring in economic sources of income that are sustainable to the community. Moreover, the study suggests the need of value-centred protection strategies on historical, social, and economic grounds and in line with the articles by Sehnem et al. (2020) that assume that the knowledge of the values attached to heritage crafts can guide more effective heritage management solutions.

Concerning the preservation efforts, the research demonstrates that community involvement can be deemed as the most paramount factor as far as the maintenance of the practice of lacquerware is concerned. The presence of the local artisans, cultural institutions, and local governments in the preservation process guarantees that the craft is highly identified with the local identity, yet on the other hand, it adapts to the contemporary market demands. This observation is consistent with Stevens (2017), who believes that ICH must be maintained through the use of a community approach, where the stakeholders would work together to ensure cultural and economic sustainability. As it is also mentioned by Połec and Murawska (2021), the active engagement of the local communities is the most critical aspect of the existence of the traditional crafts, as it assists individuals in acquiring a sense of ownership and sentiment of pride. With reference to the case of Yangzhou lacquerware, the community-based programmes, such as education and artisan workshops, are very important in passing on knowledge to the younger generation and increasing the intergenerational transference of the knowledge. This statement illustrates the importance of community involvement in the process of conserving culture and also economic development.

The results support the theoretical underpinning of the Values Based Approach to Heritage Conservation outlined in Section 2.4 in terms of their relevance. Preservation of Yangzhou lacquerware is not just about the protection of a traditional craft object, but about the protection of interrelated cultural connotations, community identity, art knowledge and economy functions. The study shows that values are not exclusive to the heritage sector, and are negotiated amongst various stakeholders, such as the local communities, the cultural sector, artisans and the market. This aligns with Mason's (2012) position that the values of many key stakeholders need to be taken into account rather than just institutional preservation frameworks in a heritage management process. Meanwhile, the results show a conflict between business and cultural values. Appropriation into the tourist industry and into global markets is the means of economic sustainability, but over-globalization can lead to the erosion of lacquerware into a market product without a cultural context. Thus, sustainable protection must embody a balanced approach that enables innovation and economic development, with due consideration for the cultural identity and symbolism of the craft tradition.

Another important detail that is discussed in the paper is the economic factor of preservation of the lacquerware, particularly concerning introducing the craft into the cultural tourism and the international markets. The findings are that the luxury commodity of lacquerware and the cultural commodity may develop a large amount of economic value via marketing. This is evidenced by the study conducted by Horjan (2011), which found that the introduction of traditional crafts to the cultural tourist business can result in an event that creates more awareness to the local artisans as well as enabling them to have an international exposure. Partarakis et al. (2025) further provide that exportation of lacquerware can be an option too and once the right marketing is done, the ancient crafted products may become valuable goods in the world markets. This approach ensures the cost-effectiveness of lacquerware, as well as makes it more attuned to the culture in the international environment. Moreover, the outcomes of the study concerning the need to manage such practise in a sustainable way are in line with Huang et al. (2021), who report that the sustainability of such traditional crafts as lacquerware in the long-term perspectives is achieved when traditional methods of production based on environmentally-friendly materials and eco-certifications are employed. As per the research, an environmentally sustainable economic development is one path that can be taken to the balance between preservation and modernization.

The study also provides context-specific knowledge of the interaction of various heritage values in the process of heritage conservation of Yangzhou lacquerware. The results do not imply that historical, artistic, social and economic values constitute four distinct categories of preservation, but rather that these are mutually reinforcing and are interrelated and needed to be dealt with together. For instance, in the context of cultural education and seeking authenticity in preservation practices, economic sustainability through tourism and market adaptation was shown to facilitate community engagement and intergenerational transfer. This reveals that sustainable heritage management is not just about safeguarding cultural artefacts but also about the interdependencies between cultural identity, local livelihoods and changing market conditions.

Lastly, the findings of the study are relevant in the argumentation of why a synergistic approach needs to be adopted in the conservation and sustainable management of the Yangzhou lacquerware. This is made up of community conservation, economic policies and sustainable production. The findings of the analysis are similar to the previous research, such as the one carried out by Zhou and Wu (2022), who also believe that the visual language and symbolism of the elasticity of the designs of the lacquerware must be imperative within the context of its cultural meaning and commercialization. The new marketing relations and sustainable friendly management position suggest that lacquerware will not cease to exist as a cultural treasure, and a source of income. The preservation of the Yangzhou lacquerware, thus, is a process of both tradition and modernity since the cultural and as well as economic sustainability of the same can be co-existent.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to identify the systematic defence measures of Yangzhou lacquerware with regard to its historical, artistic, social and economic significance. The study was set to investigate the value system in this traditional craft to draw out how the values could be used to create more successful and sustainable conservation programmes. Within the case study of Yangzhou lacquerware, the research was to assist in creating the models of the preservation of the traditional crafts, as well as the marketing driven by the market. This approach is characteristic of the broader focus of preserving ICH as simultaneously making it useful and sustainable in the modern world.

A qualitative research method was used in this study, and it involved interpreting secondary data, constituting of scholarly articles, books, reports and case studies. This method provided a very extensive understanding of historical, artistic, and economical elements of the preservation of the lacquerware. With the help of the thematic analysis, the study determined the key themes that are related to historical importance, artistic worth, community engagement, and economic sustainability. By these, the evolution of the lacquerware through the centuries and its perception in the different cultural, social and economic conditions was widely ventured. The meaning was determined by referring to the existing literature and previous reports and developed a more complicated meaning of the multidimensional value of lacquerware and the meaning of conservation that has the capacity to maintain its additional use.

The result showed that Yangzhou lacquer ware is not merely a representation of the Chinese culture, but also a strong economic resource among local people. Restoration of the lacquerware is greatly linked to the community participation and the roles of artisans, local institutions and government in the preservation of the lacquerware are significant. Besides, the artistic and aesthetic value of the lacquerware is not restricted to cultural symbolism and therefore affects both the local and the global market. It was also revealed in the study that sustainable management policies, including incorporation of environmentally friendly production methods and marketing of lacquerware using cultural tourism and international trade would be significant. It is implied in these findings that through the coordination of the economic and cultural goals lacquerware will be able to survive as an art form and as a sustainable craft. The policy implications of these findings to the policymakers, the managers of the heritage sites and the local communities are also relevant since they highlight the need to incorporate teamwork throughout the preservation process, not to mention the need to combine modern economic policies with the traditional ones. This is a way of not only making lacquerware financially viable but also keeps its culture intact to generations to come.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

Although this research offers good knowledge about the history and conservation of Yangzhou lacquerware, it is limited in some aspects. The findings derived from this study are conceptually and analytically based and cannot be interpreted as empirical observations from artisan communities, as it is not a field study. First, the study primarily drew on the secondary data, which might not be able to fully describe the delicate views of local artisans and community members who participated in the lacquerware preservation process. The future research may also utilise primary data gathered in the form of interviews with and/or surveys of artisans, policymakers, and cultural managers, giving a direct insight into the issue of the practicality of lacquerware preservation. In addition, the research was done on the specific area of Yangzhou lacquerware, so it might be difficult to generalise the results to other areas and artisans. The future direction of the research might be comparative studies in the various regions of China or other nations and how cultural heritage preservation methods vary and what each setting can teach other settings. It may also be a possibility to broaden this research by adding a quantitative analysis that would present the picture of lacquerware economical influence in different markets more thoroughly.

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ETHICAL DECLARATION

Conflict of interest: No declaration required. **Financing:** No reporting required. **Peer review:** Double anonymous peer review. **Generative AI statement:** The authors declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.