

Emotional Design in the Design Research of the "Natural Creations" Cultural and Creative Brand

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Abstract: This paper argues that in the context of modernization, the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) can be integrated with cultural and creative products. When incorporating ICH into the design of cultural and creative products, it is essential to emphasize the manifestation of the instinctive, behavioral, and reflective layers within emotional design. Taking the "Natural Creations" brand as a case study, this research examines and analyzes its cultural and creative products from the perspective of emotional design.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage; Cultural and Creative Products; Emotional Design; Formal Aesthetics

Introduction

Throughout the long evolution of Chinese civilization, intangible cultural heritage has rich connotations, serving as a vital carrier of national spirit and cultural characteristics. As a key component of the cultural and creative industry, the design of cultural and creative derivative products strives to integrate traditional symbols with modern design language, thereby enhancing the cultural distinctiveness and aesthetic appeal of products. Against this backdrop, the systematic transformation of traditional cultural resources has become both a professional challenge for practitioners and a shared cultural mission for society as a whole.

1. Development and Innovation of Intangible Cultural Heritage within Traditional Chinese Culture

Intangible cultural heritage refers to traditional cultural expressions that exist in non-material forms and are passed down through generations. Its scope encompasses oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices and festive rituals, as well as traditional craftsmanship skills^[1]. Amidst rapid technological advancement, many intangible cultural heritage elements face challenges in sustaining their transmission. Cultural and creative products represent intellectual property-protected, high-value-added goods created through the innovative transformation of cultural elements by creators utilizing wisdom, craftsmanship, and technological means. Infusing intangible cultural heritage into cultural and creative products represents a new direction for cultural empowerment within this sector. Currently, many cultural and creative products exhibit significant shortcomings in design and development, such as slow product iteration and insufficient integration of modern aesthetic trends with in-depth research into national cultural psychology. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance product intrinsic quality, highlight cultural characteristics, incorporate emotional experiences, and expand practical functions. Scientific design methodologies should be employed to drive innovation in cultural and creative products^[2].

2. Emotional Design Practices in the "Natural Creations" Brand's Cultural and Creative Products

Against this social backdrop, the author's research reveals that the "Natural Creations" brand satisfies the three levels of needs outlined by Donald A. Norman in his book *The Design of Everyday Things* through its emotional design approach. As China's first integrated sharing brand dedicated to artisans, Natural Creations upholds three core principles: nature, humanity, and craftsmanship. It employs a linkage model—"from individuals to events, from events to objects"—to reinterpret, transform, and revitalize traditional culture and craftsmanship in modern society. Since 2013, they have visited over a thousand villages and produced more than 300 documentaries. They have amassed a vast collection of handicrafts—shadow puppets, kites, New Year paintings, bamboo weaving, and more—reimagining these artifacts while preserving their cultural and ethnic characteristics. By reducing production costs, they enable more people to experience the emotional resonance of cultural heritage. (Figure 1)

2.1 Instinctual Level Design: Prioritizing Visual Perception to Stimulate Positive Emotions

The emotions users perceive in a product represent instinctive reactions—innate behaviors requiring no learning or imitation^[3]. This stage activates sensory engagement, where appearance forms the primary interface for user cognition. When researching products and con-

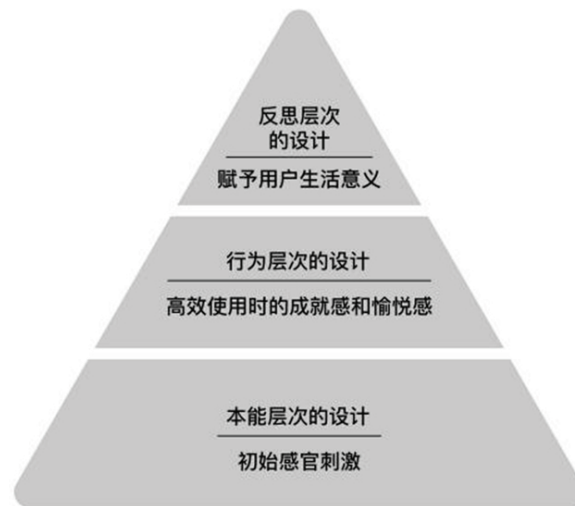


Figure 1. Emotional Design Theory (Author's illustration)

sumer groups, designers should prioritize consumer needs, using form, color, graphics, and materials to enhance external product characteristics.

Figure 2: Inspired by the concept of "moonlight and lantern glow," this design champions eco-friendliness by using wood fiberboard as the primary material. Its ingenious mortise-and-tenon structure transforms the gift box into a three-dimensional wooden lamp in seconds. On the Mid-Autumn Festival night, illuminate the lantern to savor mooncakes while admiring the moon. The packaging features a printed moon with a diffuse style. The graphic design concisely captures the waxing and waning phases of the moon, delivering an excellent visual and tactile experience that achieves the goal of instinctive design.



Figure 2. Ten Thousand Lights—Mid-Autumn Pastry Gift Box

2.2 Behavioral Level Design: Emphasizing Product Functionality and Creative Expression

Behavioral-level design centers on product functionality, aiming to create a pleasant and rewarding experience through a smooth, efficient usage process. Its primary focus lies in functionality, comprehensibility, usability, and experiential quality.

Figure 3: "Nature's Creation" Brand Cultural Product Design: "Drama from the East—Chinese Toy Shadow Puppet Experience Set." The team traveled to Luoshan County, Xinyang City, Henan Province, to research Luoshan shadow puppetry. Drawing on shadow puppet aesthetics as the core inspiration, they extracted and reimagined visual elements to create shadow puppet props, enabling an interactive experience between consumers and the product. To cater to diverse consumer preferences, multiple themed sets were launched, including "Chang'e Flying to the Moon," "A Chinese Odyssey," and "The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea." Each package included a complimentary booklet titled "The Story of Shadow Puppetry," compiled from research findings, allowing consumers to understand the narrative behind the cultural toys and contributing to the promotion of traditional craftsmanship.



Figure 3. Theater from the East—Chinese Shadow Puppet Experience Set

2.3 Reflection-Level Design: Activating Scenario Connections to Evoke Emotional Resonance

Reflective-level design anchors in the cultural significance embedded within products, drawing inspiration from diverse sources such as myths, historical narratives, urban civilizations, or symbolic imagery. Beyond fulfilling basic functionality, this level aims to resonate with users' emotional and value-driven aspirations. Designers can achieve this by constructing narrative-driven storylines, leveraging storytelling structures, emotional symbols, or brand narratives to evoke consumer empathy^[2]. In 2019, the Natural Creation Research Team initiated a project on "Chinese Kites." Over two years, they conducted field research at Weifang Kite Factory, Wangjia Village Kites, and private kite collectors, launching an innovative mini kite kit as part of their "Chinese Toys" series. Beyond transforming traditional intangible cultural heritage techniques into commercial products, the team also shares research materials—including images and texts—online from each location visited, integrating traditional knowledge into people's daily lives.

3. The Aesthetic Expression in Natural Creations' Branded Cultural Products

From an aesthetic perspective, the cultural and creative product "Paper Flower Dragon Origami Toy" evolved from China's traditional intangible cultural heritage of paper folding. Each dragon body is hand-dyed by artisans using specialized paper with excellent tensile strength and water absorption. It undergoes over 20 manual processes including gluing, carving, over-dyeing, and sun-drying. Figure 4: The innovative dragon head and tail add mythical elements to the originally simple paper-folding design. The Chinese dragon, a sacred symbol created by ancient people through imaginative synthesis of various animal traits and natural phenomena, boasts a history of approximately 8,000 years. As society evolved, the dragon's image transformed from an early deity of worship into a cultural symbol embodying auspicious meanings, now associated with soaring, inspiration, pioneering, and innovation^[4]. The color scheme draws inspiration from natural environmental hues—such as distinctive landforms, vegetation tones, and architectural colors—emphasizing the regional characteristics of intangible cultural heritage. Vibrant brightness and saturation harmonize to imbue the cultural creations with a nostalgic, folk-inspired aesthetic.



Figure 4. Art Paper Flower Dragon Origami Toy

4. Conclusion

The preservation of traditional intangible cultural heritage requires more than mere conservation; it demands integrating intangible herit-

age with contemporary contexts and applying these cultural elements to cultural and creative products. In summary, systematically integrating intangible cultural heritage elements into cultural and creative design aligns with three psychological levels of design objectives: instinct, behavior, and reflection. By precisely extracting cultural symbols and innovating through modern design language, products can be created that combine ethnic characteristics with market appeal. This approach responds to market demands while achieving the contemporary transformation of traditional culture.

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