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Research on Intangible Cultural Heritage Design and Communication Methods under the Narrative of High-Context Culture in Northeast Asia

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Abstract. This study takes the commonality of traditional cultures in Northeast Asia as the research perspective, and analyzes the transformation issues of intangible cultural heritage in contemporary design and communication. By sorting out relevant theories such as high-context culture, cultural narrative and design communication, and combining with the intangible cultural heritage design practice cases of China, Japan and South Korea, it summarizes the common characteristics of the three countries in implicit expression, situational understanding and cultural integration. This study holds that the design and communication of intangible cultural heritage should follow the basic logic of "cultural core extraction—design expression transformation—communication narrative organization", and explore more suitable intangible cultural heritage design and communication methods for the East Asian context.

Keywords: Commonality of Northeast Asian Cultures, High-Context Culture, Intangible Cultural Heritage Design, Design Transformation, Cultural Communication

1. Introduction

American psychologist Abraham Maslow classified human needs at different survival stages in his proposed "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs". When combined with Donald Norman's "Emotional Design" theory, it can be seen that after human basic needs are met, they will pursue psychological and spiritual satisfaction upward. At the same time, the global design industry has gradually shifted from "Pragmatism" to emotional design orientation to provide users with more emotional value. Against the background of globalization in multiple fields, cultural exchanges have gradually become an important way of communication and understanding between different countries. Culture can reflect the historical memory and values of a social group, and also play an important role in cross-cultural interactions in different regions.

1.1. Research background

With the increasing intensity of international cultural exchanges, the expression methods and communication paths of traditional cultural resources in contemporary society have gradually

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attracted the attention of academic and practical fields. American scholar Joseph Nye pointed out in his *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* that cultural attraction and value dissemination have an important influence in contemporary international relations [1]. In this regard, we have to mention the concept of "intangible cultural heritage (ICH)". In 2003, UNESCO pointed out in the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* that intangible cultural heritage includes traditional skills, performing arts, social practices, and related knowledge and skills. These cultural forms not only reflect the diversity of human culture, but also have important significance in cultural inheritance [2]. In recent years, while promoting the protection of intangible cultural heritage, various countries have gradually explored the application methods of intangible cultural heritage in cultural communication and the development of cultural industries. In this process, design has gradually become an important medium for the expression of traditional culture. With the development of the cultural and creative industry, the role of product design and cultural and creative design in the dissemination of traditional culture has been continuously enhanced. Through the translation of design behaviors, traditional cultural elements can enter the public vision in a more intuitive and understandable form on the basis of maintaining cultural connotations, thereby enhancing their cultural influence.

From the perspective of the composition of traditional culture, there is a certain commonality in the historical and cultural traditions of Northeast Asia (Japan, South Korea, China). For a long time, the three countries have maintained closer ties in ideological traditions, aesthetic concepts and social and cultural structures compared with Western countries. Many studies have pointed out that China, South Korea and Japan all show certain "high-context culture" characteristics in communication methods and cultural expressions. East Asian culture often emphasizes implicit expression, symbolic meaning and situational understanding. In the context of modern design, this cultural expression method provides an important foundation for the design transformation of traditional culture. In recent years, China, Japan and South Korea have carried out various practical explorations in the design transformation of traditional culture, and have gradually formed their own characteristics in the extraction of traditional cultural symbols, design expression methods and communication paths. Against this background, discussing the issues of intangible cultural heritage design and communication from the perspective of the commonality of Northeast Asian cultures is of certain significance for understanding the expression methods of traditional culture in contemporary society and how to better inherit and spread the connotation of traditional culture.

1.2. Research content

Under the above research background, this study will take the commonality of Northeast Asian traditional cultures as the main research perspective, focus on and discuss the optimization of transformation methods of intangible cultural heritage in the process of contemporary design expression and cultural communication. Specifically, this study first focuses on the common cultural characteristics formed by Northeast Asian traditional cultures in the historical development process and their specific manifestations in artistic expression and design practice; secondly, this study will continue to explore how to establish a more effective connection between traditional cultural symbols, cultural values and design languages, so as to improve the degree of understanding and acceptance of cultural content in the communication process; thirdly, by analyzing the relevant excellent cases of Japan and South Korea in the design transformation and communication practice of traditional culture, summarize the specific methodologies formed in the extraction of cultural symbols, design expression methods and communication paths; finally, from the perspective of the commonality of Northeast Asian cultures, explore more suitable intangible cultural heritage design

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expression methods for the contemporary communication environment, so as to provide a certain reference for the dissemination and development of traditional culture in the context of modern design.

1.3. Research significance and methods

Most of the existing academic research on intangible cultural heritage focuses on the discussion of cultural protection, cultural inheritance and policy levels, and there is still room for further expansion in the comprehensive analysis of it from the perspective of design expression and cultural communication. With the development of the global cultural and creative industry, the mediating role of "design" in the dissemination of traditional culture has become increasingly prominent. Transforming and expressing traditional cultural symbols through design means can improve the understandability and communication effect of cultural content to a certain extent. Therefore, systematically analyzing the design and communication methods of intangible cultural heritage from the perspective of the commonality of Northeast Asian traditional cultures is not only helpful to expand the relevant perspectives of intangible cultural heritage research, but also can provide certain practical reference for the expression of traditional culture in the context of contemporary design.

To achieve the above research objectives, this study will mainly adopt mainstream research methods such as literature research method, case analysis method and comparative research method. First, sort out the literature and representative theories in the fields of cultural communication, design research and intangible cultural heritage to build the theoretical basis of the research; secondly, select representative practical cases of intangible cultural heritage design and communication in China, Japan and South Korea, and analyze their design expression methods and communication paths; finally, on the basis of comparative analysis of the practical experience of the three countries, summarize the relevant characteristics, and on this basis, discuss the possible methods and paths of intangible cultural heritage design and communication.

2. Theoretical review

2.1. Characteristics of high-context culture and cultural expression in Northeast Asia

In the research field of cross-cultural communication, the "High-Context Culture" first proposed by American anthropologist Edward T. Hall provides an important perspective for the public to understand the communication methods between different cultures. He once proposed that in high-context cultures, the transmission of information often relies on social relations, situational backgrounds and non-verbal symbols, and does not completely depend on direct language expression [3]. He believes that the relevant differences in information expression methods of different cultures will have an important impact on interpersonal communication and cultural dissemination.

Many researchers have pointed out that East Asian societies generally present the characteristics of high-context culture in cultural expression methods. For example, in daily interpersonal communication, people in this group are more inclined to adopt expression methods that emphasize situational understanding, social networks and more implicitness. This cultural structure is not only reflected in daily social interactions, but also relatively reflected in artistic expression and design aesthetics. Japanese social anthropologist Chie Nakane pointed out in *Human Relations in a Vertical Society* that the interpersonal relationship structure of Japanese society presents obvious relationship-oriented characteristics, and this social structure has a certain cHBTBBGommonality in

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the East Asian cultural circle [4]. It can be seen that this cultural background makes East Asian societies more inclined to adopt relatively implicit expression methods such as symbolism and metaphor in artistic and cultural expressions, such as Japan's MUJI, South Korea's light luxury design style and China's "New Chinese" design style. In terms of traditional arts and crafts, this cultural expression feature is more obvious. East Asian traditional arts often convey cultural semantics through materials and shapes, and rarely use direct visual symbols. Japanese scholar Soetsu Yanagi once pointed out that traditional crafts not only reflect the technical level of their regions, but also reflect their national cultural spirit and lifestyle. Similar views are also reflected in the research of Chinese traditional aesthetics. Chinese contemporary aesthetician Zong Baihua once said that Chinese traditional art emphasizes the creation of "artistic conception" in aesthetic expression, and this aesthetic concept reflects the characteristics of implicit expression and situational understanding in Eastern culture to a certain extent. Thus, analyzing the expression methods of East Asian culture from the perspective of high-context culture seems to be more helpful to understand the expression logic of traditional culture in design transformation.

2.2. The connection between design and cultural communication

In the relevant research of cultural communication, "narrative" is regarded as an important way of constructing cultural meaning. American scholar Walter Fisher's "Narrative Paradigm" points out that humans understand experience and reality through narrative, and this theory provides an important theoretical basis for analyzing the meaning construction in cultural communication.

With the development of cultural and creative industries in recent years, design has also gradually become one of the media of cultural communication. British design scholar Guy Julier once proposed in his *The Culture of Design* that design is not only related to material production, but also an expression process of social and cultural meaning. Design activities are closely related to the cultural environment, and their results often reflect the values and aesthetic orientation of a specific society [5]. Monographs such as *Design Psychology* and *Design of Reality* jointly emphasize that contemporary design should respond to social activities and cultural needs, not just meet market and functional attributes. Design has an important responsibility in the social system and should build an "invisible bridge" between technology, culture and society.

In the process of traditional culture dissemination, the core role of design is reflected in the translation of cultural symbols. Traditional culture usually has a complex historical background, and design can make them more in line with contemporary aesthetic habits. For example, Japan has formed a relatively mature practical path in the combination of traditional crafts and modern design, South Korea has promoted its national popularity through niche design in the cultural and creative industry system, and China has also continuously explored in the design transformation of cultural tourism and intangible cultural heritage in recent years. Against this background, studying intangible cultural heritage design from the perspective of design and cultural communication is also helpful to further understand the expression methods and communication paths of traditional culture in contemporary society.

3. Analysis of the commonality of traditional cultures in Northeast Asia

3.1. Implicit expression and symbolic aesthetics

Implicitness is particularly obvious in Chinese traditional aesthetics. "Cheongsam", one of the traditional women's clothing in China, shows the unique elegance and demeanor of Chinese women

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through relatively conservative design language. Chinese aesthetics emphasizes "artistic conception" and attaches importance to the meaning of "infinity in limited form". Zong Baihua repeatedly discussed the aesthetic consciousness of "virtual and real complement each other" and "achieving more with less" in Chinese art in *Aesthetic Walk*. It does not emphasize straightforward presentation, but forms beauty through blank space, implication and atmosphere [6]. Soetsu Yanagi proposed the unified relationship between the beauty of crafts and materials, life and manual experience in *The Unknown Craftsman*, reflecting an aesthetic method that does not rely on strong symbolic stimulation but pays more attention to inner temperament. At the same time, he emphasized that Japanese traditional crafts and daily utensil design also attach importance to simple, restrained and unassuming design expression methods [7]. South Korea's industrial development has been more rapid in modern times. While its industrial strength has improved, South Korean society still retains the characteristics of emphasizing etiquette, order, relationships and propriety, which is one of the reasons why its design image is obviously different from that of Western countries. In other words, although the three countries in Northeast Asia have formed different development paths in the process of modernization, there is a relatively consistent aesthetic tendency at the level of traditional culture, that is: not pursuing excessive exposure, but attaching importance to symbolism, implication and inner emotional transmission.

3.2. Situational understanding and social relationship awareness

High-context culture is not just simple indirect language expression. It means that when the public understands a certain information A, they often combine multi-dimensional content B such as occasion, identity and relationship, and then make a comprehensive judgment on the actual meaning of A. In fact, there is no actual connection between the superficial meanings of A and B. The aforementioned Edward T. Hall's judgment on high-context culture actually implies this information understanding method of "situation precedes sentence". Chie Nakane further analyzed the "vertical relationship" characteristics of Japanese society from the perspective of social structure. He believes that from a sociological point of view, the order, position and interaction structure within the group have an important impact on individual behavior [4]. Therefore, if intangible cultural heritage design can break away from the level of surface patterns or visual collage and more fully consider context, regional etiquette, usage methods or emotional atmosphere, its communication and audience acceptance ability may be more stable.

3.3. Cultural inclusiveness and integrated development

While adhering to local traditions, Northeast Asian cultures have strong abilities of absorption, transformation and re-creation. From a historical perspective, China, Japan and South Korea are not self-enclosed development systems, but have continuously completed self-optimization in the interaction with surrounding and modern industrial civilizations. The spread of Confucianism in Northeast Asia reflects a unique cultural mechanism: when the same thought enters different countries, it will form different expression methods according to the local social structure, etiquette system and practical needs. Japan has formed a path of combining traditional culture with modern technology earlier in modern design, South Korea has established a relatively stronger integration ability between traditional cultural resources and modern cultural industries, and China has also continuously promoted the combination of traditional crafts, local culture and contemporary product design in recent years. All three countries inherit and spread traditional culture through translation and optimization, and form new forms of cultural expression.

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4. Comparative analysis of practical cases of intangible cultural heritage design and communication in Northeast Asia

4.1. Analysis of practical cases of intangible cultural heritage design and communication in Japan

Among the three countries in Northeast Asia, Japan started particularly early in the modern translation of its traditional crafts. Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten, founded in 1716, is a representative practitioner of the branding path of Japanese traditional crafts. With the goal of "revitalizing Japanese crafts", it has long carried out design development and sales of daily utensils based on Japanese crafts, and gradually transformed Japan's traditional craft resources into contemporary daily necessities and living sundries [8]. Japan's relevant practices do not simply stay in the single display of traditional patterns or elements, but pay more attention to connecting traditional materials and crafts with contemporary life needs, so that Japanese traditional culture can enter the daily life of the public in a more universal way. At the same time, Japan has also formed a relatively mature system in the promotion of traditional crafts. Aoyama Square of Japanese Traditional Crafts is one of the display and sales platforms for Japanese traditional craft products. This platform allows the public at home and abroad to "see, touch and buy" traditional crafts from all over Japan through exhibitions, on-site sales and other methods. Japan does not rely on individual brands to spread traditional culture, but jointly promotes the social popularity of traditional crafts through public display platforms, regional craft systems and market circulation channels [9]. One of the characteristics of Japanese traditional crafts is the expression of "daily life" and "conservative restraint". Whether it is lacquerware, washi, wood products or bamboo products, their official introductions often do not emphasize too grand historical story narratives, but pay more attention to materials, technological processes and practical uses. Such a storyboard narrative method itself can reflect a more typical "high-context culture" expression: not overstating directly, but allowing the public to gradually understand independently through the touch, use and craft details of the utensils.

4.2. Analysis of practical cases of intangible cultural heritage design and communication in South Korea

Compared with Japan, South Korea presents a more obvious industrial linkage structure in the communication of intangible cultural heritage design. The Korea Craft & Design Foundation (KCDF) is one of the official research and promotion institutions in South Korea, which is affiliated to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of South Korea. One of its main responsibilities is to promote the development of Korean crafts, design and hanbok at home and abroad. It can be seen that South Korea is more inclined to incorporate crafts, clothing and design into a more systematic cultural policy framework in the dissemination of traditional culture [10]. At the practical level, hanbok and hanji are two representative development directions. The introduction of KCDF's hanbok project points out that its support content specifically includes hanbok project development, experiential education, cultural tourism content and hanbok modern design research, aiming to enable hanbok to achieve sustainable development in the contemporary market environment and expand its scope of use through educational experience and exhibition promotion. Through new design objects, educational methods and experience spaces, traditional materials are no longer just abstract historical factors for the public, but have become modern cultural resources that can be actually perceived. The description of KCDF's "Constancy & Change" project can show that this

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kind of exhibition has displayed Korean traditional craft and design culture to international audiences during the Milan Design Week in Italy since 2013, and has gradually become an important platform for presenting Korean craft design to the outside world. South Korea is better at using international design exhibitions and competitions and popular cultural contexts to transform traditional content into more internationally visionary visual and narrative languages in the dissemination of traditional culture. The description shows that it has intended to showcase Korean traditional craft and design culture to the international world during the Milan Design Week since 2013, and has gradually become an important window for South Korean design export.

4.3. Analysis of practical cases of intangible cultural heritage design and communication in China

Compared with the above two countries, China has a richer cultural resource base in the design and communication of intangible cultural heritage, and has also carried out relatively influential practices in recent years. Among them, the relevant cultural and creative practices of The Palace Museum in Beijing are particularly representative. According to the official website of The Palace Museum, its products have gradually covered multiple fields such as stationery, pendants, clothing accessories and digital products, and often take cultural relics in the collection, architectural elements and traditional patterns as the main design sources [11]. In terms of communication form alone, such a path is no longer just a simple copy of cultural relic images, but attempts to transform cultural resources into usable and interactive daily portable products. The Palace Museum's cultural and creative products are not limited to being sold only in the museum, and it tried public-oriented communication channels earlier. Relevant news in 2018 showed that The Palace Museum's cultural and creative products held an exhibition in Singapore, displaying about 169 sets of products in total, and planned to continue to hold exhibitions in South Korea, Australia, Thailand, Belgium and other places. The Palace Museum proposed that one of the purposes of cultural and creative research and development is to make the cultural relics in the collection "come alive" and let the public "take the Palace Museum culture home". At the same time, China's relevant practical methods are also gradually optimized. In addition to common forms such as stationery and ornaments, The Palace Museum has also extended its design in many aspects such as digital games, input method skins and mobile applications. In 2024, according to the data of The Palace Museum's "Zero Waste Environmental Protection Cultural and Creative" project, some of its products reuse materials such as plastic bottles, fallen leaves and apple peels, and combine them with traditional patterns of The Palace Museum to produce products with both environmental protection concepts and cultural recognition.

4.4. Comparative analysis of practical cases of intangible cultural heritage design and communication in the three countries

First of all, in terms of design concepts, Japan emphasizes starting from "craftsman spirit" and daily life, and promotes the dissemination of traditional culture centered on "long-term use" and "daily integration"; South Korea emphasizes policy organization, international display and cultural event planning, and attaches importance to the modern communication methods of traditional culture entering public spaces; China has both the characteristics of cultural resource base and multi-media development, especially in the fields of museum cultural and creative products and digital expression; secondly, in terms of expression methods, Japan tends to be restrained, concise and material-oriented, and cultural meaning is hidden in the use process of products; South Korea pays

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more attention to theme optimization, exhibition narrative and linkage activities, and emphasizes the exposure of traditional culture in modern society; China has two tendencies at the same time, namely "digging deep into cultural connotation and integrating into modern life" and "instant communication of visual symbols and hot spots". These differences do not mean a simple distinction between advantages and disadvantages, but reflect the different emphases of the three countries in social structure, industrial system and communication methods; finally, in terms of communication paths, Japan pays more attention to the stable combination of brands and regional crafts, South Korea pays more attention to policy support and international display, and China pays more attention to broadening the space where product forms exist. It can be seen that there is no single form of intangible cultural heritage design and communication, and its efficiency depends on the adaptability between cultural resource base, audience structure, industrial conditions and communication media.

5. Construction of intangible cultural heritage design and communication methods

5.1. Cultural core extraction method

The primary premise of intangible cultural heritage design and communication is to identify and extract the cultural core. The so-called cultural core does not only refer to surface elements such as patterns, colors or shapes, but refers to the lifestyle, values, craft spirit and emotional factors carried by intangible cultural heritage. The intangible cultural heritage defined by UNESCO itself includes practices, knowledge, skills and related cultural spaces, which shows that intangible cultural heritage is not an isolated symbol, but a cultural system closely related to community life and historical memory. Therefore, before we carry out design transformation, we need to first clarify what is the "cultural core" that can make an intangible cultural heritage project truly have communication value? From the perspective of methods, the extraction of cultural core can be carried out from three levels: first, identify the historical origin and cultural context of the intangible cultural heritage project, clarify its function and significance in local society, and try to avoid the superficial use of cultural background; secondly, extract the relatively stable spiritual dimension content, such as the concept of manual labor, the symbiosis between man and nature, ritual order or daily ethics, so that the design does not only stay at the aesthetic level, but can carry a certain cultural thickness; thirdly, judge what kind of universality and interactivity these spiritual dimension contents can have in contemporary life, which factors can be connected with today's user groups, and which contents are more suitable to be reinterpreted in modern products. The extraction of cultural core is also oriented by the communication target. In the design and communication of intangible cultural heritage, we should avoid the "large and comprehensive" expression method, and pay more attention to extracting the most recognizable, most reflective of cultural spirit and most transformable content from specific projects, so as to improve the pertinence of subsequent design and communication.

5.2. Cultural element transformation method

After completing the cultural core extraction in the previous part, the key problem that follows is how to realize the effective transformation of cultural elements. The main role of design behavior at this stage is to establish a new form of expression between traditional culture and modern life. Guy Julier believes that design is essentially a cultural practice, which participates in the construction of social meaning while manufacturing objects [5]. Therefore, the key to the design transformation of intangible cultural heritage is not whether the elements are copied accurately, but whether the design

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has truly completed the extraction and reorganization of cultural meaning. The design transformation of intangible cultural heritage should follow the logic from the inside out, first understand the cultural spirit and aesthetic characteristics in intangible cultural heritage, and then decide what product categories, materials, structures and visual languages are most suitable for carrying these contents. For example, in some special intangible cultural heritage projects, if it is necessary to emphasize "nature", excessive industrialization and symbolization should be avoided; if it is necessary to emphasize "popularity", targeted optimization should be carried out in narrative methods, interaction and media development. From the perspective of China's current practical path, the design transformation of intangible cultural heritage needs to focus on the following three directions: first, it is necessary to strengthen the balance between functionality and cultural attributes, so that cultural elements can be naturally implanted in the later use links of products, rather than only existing as decorative meanings; secondly, it is necessary to enhance the presence of "materials & crafts" and strengthen their cultural narrative, so that the public can understand the crafts and historical precipitation they carry through product experience; thirdly, it is necessary to pay attention to the design concept of "conservatism & restraint", and avoid piling up too many traditional elements in the design to cause aesthetic fatigue to the public.

5.3. Communication narrative construction method

If the aforementioned cultural extraction focuses on "what to communicate" and design transformation solves "how to express", then communication narrative emphasizes "how to make the public understand". In this problem, the narrative theory of high-context culture can be put to use. The meaning in high-context culture often depends on situation and relationship, and people are more likely to obtain information through narrative methods with empirical logic and emotional structure. For the design and communication of intangible cultural heritage, this means that elaborating on crafts, ages or symbolic meanings alone is not enough to achieve the best communication effect. In this regard, what is more important is how to organize these contents into a situation that can be perceived and understood by the public.

The construction of communication narrative can be carried out from the aspects of life orientation, situationalization and emotionalization. The so-called life orientation means that the presentation of intangible cultural heritage content should be connected with reality as much as possible, so that it is no longer just an abstract historical object, but becomes a cultural content related to the public's basic necessities of life, family memories, daily aesthetics, etc.; the so-called situationalization means constructing specific usage scenarios, cultural scenarios and story scenarios in the communication process, allowing the public to feel the cultural meaning through these scenarios; the so-called emotionalization means attaching importance to emotional clues that can stimulate group identity such as memory, sense of belonging, ritual order or festival meaning in the expression method, thereby enhancing the foundation of public emotional resonance in cultural communication. In these aspects, some experiences of South Korea have reference significance. Its traditional culture dissemination is not only the display of objects, but also organizes narratives through practical activities, so that traditional culture forms stronger exposure and public participation in modern public spaces.

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6. Conclusion

6.1. Main conclusions

This study starts from the perspective of the commonality between traditional cultures in Northeast Asia, and analyzes the transformation issues of intangible cultural heritage in contemporary design and communication. Through sorting out and summarizing relevant theories, it can be seen that China, Japan and South Korea all have certain high-context cultural characteristics, which make the three countries present obvious commonalities in the aspects of conservative expression, situational understanding, relationship orientation and aesthetic mechanism. Thus, the contemporary expression of intangible cultural heritage is no longer just a formal issue, but a process of reorganizing cultural meaning between different media, different situations and audience groups. This study holds that the design and communication of intangible cultural heritage should follow the basic logic of "cultural core extraction—design expression transformation—communication narrative organization". In the cultural extraction stage, the spiritual core and life significance with real communication value should be identified from intangible cultural heritage, and the simple appropriation of surface symbols should be avoided; in the design transformation stage, product functions, material languages and visual expressions should be balanced based on cultural connotations, so that traditional culture can naturally enter contemporary life; in the communication organization stage, the public's understanding and acceptance of intangible cultural heritage content should be enhanced through life-oriented, situational and emotional narrative methods.

6.2. Research limitations and prospects

This study mainly adopts the analysis methods of literature research and case comparison, and there may be limitations in the sample scope and case quality. Due to factors such as network or platform restrictions, the investigation and discussion on the acceptance effect of different audience groups have not yet carried out in-depth analysis at the empirical level. In future research, relevant researchers can further combine questionnaire surveys, interview research and other methods to investigate and analyze the communication effect on this basis, and make more detailed analysis and discussion on the audience understanding mechanism, cross-cultural acceptance path and expression differences under different media conditions in the design and communication of intangible cultural heritage.

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