

Traditional Genes and Modern Translation: A Comparative Study of Innovative Practices in Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Context of the “Double Helix Model”

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Abstract:

This paper aims to explore modern approaches to “revitalizing” intangible cultural heritage. Starting from the reflections triggered by watching the anime “Demon Slayer,” the study notes that Japan has successfully transformed its traditional culture into global trends, while the dissemination of China’s intangible cultural heritage faces significant challenges. To address this issue, the paper proposes a “Cultural Revitalization Double Helix Model,” which suggests that the modernization of intangible cultural heritage requires the interweaving and synergistic interaction of “traditional genes” and “modern expressions.”

By comparing Issey Miyake’s “philosophical breakthrough” innovations, Bosideng’s approaches to refining craftsmanship, and Chanel’s use of symbolic elements, the study reveals hierarchical differences in the innovation of intangible cultural heritage. Ultimately, it proposes systematic strategies across four dimensions—narrative, design, experience, and industry—aimed at helping China’s intangible cultural heritage find a path for transformation that is rooted in tradition while integrating into contemporary life.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Cultural Revitalization, Double Helix Model, Traditional Genes, Modern Expressions

I. Introduction

(A) Research Background

The idea for this research arose from an experience watching a movie. When I was in the cinema watch-

ing the Japanese anime film “Demon Slayer,” the technique performed by the protagonist Tanjiro, “Fire God Kagura,” captivated me greatly. After returning home, I conducted some research and came to understand the Ukiyo-e aesthetic culture behind it. This ex-

perience made me realize that Japanese anime and design have already seamlessly integrated traditional cultural symbols such as Ukiyo-e and samurai spirit into modern cultural trends that have become popular worldwide [11]. In contrast, in China, those intangible cultural heritages that carry thousands of years of wisdom often seem neglected and marginalized in today's dissemination efforts, failing to reach the lives and emotions of younger people [4][5].

This led me to ponder: What are the logic and methods behind the success of cultural dissemination represented by Japan? Can China critically learn from these experiences and apply them? Is it possible to find a path to "revitalization" that is rooted in traditional Chinese culture while also resonating with contemporary public values? [1](II) Research Significance and Innovations

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the "Cultural Reactivation Double Helix Model" developed in this study aims to provide a feasible framework for the transformation of intangible cultural heritage from being "protected heritage" into "desired resources." Practically, by conducting a comparative analysis of leading Japanese cases and cutting-edge practices in China, this research can offer insights and strategic recommendations for the innovative transformation of intangible cultural heritage in China, particularly traditional crafts.

The innovations of this study lie in two main aspects: First, it elevates issues stemming from popular culture (such as "Demon Slayer") to a level of comparative study focusing on design logic and brand strategy, thereby shifting the research perspective. Second, it establishes the double helix model to elucidate how "traditional elements" and "modern expressions" interact and complement each other in the innovation of intangible cultural heritage, providing valuable guidance for its development.

(III) Research Methods

This study employs a multi-case comparative approach and theoretical model construction. Three key cases are selected for comparison: Issey Miyake [2][8] and Bosideng [6]. Issey Miyake serves as a model example of philosophical innovation in Japanese intangible cultural heritage, while Bosideng represents a cutting-edge practice in China's efforts to modernize intangible cultural heritage through branding strategies. In addition to this, the application of Chanel's [9] approach to Chinese lacquer craftsmanship is also used as a reference framework in order to clarify the differences in the paths of cultural translation. At the theoretical level, the "Cultural Activation Double Helix Model" is constructed and employed as an analytical tool throughout the entire text.

II. Deconstruction of the Japanese Case: Issey Miyake – Philosophical Distillation and Groundbreaking Innovation

(a) In-depth Exploration of Traditional Elements: The Philosophy Behind Origami and Kimono

Issey Miyake's inspiration is rooted in Japanese traditional culture. He did not simply use kimono fabrics or origami patterns; rather, he integrated them deeply into the design and production philosophy of his products [2]:

- From "Origami": He captured the essence of origami, which lies in creating shape and space through folding rather than cutting.

- From "Kimono": He drew on the concept of "using a single piece of fabric to create a garment," striving for a sense of harmony between the fabric and the body.

(b) Modern Expressions and Creative Transformations

Based on these philosophical principles, Issey Miyake transformed them into modern expressions:

- Narrative Translation: The inspiration drawn from traditional cultural clothing is extended to advocate for greater freedom of movement and a modern way of living. [8] As a result, clothing is no longer a constraint but rather becomes a "second skin" that provides comfort and dynamical beauty. [2]

- Aesthetic Design: The inspiration derived from origami techniques is transformed into the brand's iconic "lifetime folds." [2]

- Business Model: Through international platforms such as Paris Fashion Week, the brand has been positioned as a symbol of forward-thinking, artistic design, transcending the boundaries of traditional ethnic clothing. [8]

III. Theoretical Construction: The Dual-Helix Model of Cultural Revitalization

(A) Components of the Model

In this model, the successful modernization of intangible cultural heritage relies on the interwoven and mutually reinforcing relationship between the "traditional genetic sequence" and the "modern expressive sequence," much like the DNA double helix structure.

- Traditional Genetic Sequence: This represents the foundation and soul of intangible cultural heritage and includes three main aspects:

1. Core techniques and aesthetics: Such as unique weaving methods and dyeing techniques.

2. Cultural core and philosophy: Examples include China's concept of "harmony between man and nature" and

the mindset associated with craftsmanship.³ Indigenous symbols and narrative: For example, the legends and customs behind intangible cultural heritage.

· Modern expression sequences: These serve as a bridge connecting tradition and modernity, and mainly include four aspects:

1. Narrative translation: Transforming grand, ancient historical narratives into modern stories that resonate with individual and universal emotions.

2. Aesthetic design: Extracting traditional aesthetic elements (patterns, lines) and integrating them with modern aesthetics to create forms that are more readily accepted by contemporary audiences [3].

3. Technical media: Utilizing new materials, techniques, and digital media for reconstruction and dissemination [1].

4. Business models: Employing modern commercial approaches such as collaborations and IP licensing to transform cultural value into market value.

(B) The insights offered by this model

The essence of this model lies in the “interwoven and synergistic relationship” between these two sequences. “Modern expressions” that lack the “traditional genes” lack cultural depth and are unable to effectively promote intangible cultural heritage; conversely, “traditional genes” without “modern expressions” face difficulties in developing in today’s society and struggle to integrate into people’s lives, risking decline. Therefore, both parties must achieve a spiral upward development through continuous dialogue and integration, working together to transform intangible cultural heritage from mere exhibits in museums into dynamic cultural resources that can integrate into modern society.

IV. Case Studies from China: Bosideng, Chanel

(A) Bosideng: A Model of Boundary-Piercing Integration
Bosideng’s “Integration” fashion show in Paris undoubtedly represents a significant leap in the internationalization of Chinese brands’ intangible cultural heritage. [6] However, its approach seems more like using intangible cultural heritage as material for integration and creative design, rather than transforming it into a philosophy that fundamentally alters the design itself.

· Disadvantage 1: Intangible cultural heritage serves merely as a “finishing touch,” not the “soul of the design”

In Bosideng’s related collections, elements of intangible cultural heritage such as embroidery and button-up designs often appear only as partial decorations or minor embellishments, functioning merely as complements to the 羽绒 jackets themselves. This is in stark contrast

to Issey Miyake’s approach, which originated from the philosophy of “a piece of fabric” to create entirely new clothing structures (such as the “Issey Miyake pleat”). Bosideng’s design philosophy remains “modern clothing + traditional decoration”; traditional craftsmanship does not play a role in reshaping the product itself. In this context, intangible cultural heritage serves primarily as a value-adding element, rather than a determinant of the overall design paradigm. [9] · Disadvantage 2: The narrative surrounding intangible cultural heritage is grand, but the emotional connection with individual consumers is weak. While the concept of “integration” used in these designs is indeed grand, it fails to establish a meaningful emotional connection with the lives of consumers. In contrast, Issey Miyake’s “a piece of fabric” philosophy directly addresses modern people’s core desires for bodily freedom, comfort, and convenience, thus creating a strong emotional resonance with consumers. Bosideng’s narratives, on the other hand, tend to focus more on promoting the brand’s value propositions rather than connecting with consumers’ daily experiences.

· Disadvantage 3: This integration is “phased” rather than becoming a long-term, inherent part of the brand’s identity.

This fashion event carries a strong emphasis on trend-based marketing and seasonal products. At present, intangible cultural heritage has not been integrated into the brand’s long-term, stable design language. This contrasts sharply with Issey Miyake’s approach, where the philosophy of folds has remained an unwavering core element of the brand’s identity for decades and continues to be applied in its designs.

Analysis using the double helix model: Bosideng’s practice of integration reflects a one-way adoption of “modern expressive elements” (international fashion shows, brand narratives, technological textiles) over “traditional design elements” (weaving techniques, -buttoning styles). While traditional elements are incorporated into modern products, these two approaches do not truly complement each other in a way that generates new and creative outcomes.

(II) Chanel: A Classic Example of Borrowed and Integrated Elements

As an international luxury brand, Chanel’s application of Chinese lacquer and mother-of-pearl techniques represents a more superficial and externally imposed form of integration. This limitation becomes particularly evident when compared to Issey Miyake’s approach.

· Disadvantage 1: The integration remains limited to “visual symbols,” stripping away the cultural context.

Chanel has adopted the dazzling luster and inlay techniques of Chinese lacquer craftsmanship and applied them to jewelry, watches, and other accessories.[9] However,

this use fails to reflect the spiritual connotations associated with these traditions, such as rituals and ceremonies. The craftsmanship serves merely as a decorative element, ultimately reinforcing Chanel’s own aesthetic concept of “luxurious handmade craftsmanship.” This is a clear example of “borrowing cultural symbols.”

· Disadvantage 2: Absolute brand dominance, with intangible cultural heritage crafts playing a subordinate role.

Throughout the entire design and production process, Chanel, as a foreign brand, maintains absolute control.[9] Intangible cultural heritage artisans and their techniques are utilized to enhance the brand’s luxury image, but the cultural authenticity and narrative significance of these traditions are overlooked. This contrasts sharply with

Issey Miyake’s approach, which focuses on exploring the philosophy behind technologies and using them to embody that philosophy in brand development. Double helix analysis: In the case of Chanel, the “traditional genetic sequence” (the Chinese lacquer-making technique) and the “modern expressive sequence” (the aesthetic values of the Chanel brand) were almost completely separated. Traditional elements were appropriated by the modern brand and transformed into fragments that conformed to the aesthetic framework of its own system. In this case, the double helix structure failed to form; the traditional genetic chain was fragmented, losing its ability to evolve independently.

	Ishigaya Issey	Bosideng	Chanel
Fusion method	Transcendent	refined version	borrowed form
Traditional gene manipulation techniques	Philosophical Refinement: The Philosophy of Origami's "One Cloth"[2]	Integration of skills: retain and improve the weaving and embroidery skills, and absorb the form and connotation of the philosophy of the five elements[6]	Symbol extraction: Presenting the beauty of the large lacquer process, using traditional inlay techniques[9]
modern forms of expression	Create new expressions: invent "lifelong folds" as the core design language of the brand	International integration: Elevate tradition to the top level through international design and technology	Luxury translation: Incorporate traditional elements into luxury aesthetics and production systems
Depth of double-helix interaction	Deep integration: the traditional philosophy is completely transformed into a modern form and becomes the core of the brand itself	Cross-interpenetration: traditional elements are blended with modern technology and international context	Surface combination: traditional symbols are attached to the original product and brand image
The essence of cultural translation	Creative transformation from the inside out	Extracting elements from the outside in.	The integration of external visual elements

6. Strategic suggestions for the modern development of China’s intangible cultural heritage

Strategy 1: Narrative reconstruction—from “telling history” to “telling stories”

· Goal: Activate the spiritual core of traditional genes, translate the narrative through modern expression, and trigger emotional resonance.

· Specific methods:

1. Individualized perspective: Abandon grand historical narratives, focus on “people” and enhance the emotional resonance of the audience

2. Emotional anchor: Explore the universal emotions contained in intangible cultural heritage and shorten the emo-

tional distance with the public

3. World view construction: Learn from Issey Miyake and use intangible cultural heritage elements as the core setting and source of inspiration for the brand

Strategy 2: Design translation – from “cultural relics” to “tokens”

· Goal: Transform the aesthetic symbols in traditional genes into daily usable consumer products through the design power of modern expression

· Specific methods:

1. Aesthetic extraction and reconstruction: Cooperate with well-known designers or trendy brands. For example, the core lines and colors are extracted from the totem of “Miao Embroidery”, transformed and applied to clothing, computer bags or mobile phone cases.

2. Functional crossover: combine intangible cultural heritage skills with practical functions. For example, the natural texture and breathability of “linen cloth” can be used to produce lamps, stationery or home clothes with a strong oriental texture, [3] allowing its aesthetics and functionality to find a place in modern life at the same time.

3. IP derivative development: Design cartoon IP images for representative intangible cultural heritage items (such as local opera characters, mythological characters), and authorize the development of emoticon packs, blind boxes, co-branded drinks, etc., so that they can become part of young people’s social interaction and consumption. [5]
Strategy 3: Deepening of experience – from “watching” to “participating”

· Goal: Make use of technological media in “modern expression” to make “traditional genes” perceptible and interactive. [5]

· Specific methods:

1. Digital twins and VR immersion: Use 3D modeling and VR technology to create an online intangible cultural heritage museum

2. Offline immersive workshops: For example, opening an intangible cultural heritage experience space[4] provides opportunities for experience and enhances the sense of participation.

Strategy 4: Industrial linkage – from “island” to “ecology”

· Goal: Through business models in modern expression, build an industrial ecosystem that allows traditional genes to sustainably add value.

· Specific methods:

1. Establish an “Intangible Cultural Heritage Cross-border Innovation Fund”: Reduce market risks through state capital, guide the entry of social capital, and use professional operations to solve the problem of “scattered, chaotic, and difficult to use” intangible cultural heritage IP, and achieve systematic and large-scale output [10]

2. Implement the “Intangible Cultural Heritage Regional Brand Revitalization Plan”: select areas rich in intangible cultural heritage resources,[12] package the entire area into a complete, high-quality cultural consumption brand, and achieve coordinated development of intangible cultural heritage and regional economy

Chapter 7 Conclusion and Outlook

(1) Research conclusion

This study started from the cultural phenomenon of “Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba” [11], constructed a “double helix model of cultural activation”, and through the case comparison of Issey Miyake and Bosideng, revealed two main paths of intangible cultural heritage fashion innovation: “boundary-breaking innovation” and “tempering improvement”. Research shows that the key to successful modernization of intangible cultural heritage is to achieve

in-depth interaction and collaborative empowerment of “traditional genes” and “modern expressions”. Its highest form is to extract the philosophical spirit from traditional culture and create unprecedented contemporary forms and languages.

(2) Research limitations and prospects

The limitation of this study is that it mainly focuses on the field of clothing design. Future research can be expanded to more diverse industries such as home furnishing and digital content. In addition, more detailed empirical research can be conducted on the specific mechanisms of the “double helix” interaction, such as the weights and triggering conditions between different elements. Looking to the future, with the development of technologies such as AI and the Metaverse, the “digital translation” and “virtual activation” of intangible cultural heritage will become a new frontier full of potential, worthy of continued attention and exploration.

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