

Cross-cultural Co-creation and Digital Narration: A Research on the Path of Revitalizing Rural Artisans Enabled by Intangible Cultural Heritage Animation IP—A Sino-Japanese Comparative Perspective Based on Yuxi Kiln and Bai Ethnic Group Tie-dye

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of rural revitalization and the shifting perceptions of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), exploring ways to inherit traditional crafts and realize youthful transformation as well as cross-border communication via Sino-Japanese co-creation has become an important research topic. Taking Yuxi Kiln blue and white porcelain and Bai ethnic group tie-dye from China, together with Arita porcelain and Awa indigo dye from Japan as comparative research objects, this paper constructs a three-dimensional transformation plus three-party linkage empowerment model for ICH animation IP. By summarizing and comparing the differences between Chinese and Japanese ICH in craft inheritance, IP branding and industrial ecology, this paper proposes the transformation path of “craft to IP to product” and the linkage mechanism of “artisans, consumers and markets.” Based on the trials of character design, AR interactive products and social media communication, this study explores the digital transformation paths for ICH. It provides a replicable cross-cultural digital empowerment approach for the revitalization of rural artisans.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage activation; Animation IP; Sino-Japanese comparison; Yuxi Kiln; Bai ethnic group tie-dye; Digital narration; Rural artisans revitalization

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1. Introduction

China’s protection of intangible cultural heritage is transitioning from rescue recording to living inheritance. Meanwhile, Japan has addressed the aging of traditional crafts practitioners and stimulated market vitality of ICH by promoting artisan IP development under the *COOL JAPAN* strategy^[1]. Cases such as *Young Master*

Luban prove that animation IP is highly capable of converting traditional crafts into cultural products favored by young consumer groups. However, most existing studies either focus on single-country IIP cases or merely discuss IP design, while few conduct systematic comparisons between Chinese and Japanese ICH systems and design implementable transformation models from the perspective of Sino-Japanese co-creation. Yuxi Kiln blue and white porcelain and Bai ethnic group tie-dye are confronted with problems including blank brand positioning, insufficient recognition among young people, and product homogenization. In contrast, Japan's Arita porcelain and Awa indigo dye have formed a mature ecological loop integrating characters, stories, regional culture and consumption. Therefore, this research explores the transformation of local ICH into communicable and consumable digital assets through Sino-Japanese co-creation and animation IP narration, and provides references for relevant practices.

2. Literature review and theoretical basis

2.1. Three modes of intangible cultural heritage activation

Jin Shaoping pointed out that ethnic culture must bear the cultural marks of the times during inheritance and development; otherwise, it cannot be passed down continuously ^[2]. Currently, there are three mainstream modes for ICH activation at home and abroad.

The first is the productive protection mode. It introduces ICH products into modern production and circulation channels to realize self-sustainability via market operations. The theory of "craft villages" holds that handicrafts should be connected with tourism and cultural and creative industries to form a complete industrial chain ^[3].

The second is digital archiving. It adopts 3D scanning, motion capture, databases, and other technologies to record ICH in detail and display works online. UNESCO's Digital Heritage Project launched in recent years falls into this category ^[4].

The third is narrative transformation. It converts ICH crafts into story-based content such as documentaries, animations, and games. The integration of ICH and animations can enhance the appeal of cultural heritage and strengthen young audiences' emotional identification, while people should guard against excessive symbolization and over-commercialization ^[5].

IP content characterized by storytelling and emotional resonance is more likely to arouse young people's interest and recognition. Digital narration organizes cultural content into experiential and participatory story scenarios by virtue of digital media, featuring interactivity, immersion, and cross-platform communication ^[6]. The immersive narration theory emphasizes the sense of immersion and participation that digital media bring to users ^[7]. Transmedia storytelling highlights that a complete story is distributed across multiple media platforms to form an integrated experience for audiences ^[8]. Long Diyong argued that transmedia storytelling is not a simple transfer of information, but collaborative construction and meaning expansion among different media ^[9].

2.2. Cultural translation mechanism of animation IP and definition of core concepts

In the context of the contemporary cultural industry, IP has evolved into content assets with fan bases and cross-media development potential ^[10]. Different from flat image mascots, the creation of animation IP relies on complete world settings, vivid character personalities, and clear narrative lines. Taking *Young Master Luban* as an example, its narrative framework combining youth growth and craft interpretation transforms woodworking skills into consumable content. The animation IP discussed in this paper refers to a cultural

content system with narrative, emotional value and commercial development potential.

In the practice of transforming ICH resources into animation IP, creators need to strike a balance between craft authenticity, user acceptance, and entertaining expression. It is necessary to avoid excessive simplification on the one hand, and lower the comprehension threshold of traditional culture on the other hand.

The three-dimensional transformation model proposed in this paper takes animation characters as the core of narration, AR postcards as interactive entrances, and social media as communication platforms. The three elements jointly constitute a complete digital narration system.

3. Comparison of ICH crafts and IP development between China and Japan

3.1. Yuxi Kiln vs. Arita Porcelain: From craft to symbol

As a representative of Yunnan blue and white porcelain, Yuxi Kiln features distinctive local patterns such as fish and algae designs as well as interlocking floral motifs. Nevertheless, it has not formed a unified brand system and stable market channels, resulting in low product recognition ^[11].

Originating from Arita Town in Saga Prefecture in the 17th century, Arita porcelain has developed diverse styles including Kakiemon, Nabeshima and Kinrande, as well as a mature kiln brand system. Each workshop owns independent trademarks, product grading standards and pricing rules, laying a solid foundation for IP co-branding. In recent years, Arita porcelain has expanded its young customer groups through animation collaborations.

Japan implements a dual system of certification and support under the *Traditional Crafts Industry Promotion Act* ^[12]. The government establishes quality standards via the “Traditional Crafts” certification system, and encourages enterprises to participate through market-oriented measures such as tax incentives and low-interest loans, as well as R&D subsidies. Regional craft associations unite local producers to realize unified branding, shared sales channels and joint R&D. For instance, the Kutani Porcelain Association in Ishikawa Prefecture comprises more than 120 enterprises with an annual output value of 8 billion Japanese Yen. It once launched co-branded products with the anime *Hanasaku Iroha*, which greatly boosted brand popularity ^[13].

3.2. Bai ethnic group tie-dye vs. Awa indigo dye: Pattern narration and artisan persona

Bai ethnic group tie-dye uses isatis root as a natural dyestuff. Its main procedures include pattern drawing, tie-dyeing, dipping, thread removal, and air-drying. Traditional patterns are dominated by butterflies, flowers, plants, and landscapes, which are rich in Bai ethnic folk customs. At present, Zhoucheng Village has formed an industrial cluster where almost every household engages in tie-dye production. However, products suffer from severe homogenization. Most works are basic commodities such as scarves and tablecloths with outdated patterns. Consumers mostly purchase them as tourist souvenirs and have no willingness for secondary communication.

Awa indigo dye, produced in Tokushima Prefecture, is famous for its master artisan system. It highlights the narration of artisans and local culture. NHK documentary *Tales of Indigo Masters* tells the life stories of three generations of indigo dyers in the form of biographies. Another work, *BLUE THERAPY*, combines indigo dyeing with psychological healing, attracting numerous anime fans. Awa indigo dye is also supported by the *Traditional Crafts Industry Promotion Act*. Local indigo dye associations have been established to

unify brands and quality criteria.

To sum up, Bai ethnic group tie-dye not only lacks innovative design, but also fails to take artisans as narrative subjects. Although its patterns are exquisite, there are no related stories attached. The design of animation characters can convert the connotation of tie-dye patterns into character personalities, which makes up for the above deficiency.

3.3. Analysis of structural differences in systems, markets and cultural acceptance

The differences in IIP development between China and Japan lie not only in design, but also in institutional support, market environment and public cognition. Supported by the *Traditional Crafts Industry Promotion Act*, Japan has built a mature system for brand collaboration and market operation. Traditional crafts achieve sustainable dissemination via standardized management, joint promotion and cross-border cooperation. Meanwhile, the well-developed animation industry and fan economy provide a stable consumer base for the integration of traditional crafts and animation IP. In China, ICH protection mainly focuses on project recognition and inheritance support. The system is relatively weak in sustainable operation and role-based communication. ICH consumption is mostly limited to cultural and creative tourist products, without forming stable emotional recognition and continuous consumption mechanisms.

3.4. Summary of systemic gaps in IP development

Generally speaking, Japanese IIP development emphasizes character narration and sustainable operation, while most Chinese projects merely focus on visual symbol development without forming a complete loop of content dissemination and consumption. The former is driven by storytelling, while the latter centers on visual output. Essentially, the gap reflects the difference between the cultural project thinking (a full industrial chain covering craft connotation, story creation, and consumption circulation) and the design outsourcing thinking (only extracting visual symbols without follow-up development).

4. Construction of the “Three-dimensional Transformation + Three-party Linkage” model

4.1. Three-dimensional transformation path

4.1.1. Craft to IP

Traditional crafts contain plenty of tacit knowledge that cannot be directly displayed, such as glaze proportion, pH control of dye liquor, and kiln temperature regulation. Based on the method of element extraction and image mapping, four animation characters are designed to visualize craft contents and serve as the core carriers for subsequent narration and communication. Taking blue and white porcelain as an example, its color matching and pattern design draw inspiration from Yuxi Kiln elements.

4.1.2. IP to product

Products act as important media connecting IP and consumers. Seven types of AR postcards are designed in this research. Each postcard corresponds to a specific character and craft scene. Adopting WebAR technology, users can trigger interactive content by scanning QR codes, which serves as an entry for cultural consumption.

4.1.3. Product to consumption to craft feedback

The revenue from postcards is divided into two parts: one part is paid as copyright royalties to artisans, and the rest is invested into the digital gene bank fund (planned in the design phase). Consumers' purchasing behavior is not only a commercial transaction, but also supports the sorting and preservation of ICH resources, thus forming a virtuous cycle of product development, market consumption and craft protection.

4.2. Three-party linkage mechanism: Artisans, consumers and markets

Artisan side: A Sino-Japanese bilingual digital gene bank will be built to systematically sort out textual, pictorial and video materials of 14 endangered procedures of Yuxi Kiln. Currently, relevant data are collected from public documents and museum digital resources, and on-site field recording has not been carried out yet.

Consumer side: QR code interaction and social sharing are adopted to enhance user participation. Task-based mechanisms are applied to increase fun and sustain communication vitality.

Market side: A three-tier product system is established:

Basic tier: Low-priced AR postcards to expand coverage and influence;

Intermediate tier: Co-branded handcraft works by artisans such as tie-dye scarves to meet collection demands;

Extended tier: Online courses for enthusiasts who intend to learn relevant crafts.

4.3. Model innovation and applicable scope

As shown in **Figure 1**, this model balances cultural expression, user acceptance, and market transformation in ICH communication, and realizes cultural value dissemination through the linkage of artisans, consumers, and markets. It is applicable to ICH projects whose procedures can be split and compared across categories. However, it is not suitable for ritual heritage and oral literature.

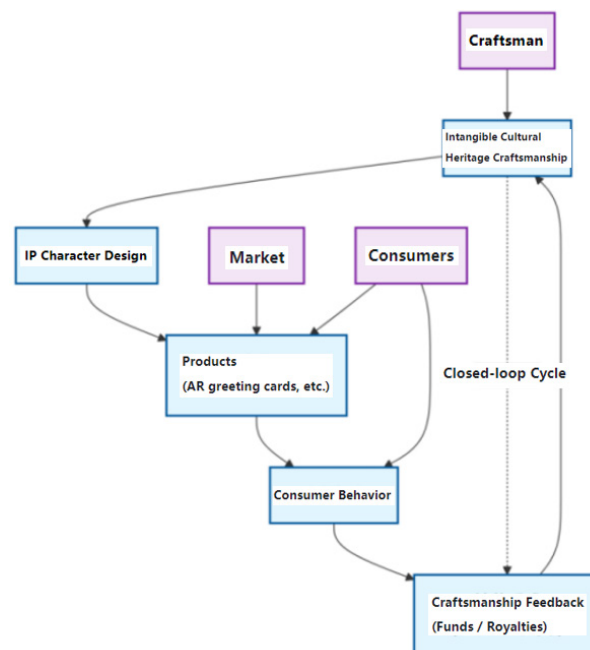


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of the “3D Transformation + Three-End Coordination” model

5. Digital empowerment path and feasibility verification

5.1. Verification of IP communication effect

The research team released two posts including character profiles and short comic episodes on Xiaohongshu. The total number of likes reached 3,468. The data show that users hold high recognition for anthropomorphized craft characters. It is proven that the quality and interactivity of communication contents greatly affect users' cognition and participation in digital ICH dissemination ^[14]. It should be noted that the account is newly established with a limited sample size, so the results cannot serve as statistical verification.

5.2. Analysis of commercial transformation feasibility

Research indicates that animation and character-based ICH products have great market potential among young consumer groups. The operation mode combining Sino-Japanese bilingual services and social media enjoys high commercialization prospects in cross-border consumption scenarios.

6. Conclusion

From the perspective of Sino-Japanese co-creation, this study constructs the “three-dimensional transformation + three-party linkage” model, and completes theoretical construction, IP design and preliminary communication verification based on Yuxi Kiln and Bai ethnic group tie-dye. Theoretically, this research establishes a systematic framework integrating craft transformation, IP narration and market linkage, and responds to three major contradictions in relevant fields. Practically, it verifies that animation IP can enhance the communication effect of ICH among young people and build new connections between rural artisans and digital consumption scenarios. Cross-cultural co-creation requires a proper balance among craft characteristics, narrative power of characters, and market adaptability.

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