

Applying Local Culture Features into Creative Craft Products Design

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Abstract. The impact of worldwide commercial competition has brought about the emergence of cultural creative industries. We are now approaching a new era of aesthetic economy but also facing a decline in craft industries resulted from the impact of competitors' low-priced commodities. In order to upgrade our design industry, Taiwanese government has undertaken an important project titled "Challenge 2008: National Development Focus Plan". The emphases of the plan are on exploiting our rich cultural resources for developing design creativity and advancing the design industries by creating and promoting "experiential products," a reflection of the actual Taiwanese lifestyle. The purpose of this study is to convey/integrate Taiwanese local features into the design of cultural creative product. For the design processes, this study adapts the culture product design model, developed by Professor Rungtai Lin, with three main steps of attaining Cultural-specific features, formulating design concept model, and completing cultural product design. A series of craft products have been created as a demonstration to provide designers with valuable reference for successfully designing cultural creative products. An illustration for attributes of cultural product design is detailed for further synthesis of the design process.

Keywords: cultural creative industry, cultural product design, craft product.

1 Introduction

After entering WTO, Taiwan is now facing a decline in craft industries resulted from the impact of competitors' low-priced commodities. In order to reduce the manufacturing cost, many craft industries were forced to move to Mainland China and Southeast Asia. Some of the precious techniques of our traditional crafts were thus lost. How to make the best of cultural resources to create fashionable product with delicate craftsmanship becomes a critical issue.

With limited geographical resources, Taiwan could only survive the keen competition with excellent design products of high quality or high price. In other words, future commodities from Taiwan could be highly competitive only when they

are of high design quality. Such quality products require not only enhanced manufacturing quality, strengthened functions and satisfaction for consumer use, but also emphasis on being unique and symbolic. As a result of over-emphasis globalization, only products with local cultural features would satisfy consumers' needs and curiosity.

The study aims to integrate Taiwanese native cultural features, on top of taking advantages of the uniqueness of craft materials, for designing fashionable craft products so as to solidify the craft industry. Its significance is manifested on three specific aspects in culture, design and education. For the cultural aspect, this study explores essential resources from native Taiwan culture and then presents Taiwanese-style cultural features, through application on craft products with transformational design, on everyday life items used in food, clothing, living and transportation. In addition to illustrating our culture, this study also provides essential references for future designers in the field here in Taiwan. Moreover, for the educational aspect, this study brings about the educational significance of maintaining our cultural features when consumers learn about the unique features and contents of Taiwanese culture through the aesthetic values manifested by the craft products.

2 Literature Review

The entire globe is now facing a LOHAS consumption era in which cultural creative industries and aesthetic economy prevail. Ray and Anderson [13] had predicted at the turn of this century the correlation between LOHAS consumption and cultural creative industries. They indicated in their book, *The cultural creatives: How 50 million people are changing the world*, that the growth of LOHAS industries resulted from the needs for cultural creativity.

Each and every country in the world today is making their best efforts towards developing experience economy, hoping that through changes on industry formation style and consumers' living style there could be spectacular transformation of commodities that are closely linked to the mass culture and life and thus create new lives for the industries and the commodities [3, 4, 6, 14]. In encountering the era of aesthetic economy, the government in Taiwan has undertaken the national project of "Challenge 2008: National Development Focus Plan", initiating the plan for developing cultural creative industries, based on the concept of industry chains. These industries include (1) the core industry of cultural arts, (2) the design industry, and (3) creativity supporting and peripheral creativity industry.

Aesthetic economy, a commonly used term here, is rarely used in western countries, experience economy instead is what is used. Pine and Gilmore, in their book *The experience economy: Work is theater & every business a stage*, classified industries into four categories -- commodity business, goods business, service business, and experience business [11]. They defined experience industries as those that appeal to consumers' emotion, and indicated that development of experience economy is an inevitable trend in the future, as the industries come with the highest add-on-values.

As Pine and Gilmore suggested in their book, *Authenticity: What consumers really want*, ubiquity is the fatal opponent of experience economy [12]. After the globalization, only products with local cultural features would satisfy consumers' needs and curiosity. Culture is the essence of creativity while creativity takes on the core of the industries; that is, only when craft works come with cultural significance will they be alive. To integrate cultural and craft design elements into products, to establish uniqueness of products and differences between brands, and to bring upon consumers irreplaceable aesthetic experiences are major challenges for present design industries [1, 7, 15].

Cultural creative industry seeks after emotional inspiration towards life, aesthetic economy emphasizes actual experience of life, and LOHAS consumption manifests the pursuit of life values. In other words, a good product is a craft which exercises discourse with people through its sensational image and brings inspiration to them. As American design expert Norman stated, affective/emotional factors are the ultimate determiner of the success or failure of product design [10]. There are two functions of emotional design, one is to outlet the emotions of the users' experience at the specific moment, the other is to demonstrate the emotional values humankind possess. Whether it is the former or the later, they both stress providing the consumers the most direct mental experience. The strongest power which can touch people originates from the function of empathy that aestheticians emphasize; the foundation of such function; however, usually is built upon the true reflection of life experiences each of us has. In the foreseeable future, our cultural creative industry will turn out to be a new arena of design in which arts from culture will be its content, aesthetic experience its appeal, LOHAS consumption its goal, and environmental sustainable development its emphasis.

3 Research Method

The purpose of this study is to, after exploring the value and content of Taiwanese local culture, integrate the essence of Taiwanese culture into the design and actual manufacturing of cultural creative products. The flowchart in Figure 1 illustrates our research process.

For the design process, this study adapts the culture product design model which was developed by Rungtai Lin [9]. The model comes with three main steps of attaining culture-specific features, formulating design concept model, and completing cultural product design (Fig. 2).

For cultural value added creation, the first step is to interpret the raw cultural information so that, by "value added information", they become usable "design information". The second step is to analyze and induce the design information through "value added knowledge" and to transform the information into applicable "creativity knowledge." Finally, with flexible application of "value added creation", precious "wisdom property" is achieved.

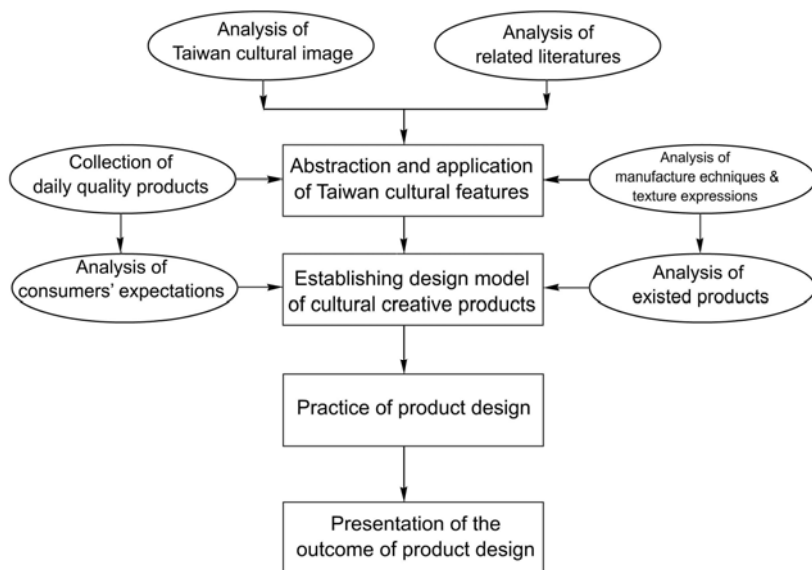


Fig. 1. The framework of the research process

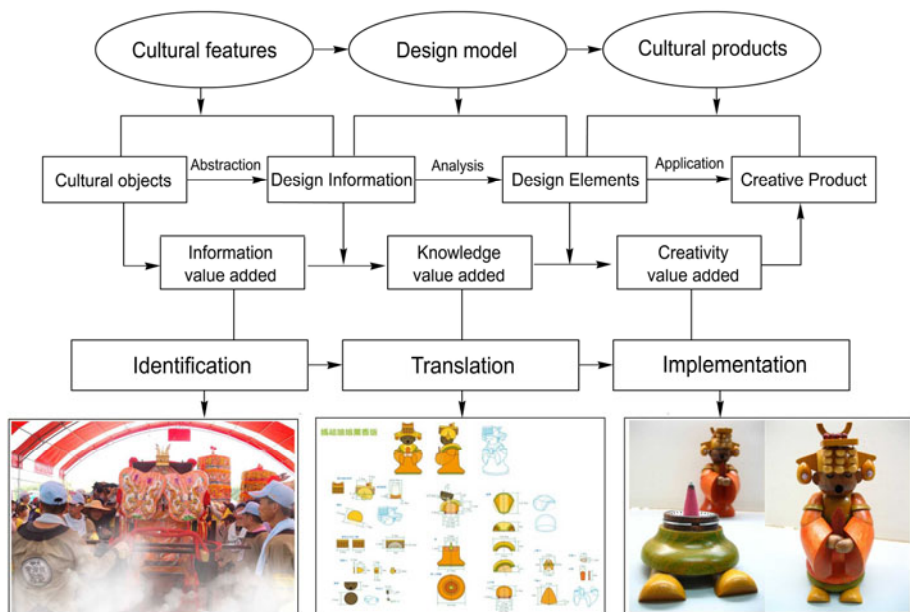


Fig. 2. The framework of cultural product design model (Lin, 2007)

4 Results and Discussion

The main achievement and contribution of this study is to provide designers and scholars a reference model in applying Taiwanese culture elements on the design of cultural creative products. In addition, through actual design and development of craft products, through effective promotion of art and cultural industries, craft with creativity becomes business. As initial results of the study, a major series of work, titled “I/Doll love you,” includes two themes—the Beetle-nut Lady series (Fig. 3) and the Gods series (Fig. 4-6).

The God series serves to show a delicate example for how we integrated culture features into our design. In addition to the cultural significance carried by the gods’ representative figures, the series also strive to illustrate deeper meaning of some cultural religious events in Taiwan. Each god figure is an incense-stove assembled by powerful magnets. Why incense-stove? More than a tool for healing, incense-stoves presents an essential symbol of beliefs and practices when people go worship the gods in the temples. Incenses are lighted for people to pray and communicate with Gods, then they are placed in the incense-stoves after prayer. The ash left in the incense-stoves is believed to have healing and heritage-preserving effects.



Fig. 3. The Beetle-nut Lady series (Designed by Shi-Jie Shen and Li- Juan Fu)



Fig. 4. The Gods series (i): The God of the Earth (Designed by Shi-Jie Shen and Li- Juan Fu)



Fig. 5. The Gods series (ii): The God of Wealth (Designed by Shi-Jie Shen and Li- Juan Fu)



Fig. 6. The Gods series (iii): The Ma-Zu (Designed by Shi-Jie Shen and Li- Juan Fu)

Take the figure of Ma-Zu, the Goddess of Mercy, for instance. She is characterized with deep complexion, hand-held token, and the pearl tassels on her decorative head-piece. The design adapting the incense-stove as our product originated from the most popular annual cultural events of “The Mar-Zu’s annual trip”. In Taiwan, the belief in Mar-Zu has become extremely popular. On Mar-Zu’s birthday, March 23 in the lunar calendar, all the Mar-Zu temples in Taiwan will hold fantastic worshipping and trip-around events, which usually attract tens of thousands of followers and tourists, as it grows into an internationally-renown event. Among them, the one held by Chen-Lan Temple in Dar-Jar, Taichong County, is the most spectacular. Due to it’s being the oldest Mar-Zu Temple in Taiwan, Mar-Zu from this temples receives highest popularity and thus creates the well-known national event of “Dar-Jar Mar-Zu trip-around for incense offering”. Its popularity could be revealed by the phrase coined in recent years—“Craze about Mar-Zu in March”.

The procedures of Dar-Jar Mar-Zu’s trip-around include seven climax rituals—starting the trip, sitting on the temple, birthday celebration, lighting the incense, setting the incense, returning of the sedan chair, and adding the fire. On the fourth evening of her trip, before Dar-Jar Mar-Zu returns from her visit of Fong-Tien Temple, there is the “Returning ceremony”, now titled “Passing on the incense”. For this specific step, the Taoist priest passed three times the incense from the stove of the destination temple, Fong-Tien Temple, into the smaller incense-stove of the Chen-Lan Temple; the stove

then is put into a wooden box and sealed by the Taoist priest to completed the “Passing on the incense” ceremony. Poking the incense, also termed “continuing the incense” is the step in which the followers competed, extremely keenly, in poking the incense into the small stove in Mar-Zu’s incense–stove so as to have their wishes granted. The followers will have four opportunities to do so—the first incense, the second incense, the third incense, and the incense patronizing. In the final ritual of “adding the fire” in the evening, the head of the praying group will use a long ladle to scoop the ash in the incense–stove and add it to each of the incense–stoves in the Dar-Jar Mar-Zu temple. The whole process of handing down the incense is then completed.

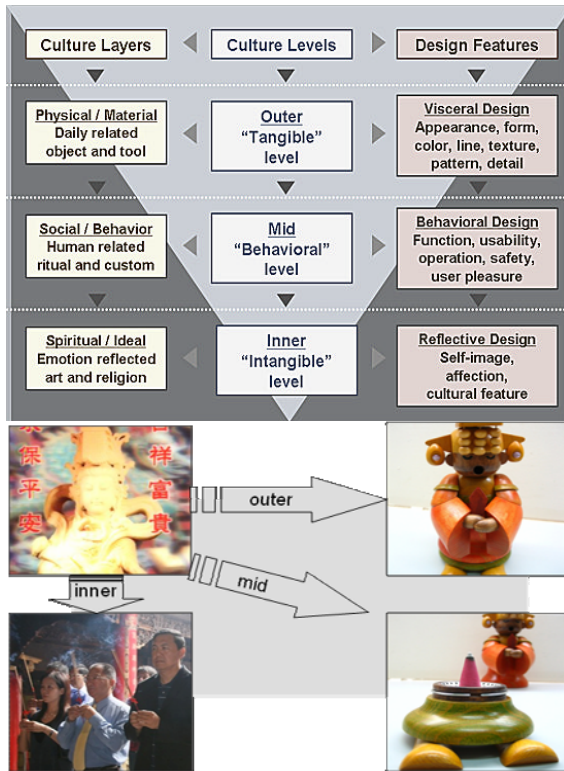


Fig. 7. Attributes of cultural product design (Hsu, 2004; Lin, 2007)

This globally-renown cultural event of “Mar-Zu trip-around” is completed with ritual stages which center themselves with the actual application of “Shun”—the incense, placed in incense–stoves. Our cultural creative product thus intends to shift the external formalities to rituals of internal blessing and further, the effects for mental comfort and relaxation.

This design process is completed according to the model of cultural product design attributes proposed by Hsu (Fig. 7) [5]. Besides the cultural space presented in the model chart, we have, with further literature review and adding three cultural levels, categorized the design factors into different product design attributes. As shown on the

right columns, the three attributes contain (1) outer or tangible level which includes color, quality, shape, surface decoration, lines, detail handling, assembling parts and so on; (2) mid or behavioral level that covers attributes such as function, operation, convenience in use, safety and user pleasure; and (3) inner or intangible level, for instance, a product comes with a special meaning, with a story, with emotional inspiration, or with cultural features.

With the attributes in mind, this series of cultural creative products has turned the abstract religious concepts of “Mar-Zu Culture”, through the internal interpretation and field experience of the “Mar-Zu-trip” rituals, into the actual sensational “products of the incense-stove” which provide specific emotional memory, become part of life, and sustain the vitality of festival culture [2] . The whole process could be addressed as a circulation consisted of four phases: (1) conceptualization of cultural factors, (2) symbolization of cultural factors, (3) materialization of cultural factors, and (4) bringing cultural factors into daily life (Figure 8).

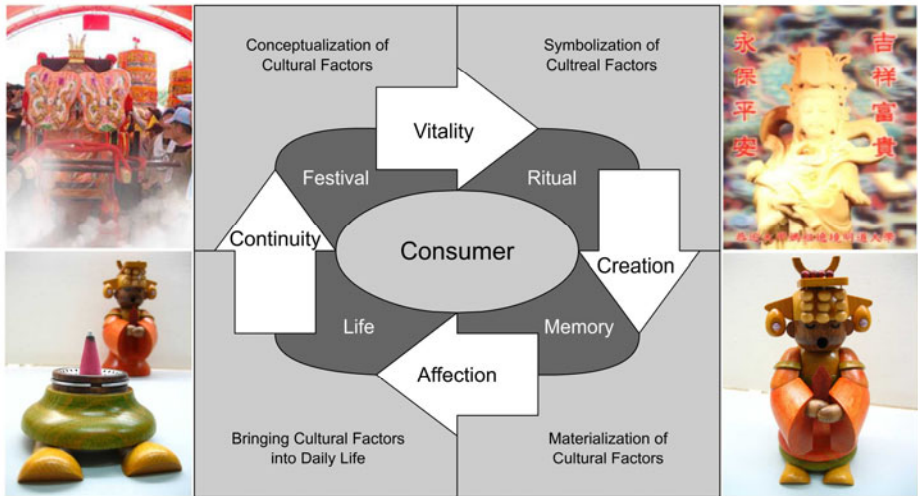


Fig. 8. The experience model of festival culture

5 Conclusion

The study engages in transforming “Taiwanese Cultural Elements” to “Cultural Creative”. As stated in the introduction, with limited geographical resources, the competition power of Taiwan lies mainly on excellent design products of high quality or high price. Such quality products have to emphasize their being unique and symbolic. Only products with local cultural features would satisfy consumers’ needs and curiosity. Exploring Chinese cultural features has become a trend. Along this trend, we could thus provide fresh, nature-flavored craft goods in the future market, by integrating Taiwanese cultural elements into craft aesthetics.

To encounter the threat of the low-priced competition from our neighboring countries, craft industry in Taiwan has moved their manufacturing section to areas with lower labor cost. When they sell their products back to Taiwan, it brings severe attack on the industries staying in Taiwan. A trend for globalization there is, still it becomes catastrophic to the development of local craft industry. This study targets at combining craft techniques with creativity, leading local craft manufacturers to enhance product value with design, redirecting what is lost in the OEM-production mode, and gradually eliminating the threat from low-price competition.

Acknowledgments. The creative craft products demonstrated in this study, including the Beetle-nut Lady series and the Gods series, were designed and made by Shi-Jie Shen and Li- Juan Fu. Mr. Shen and Miss Fu are graduate students of Crafts and Design Department at National Taiwan University of Arts. They are also the founder partners of Mufun woodworking studio.

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