



Research on the Contemporary Expression and Visual Translation of Intangible Cultural Heritage - A Case Study of Jeju Island's Haenyeo Culture

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Abstract. Cultural heritage is not only a carrier of cultural memory but also a symbol of local identity and collective emotion, possessing rich visual language resources and cultural narrative potential. Jeju Island's Haenyeo culture, as an important intangible cultural heritage of South Korea, embodies the unique values of women's marine labor, matriarchal social structure, and ecological wisdom, making it a typical form of regional culture and intangible heritage. With the increasing global attention to the protection and redesign of intangible heritage, how to effectively translate it using modern design methods has become an important topic in cultural creative design. This article starts from the perspective of visual communication design, using methods such as literature review, image symbol analysis and design concepts to extract and reconstruct the visual elements of Jeju's haenyeo culture. It proposes a design strategy centered on illustration narrative and color graphic systems, and explores its application potential in cultural and creative products and media communication. This study aims to explore the living transmission paths of regional intangible cultural heritage in contemporary society, providing reference ideas and practical solutions for the innovative expression of traditional culture and engaging in creative practice.

Keywords: Jeju Island Haenyeo Culture; Cultural Heritage; Visual Translation

1 Introduction

A visual identity system is a visual medium for the core values and symbolic narratives of an institution, community, or region[1]. Jeju Island's Haenyeo culture is a typical representative of this type of intangible cultural heritage. As one of the UNESCO-recognized world intangible cultural heritages, the Haenyeo of Jeju not only exemplifies the sustainable use of marine resources but also reflects the resilient, independent, and wise lifestyle of women in a matriarchal society. This research focuses on the extracting visual symbols and design translation, attempting to construct a visual system and design strategy for cultural and creative products based on haenyeo culture, and to carry out design practice and image expression.

2 Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Historical Background and Intangible Heritage Value

Jeju Island's Haenyeo culture originated in Jeju Island, South Korea. It is a form of labor performed by women who dive without equipment to harvest marine products, with a history dating back to the 5th century AD. The Haenyeo embody the core symbols of Jeju Island's matriarchal culture through their resilient, independent, and cooperative labor spirit. They do not rely on diving equipment; instead, they navigate freely among the reefs, collecting abalone, sea urchins, kelp, and other marine products, forming a unique "marine livelihood culture."

In 2007, the South Korean government designated "Jeju Island Haenyeo Culture" as a national intangible cultural heritage, and in 2016, it was included in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Its intangible heritage value is reflected not only in the uniqueness of survival skills but also in the cultural connotations of matriarchal social organization, ecological sustainability concepts, and collective rituals and belief systems.

2.2 Visual Characteristics and Visual Elements

From the perspective of visual communication design, the extraction of visual elements from intangible cultural heritage is foundational work. Haenyeo culture possesses extremely distinctive and recognizable visual elements, making it convenient for design translation and visual expression.

1. Character Images and Costumes

The haenyeo (female divers) wear black tight-fitting wetsuits and are equipped with tools such as masks, floats (테왁), and nets (망사리), which form their typical visual image. Their hairstyles, movements, and skin tones also have strong regional identifiers, serving as important references for constructing IP characters or illustration images.

2. Tools and Utensils

Floats, sickles, breathing tubes, bamboo baskets, and statues of haenyeo are common utensils in haenyeo culture. These objects, which possess strong materiality and symbolism, can be translated into graphic symbols and applied to decorative patterns in cultural and creative products.

3. Scene and Environmental Elements

The basalt coast of Jeju Island, seaweed clusters, wave patterns, and daily scenes of collective drying of kelp and market transactions constitute the unique visual field of haenyeo culture. Illustration narrative techniques can be used to recreate these elements and establish a sense of place.

4. Metaphorical Translation of Sounds and Actions

The unique "숨비소리" (breathing sound) emitted by haenyeo when they surface is an important auditory symbol of this culture. How to visually translate this sound metaphorically, for example, by expressing it through gradient ripples or bubble lines, can serve as a starting point for design innovation.

By distilling these elements, rich resources can be provided for constructing graphic language, visual symbol systems, and narrative content for the next step in cultural and creative design.

3 Visual Translation Strategies and Cultural and Creative Design Concepts

3.1 Strategy Paths for Visual Translation

In modern intangible cultural heritage visual communication design, "translation" is not only the reproduction of images but also the re-encoding of cultural information. The reinterpretation of heritage motifs not only preserves aesthetic and cultural values, but also stimulates creative innovation in contemporary design[2].

This study proposes two main visual translation strategies:

(1) Image narrative system design

Through a series of illustrations, emphasize the rhythm of the labor process and the relationship between people and the sea, in order to enhance the warmth of cultural memory.

(2) Construction of Graphic and Color System

The color selection can adopt regional tones such as "Ocean Blue," "Basalt Black," "Drift Orange," and "Seaweed Green"; graphic elements include collected abalone, Hallasan, tools, and altars. The system construction can be used for unified visual identification of brand image, packaging patterns, and cultural and creative derivative products. Color semiotics represents one of the most thoroughly studied aspects of cross-cultural visual communication, with extensive research documenting how color associations vary dramatically between cultural regions[3].

3.2 Concept and Application Scenarios of Cultural and Creative Products

Based on the above visual system concept, a series of cultural and creative products with cultural depth and market communication power can be developed in Table 1.

Table 1. Series of cultural and creative products.

Product Type	Design Suggestions	Application Scenarios
Postcard Set	Illustration Narrative Series	Visitor Souvenirs Museum Sales
Canvas bags/hats	Flat wind illustration	Everyday practical communication
Office supplies/set folders	Graphic elements: Haenyeo logo, seafood patterns, buoy tools	Student groups, office groups
Digital media products	Emojis, AR experience cards	Social media, interactive exhibitions

These products not only have high market adaptability but also achieve innovative communication of Haenyeo culture through visual communication methods, making it "visible, portable, and widely spread."

4 Case Analysis and Design Evaluation

4.1 Visual System and Cultural Communication of the Haenyeo Museum in Jeju Island

As an important platform for the dissemination of Haenyeo culture, the Haenyeo Museum not only collects a large number of historical documents, tools, and audiovisual materials but also demonstrates respect for intangible cultural heritage.

(1) Visual Guidance System

The museum's wayfinding design uses ocean blue and volcanic rock gray, echoing the natural color palette of Jeju. This system serves the dual functions of "cultural recognition" and "visitor readability."

(2) Souvenir Design

The existing souvenirs mainly consist of photo prints and physical models, lacking systematic and modern visual identity and IP character development. This also provides space for future design—enhancing cultural interest and market appeal through original visual language.

4.2 Evaluation of Design Strategies and Extended Thoughts

By elaborating on the contributions to the inheritance of regional culture, we can clearly perceive the numerous issues faced in the transmission of traditional culture[4]. From the perspective of the museum's visual practices and existing products, there is still considerable room for development in the visual expression of Haenyeo culture. The following dimensions can provide evaluation criteria for future design practices:

Communication Evaluation: Does it facilitate the quick understanding of intangible cultural heritage knowledge? Does it possess image communicability?

Cultural evaluation: Does it respect the original culture? Does it explore its spiritual aspects rather than just surface symbols?

Market evaluation: Can it be extended into cultural and creative products across multiple scenarios and media? Does it consider user needs and usage scenarios?

4.3 Design Theoretical Framework

The existence of culture is the result of human beings symbolizing it through language[5]. In terms of theoretical construction (Figure 1), this study comprehensively utilizes theories of intangible cultural heritage protection, visual communication design, and cultural creative design methodology to build a multidimensional theoretical support system:

(1) Theory of intangible cultural heritage protection

Provides the cultural value foundation for the research, emphasizing the historical value, ecological wisdom, and spirit of female labor of the Haenyeo culture as a "living tradition," guiding the understanding of its deep cultural structure.

(2) Visual communication design theory

Utilizing semiotics, image narrative, and visual language construction theory, it extracts the visual symbol elements of Haenyeo culture, including character images, tools, action states, and graphic translation paths of sound metaphors.

(3) Cultural creative design theory

Employing theories of product design, IP image design, and graphic system construction, it explores how intangible cultural heritage can achieve visual regeneration and commercial communication through contemporary design language, facilitating the transformation logic from "culture to product."

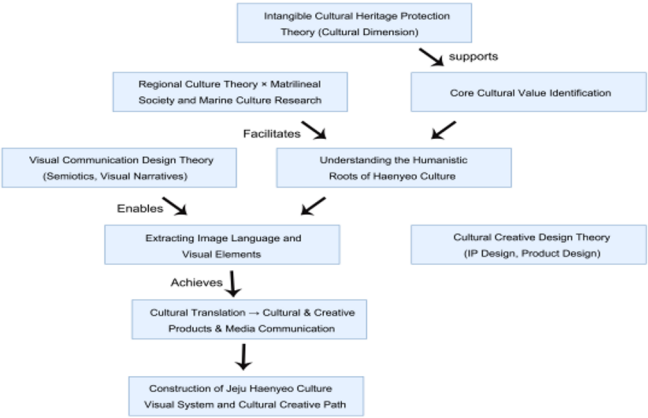


Fig. 1. Theoretical Framework Structure Diagram.

5 “They Coexist with the Sea” — Design Practice and Analysis of Visual Translation of Jeju Island's Haenyeo Culture

5.1 Design Description

This design takes the precious intangible cultural heritage of Jeju Island's haenyeo culture as its core source of inspiration, deeply exploring elements such as the image of haenyeo, traditional working tools, marine ecological environments, and iconic regional landscapes (such as Hallasan Mountain and coastal altars). Through two main sections of illustration creation and cultural product development, it completes the translation of haenyeo culture from its original form to visual symbols and then to practical cultural carriers. The aim is to convey the core values of resilience, reverence for nature, and coexistence with the sea in a direct and approachable visual language, enhancing public awareness and appreciation of this intangible cultural heritage and promoting its living transmission in modern society.

5.2 Design Analysis

(1) Illustration Design: Visual Refinement and Narrative of Cultural Elements (Figure 2)

① Image Shaping and Cultural Symbol Extraction

The illustration focuses on the image of experienced haenyeo, with the design of white hair reflecting the age characteristics of the haenyeo group (mostly experienced middle-aged and elderly women), while also implying the temporal depth of cultural inheritance, constructing a cultural connection of “people - sea - region,” transforming the abstract haenyeo culture into a tangible and perceptible visual symbol system.

② Cultural Signification of Color and Composition

In terms of color, high-saturation blue, green, and orange are selected as the main color scheme. Blue echoes the marine ecology, green symbolizes marine vegetation and vitality, and orange brightens the picture while metaphorically representing the passion and resilience of haenyeo, completing the narrative extension of haenyeo culture from “working scenes” to “regional cultural ecology.”



Fig. 2. Illustration Design Display Board.

(2) Cultural and Creative Product Design: The Diverse Implementation and Dissemination of Cultural Values(Figure 3)

① Cultural Adaptability of Product Carriers

Cultural creative products have always been an effective carrier of folk traditional culture and an important channel for the dissemination of traditional culture[6].Covering a variety of categories such as stationery, lifestyle products, digital accessories, and creative ornaments, it meets the needs of modern life scenarios, achieving the transformation of “cultural reach - cognition - recognition.”

② Product Translation Logic of Visual Symbols

Consistently using the image of the haenyeo (female diver), color system, and core elements from the illustrations to ensure consistency in cultural recognition. Through the translation strategy of “whole - part” and “complete narrative - symbol extraction,” it effectively implements cultural symbols across different product carriers.

Design Value and Insights on Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance This design provides an innovative practical paradigm for the inheritance of Jeju Island's haenyeo culture through the visual translation chain of “extracting cultural symbols from illustrations - expanding dissemination paths for cultural and creative products.”

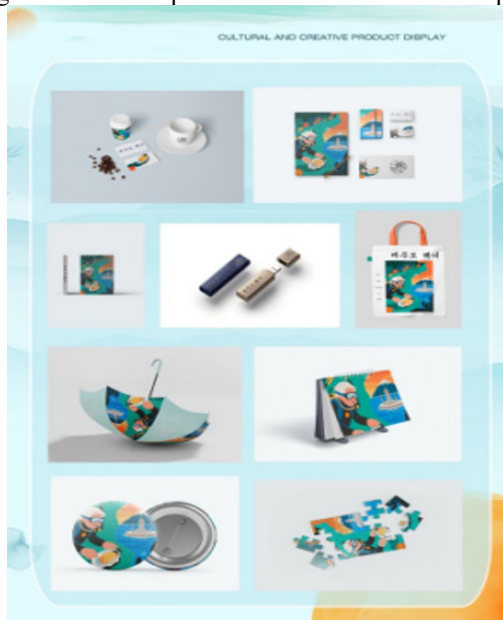


Fig. 3. Cultural and Creative Design Display Board.

6 Conclusion and Outlook

In the context of globalization and consumerism, traditional festival products generally face issues such as the homogenization of symbols and the superficiality of cultural expression[7]. This study focuses on the haenyeo culture of Jeju Island, exploring the visual translation paths of intangible cultural heritage in the context of modern communication from the academic perspectives of cultural heritage and modern creative design. By sorting out the historical context and image characteristics of haenyeo culture, it extracts visual elements such as character images, tools, and environmental scenes, constructing a visual language system with regional recognition and cultural depth.

This article conducts a literature review by searching the CNKI and RISS databases using Chinese and Korean keywords such as 'Jeju Island Haenyeo Culture', 'Visual Translation', and 'Intangible Cultural Heritage', selecting 23 relevant papers from 2015

to 2025 as the theoretical foundation. The research shows that visual communication is not only a “visible” way of disseminating intangible cultural heritage but also a creative tool that can reconstruct cultural narratives and enhance public interaction and perception. Through systematic design translation, traditional haenyeo culture can re-enter the public eye in a friendly, interesting, and life-oriented manner, stimulating people's attention and recognition of traditional culture.

Of course, this study still has certain limitations in terms of research depth and practical validation. Future work could further include field interviews, user testing, and cross-cultural communication comparisons. At the same time, it is hoped that this research can provide reference paths for the visual regeneration of intangible cultural heritage in more regions, allowing design to truly become a bridge connecting tradition and the future.

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