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# Reinterpreting Chinese Artistic Heritage in Contemporary Product Design: Integrating Cultural Identity and Design Innovation

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## Abstract

This study explores how Chinese artistic heritage can serve as a foundation for contemporary product design by integrating cultural identity with creative innovation. Drawing on Qiang embroidery and Dunhuang Feitian imagery as representative cases, the research examines how traditional visual and symbolic elements can be reinterpreted within the context of cultural and creative products (CCPs). A qualitative multiple-case study approach was employed, combining visual analysis, documentary review, and semi-structured interviews with professional designers. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key strategies that enable the transformation of intangible cultural heritage into contemporary design practices. The findings reveal four interconnected design pathways: symbolic abstraction, aesthetic fusion, cultural storytelling, and the development of a Product DNA Model that conceptualizes heritage-based design innovation. These pathways illustrate how designers reinterpret traditional artistic elements through processes of symbolic transformation, material adaptation, and narrative construction. Rather than merely replicating historical motifs, designers translate cultural symbols into contemporary design languages that maintain cultural authenticity while adapting to modern aesthetic and functional contexts. The proposed Product DNA Model integrates four key dimensions—heritage origin, symbolic transformation, material adaptation, and user emotion/storytelling—providing a conceptual framework for understanding how heritage-informed design can be systematically implemented within cultural and creative industries. The study suggests that the reinterpretation of traditional art may enhance emotional resonance, strengthen cultural identity, and support the sustainable development of culturally meaningful products. By bridging traditional craftsmanship with contemporary design methodologies, this research contributes to the theoretical understanding of heritage-driven design innovation and offers practical insights for designers, creative enterprises, and cultural institutions seeking to integrate intangible cultural heritage into modern product development.

**Keywords:** Chinese artistic heritage; Cultural identity; Cultural and creative products; Product design innovation; Emotional design

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## 1. Introduction

In the 21st century, the convergence of cultural heritage and modern design has become a defining paradigm in the global creative economy. The rapid expansion of the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) has generated increasing demand for designs that not only serve functional and aesthetic purposes but also communicate cultural meaning and identity (Choi, 2019; UNESCO, 2022). Within this context, Chinese designers face both an

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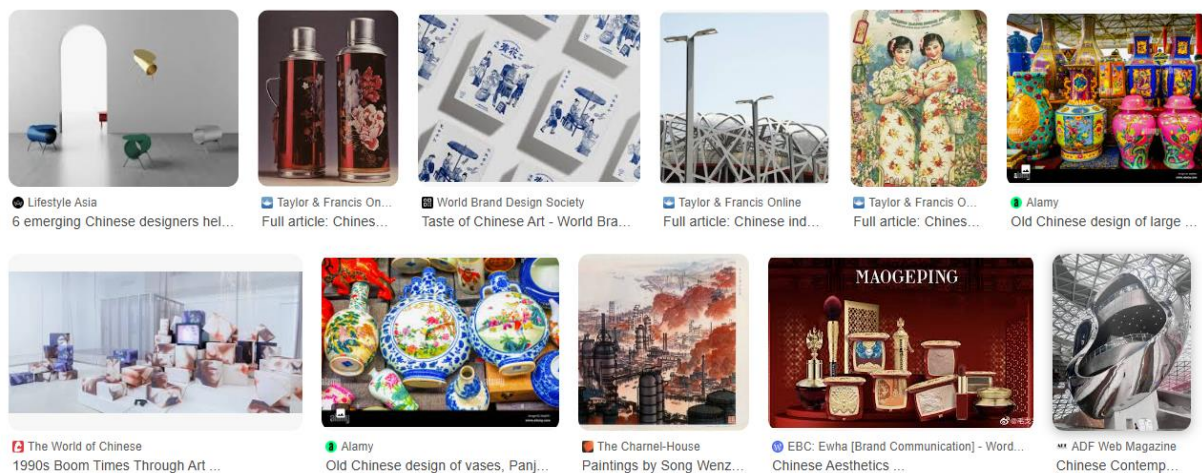
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opportunity and a challenge—to reinterpret their nation’s rich artistic traditions within the frameworks of contemporary aesthetics and technological innovation. The integration of traditional Chinese art forms, such as Qiang embroidery, Dunhuang Feitian imagery, and heritage color systems, reflects a deep cultural continuity that aligns with the global trend toward design humanism and emotional innovation (Norman, 2004; Verganti, 2017). As cultural and creative industries increasingly contribute to national economic development, heritage-informed product innovation represents not only a cultural endeavor but also a strategic pathway for enhancing market competitiveness within the global creative economy.

Recent studies emphasize that effective design innovation in East Asia relies on balancing authenticity with adaptability, ensuring that modern creations remain rooted in historical narratives while appealing to contemporary audiences (Li & Zhao, 2020; Choi, 2019). Traditional Chinese visual language—its motifs, color palettes, and symbolic systems—offers immense potential as a design resource. Yet, as Wang et al. (2025) note, many current adaptations of traditional artistic heritage remain superficial, often reducing culturally meaningful symbols to decorative patterns devoid of context or emotional depth. This issue underscores the necessity for a systematic framework that supports meaningful integration of artistic heritage into design, rather than its mere aesthetic appropriation.

Furthermore, heritage-driven innovation holds economic and cultural significance. UNESCO (2022) highlights that the creative economy in Asia, particularly in China, is being reshaped by the commercialization of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and by design-driven entrepreneurship. This trend is evident in regions such as Dali, Yunnan, where the revitalization of Bai ethnic crafts—through tie-dyeing, embroidery, and woodcarving—has successfully merged cultural preservation with tourism and market development (Zhang et al., 2025). Similarly, Jin and Sharudin (2024) demonstrate that integrating traditional symbols into modern product design fosters cultural inheritance and innovation, enabling designers to reimagine national identity within a globalized market.

Despite these advancements, significant research gaps remain. Many product designs inspired by Chinese heritage prioritize aesthetics over conceptual depth, neglecting the philosophical and emotional dimensions that give cultural symbols their meaning. As Li and Zhao (2020) argue, innovation rooted in cultural heritage must extend beyond visual imitation to encompass symbolic translation, where heritage elements are reframed to express contemporary values. This necessitates design strategies that are not only visually compelling but also semantically coherent and culturally resonant.



**Figure 1.**  
*Contemporary Applications of Chinese Artistic Heritage in Product Design.*  
 Illustrative compilation prepared by the authors based on publicly available design examples.  
 (Sources: Lifestyle Asia; Taylor & Francis Online; Alamy; ADF Web Magazine)

This study, therefore, seeks to explore how Chinese artistic heritage can be strategically reinterpreted in contemporary product design to foster emotional engagement, cultural authenticity, and design innovation. Drawing on Norman’s (2004) theory of emotional design and Verganti’s (2017) framework of meaningful

innovation, the research examines how designers can transform traditional artistic elements—such as colors, symbols, and craftsmanship—into modern design narratives that communicate both identity and emotion. As illustrated in Figure 1, this synthesis exemplifies how traditional aesthetics can be reimaged within contemporary contexts to sustain cultural vitality and creative distinctiveness.

Unlike existing frameworks that primarily emphasize emotional design (Norman, 2004) or meaning-driven innovation (Verganti, 2017), this study proposes the Product DNA Model as an integrative framework for heritage-based product design. The model synthesizes four interconnected dimensions—heritage origin, symbolic transformation, material adaptation, and user emotion/storytelling—to explain how traditional artistic heritage can be systematically translated into contemporary product innovation. By integrating cultural identity, emotional engagement, and design strategy within a unified structure, the Product DNA Model offers both theoretical insight and practical guidance for designers and creative industries seeking to transform intangible cultural heritage into sustainable and market-relevant design solutions.

## 1.1 Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to explore how traditional Chinese artistic heritage can be reinterpreted and integrated into contemporary product design to promote cultural identity, emotional engagement, and design innovation. In pursuit of this aim, the study seeks to achieve the following specific objectives:

(1) To examine the role of cultural identity in shaping design innovation within China's cultural and creative industries, emphasizing how traditional art influences contemporary aesthetics and brand narratives.

(2) To analyze the ways in which intangible cultural heritage (ICH) — including traditional craftsmanship, symbolism, and motifs — can be adapted into modern design practices while preserving authenticity and cultural meaning.

(3) To investigate how emotional and meaning-driven design principles (Norman, 2004; Verganti, 2017) contribute to users' aesthetic appreciation, emotional attachment, and cultural awareness in heritage-based product design.

(4) To identify and synthesize successful design strategies (e.g., symbolic abstraction, aesthetic fusion, and storytelling) that effectively bridge traditional Chinese art forms with modern design innovation.

(5) To develop a conceptual framework for heritage-inspired product design that supports both cultural sustainability and creative industry development in contemporary China.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Cultural Identity and Design Innovation

Cultural identity serves as a fundamental catalyst in shaping design innovation within East Asian creative industries. It provides both the aesthetic foundation and the cultural narrative that connect traditional heritage with modern creativity. As Choi (2019) explains, East Asian designers are tasked with balancing technological advancement and heritage consciousness, ensuring that innovation remains anchored in collective identity while maintaining global competitiveness. In China, the design reinterpretation of historical art forms—such as Qiang embroidery, paper cutting, and Dunhuang Feitian imagery—demonstrates how symbolic elements can serve as communicative devices that embody cultural memory and national pride.

Recent research underscores that heritage-based design extends beyond visual replication to embody emotional and ethical dimensions. Wang et al. (2025) argue that embedding traditional aesthetics into product innovation enables cultural resonance and emotional attachment among consumers, fostering a shared sense of belonging within an increasingly globalized market. Through this process, cultural identity is rearticulated—not as a static inheritance—but as a dynamic design language that informs contemporary aesthetics, brand narratives, and creative production.

## 2.2 Integrating Intangible Heritage into Modern Design

The integration of intangible cultural heritage (ICH)—including craftsmanship, motifs, oral traditions, and symbolic narratives—forms a vital bridge between past and present creative practices. Li and Zhao (2020) highlight that intangible heritage provides designers with a reservoir of creative inspiration grounded in historical continuity. However, the challenge lies in translating heritage into design concepts that are contextually relevant and emotionally meaningful for modern users. Jin and Sharudin (2024) demonstrate that modern reinterpretations of traditional Chinese symbols—such as cloud patterns, phoenix motifs, and calligraphic forms—can enrich product identity when designers approach them as cultural signifiers rather than mere ornamentation.

Zhang et al. (2025) further show that integrating traditional art practices within industrial design, as seen in Dalian's contemporary Chinese painting products, promotes cultural transmission through material innovation. When traditional crafts are recontextualized using sustainable materials or digital fabrication, they evolve into living traditions that resonate with modern values of creativity and environmental responsibility. Therefore, the role of intangible heritage in design is not to preserve the past unchanged but to transform it into dynamic cultural capital that enhances innovation, narrative, and authenticity.

## 2.3 Emotional and Meaningful Design

Emotional design theory provides a critical framework for understanding how users connect with products on psychological and cultural levels. Norman (2004) contends that emotional engagement emerges when design evokes pleasure, attachment, or personal meaning through its form, texture, and symbolism. In the context of cultural and creative products (CCPs), this emotional resonance bridges aesthetics and identity—allowing traditional motifs to elicit both nostalgia and pride.

Verganti (2017) expands on this notion by introducing meaning-driven innovation, arguing that true creativity arises when designers reinterpret cultural codes to create new meanings rather than solely enhancing usability. In Chinese heritage-based design, emotional and meaningful innovation occurs when traditional art elements are embedded into products in ways that stimulate reflection and empathy. For instance, Wang et al. (2025) note that minimalist reinterpretations of heritage patterns can evoke a sense of tranquility and spiritual continuity, aligning with the psychological well-being of consumers. Thus, emotional innovation transforms design from a functional practice into a medium for cultural storytelling and human connection.

## 2.4 The Role of Cultural and Creative Products

Cultural and creative products (CCPs) play a central role in preserving cultural identity while stimulating economic growth and social innovation. UNESCO (2022) identifies CCPs as one of the fastest-growing sectors in the global creative economy, emphasizing their capacity to revitalize heritage knowledge and engage younger audiences. In China, the development of CCPs has become a strategic national priority, aligning with the broader goal of transforming cultural resources into sustainable creative assets.

According to Choi (2019) and Li and Zhao (2020), successful CCPs embody three interrelated dimensions: cultural authenticity, design innovation, and emotional resonance. These products act as intermediaries between tradition and modernity, enabling designers to reinterpret heritage elements in new formats—ranging from digital applications and interior design to fashion and packaging. Zhang et al. (2025) highlight that such design-led reinterpretations enhance cultural self-confidence and international visibility. By synthesizing cultural identity, intangible heritage, and emotional design, this study contributes to developing a theoretical and practical framework for reimagining Chinese artistic heritage in contemporary product design.

The reviewed literature collectively suggests that the fusion of culture and innovation is key to sustaining the relevance of traditional arts in the modern design ecosystem. Cultural identity provides the narrative foundation, intangible heritage supplies the symbolic material, and emotional innovation facilitates user connection and market value. However, as Wang et al. (2025) and Li and Zhao (2020) emphasize, the risk of superficial adaptation persists unless designers engage with heritage conceptually, ethically, and experientially. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to propose a design framework that operationalizes heritage reinterpretation through emotional

and meaning-driven design principles, ensuring that Chinese artistic traditions continue to inspire innovation in a global context.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

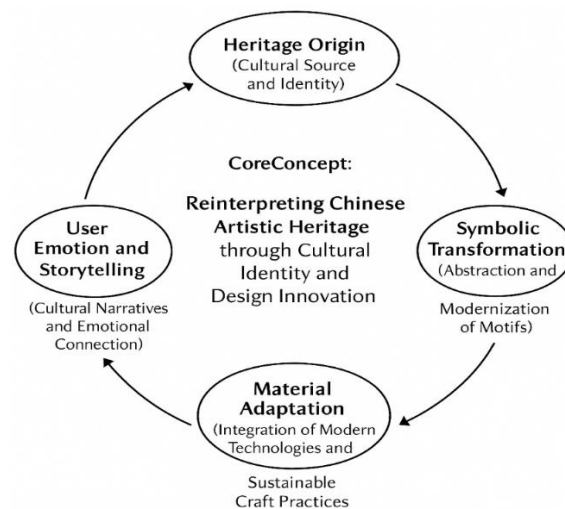
This study adopts a qualitative multiple-case exploratory research design to investigate how traditional Chinese artistic heritage can be transformed into culturally meaningful contemporary products through design innovation. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate because the research seeks to understand design interpretation processes, cultural meaning construction, and symbolic translation, which require in-depth contextual analysis rather than quantitative measurement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Two representative cases of Chinese cultural and creative products (CCPs) were selected as the focal cases: Blue Calico heritage design and Dunhuang cultural heritage design. These cases were chosen because they represent distinct forms of intangible cultural heritage—textile craftsmanship and mural-based artistic heritage—both of which have been actively reinterpreted within contemporary cultural industries. The cases provide a suitable context for examining how traditional visual language, cultural symbolism, and emotional meaning can be integrated into modern product design.

The research integrates three complementary qualitative data sources:

- (1) Semi-structured expert interviews
- (2) Visual analysis of cultural products
- (3) Documentary analysis of design archives and cultural resources

This multi-source approach enables methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings (Patton, 2015).



**Figure 2.**  
*Conceptual Diagram of the Product DNA Model*  
(Source. Constructed by Authors.)

#### 3.2 Participant Selection and Sampling Strategy

A purposive expert sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants with professional experience in design practice, cultural heritage design, or design education. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who possess relevant expertise and insight related to the research topic (Etikan et al., 2016).

Five participants were selected according to the following criteria:

- At least five years of professional experience in product design, cultural design, or design education
- Direct involvement in cultural product development, creative industry practice, or heritage-based design research
- Familiarity with Chinese cultural heritage or cultural and creative product design

The participants consisted of professional product designers and design educators with expertise in cultural design innovation.

**Table 1.**

*Participant Profile Summary*

Participant	Professional Role	Years of Experience	Area of Expertise
P1	Product Designer	10+ years	Cultural product design
P2	Design Educator	12+ years	Cultural heritage design
P3	Industrial Designer	8+ years	Creative product development
P4	Design Researcher	9+ years	Cultural innovation research
P5	Cultural Brand Designer	11+ years	Cultural branding and product design

(Source. Constructed by Authors.)

Participants are referred to using anonymized identifiers (P1–P5) to ensure confidentiality.

### 3.3 Research Instrument

Given the qualitative nature of this study, two main research instruments were developed to collect and organize data systematically:

- (1) a semi-structured interview guide for professional designers and design educators, and
- (2) a visual and documentary analysis checklist for examining selected cultural and creative product samples.

Both instruments were designed to align directly with the study’s research objectives and theoretical foundations of cultural identity, intangible heritage, and emotional design.

#### 3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview guide served as the principal data collection instrument to gather expert insights from professional designers engaged in cultural and creative product (CCP) development.

It was constructed to explore participants’ experiences, perspectives, and strategies in integrating traditional Chinese art forms—such as Qiang embroidery and Dunhuang Feitian imagery—into contemporary design contexts.

All interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via video conferencing, depending on participant availability. Each session lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. The interview instrument was pilot-tested with two design practitioners to refine question clarity, flow, and relevance prior to data collection.

**Table 2.**

*Four thematic sections, each corresponding to a key research objective*

Interview Theme	Purpose	Sample Guiding Questions	Linked Objective
1. Cultural Identity and Design Philosophy	To explore how cultural background and identity influence designers’ approaches to product innovation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you define cultural identity in your design work?</li> <li>• In what ways do you incorporate Chinese artistic heritage into your design concepts?</li> <li>• What role does cultural symbolism play in connecting with your audience?</li> </ul>	Objective 1
2. Application of Intangible Heritage	To investigate how traditional craftsmanship, motifs, and narratives are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you select and adapt traditional art forms for modern applications?</li> <li>• What challenges do you face in</li> </ul>	Objective 2

	reinterpreted in modern product design.	preserving authenticity while innovating? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do materials or production techniques influence your heritage-inspired designs?</li> </ul>	
3. Emotional and Meaningful Design	To understand how emotional design principles guide product development and user engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you design products that evoke emotional or cultural resonance?</li> <li>• Can you share an example of a product that successfully connects users to cultural meaning?</li> <li>• How does emotional engagement influence design innovation?</li> </ul>	Objective 3
4. Design Strategies and Framework Development	To identify emerging design strategies and frameworks for heritage-based innovation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What strategies have you found effective for merging traditional and modern aesthetics?</li> <li>• How can designers ensure their work contributes to cultural sustainability?</li> <li>• What would a successful framework for heritage-based design include?</li> </ul>	Objectives 4 & 5

(Source. Constructed by Authors.)

### 3.3.2 Visual and Documentary Analysis Checklist

To complement the interviews, a structured visual and documentary analysis checklist was developed as a secondary research instrument. This tool was used to systematically evaluate selected product samples, design documents, and archival materials to ensure consistent data interpretation.

**Table 3.**

*The checklist focused on three analytical dimensions.*

Analytical Dimension	Key Indicators	Research Link
Cultural Identity Expression	Use of traditional symbols, motifs, and color schemes; representation of local or ethnic heritage; coherence with cultural narratives.	Objective 1
Integration of Intangible Heritage	Adaptation of traditional materials, techniques, or craftsmanship into modern production; reinterpretation of heritage forms and meanings.	Objective 2
Emotional and Meaningful Innovation	Aesthetic appeal, emotional resonance, user connection, and storytelling capacity within the product design.	Objective 3

(Source. Constructed by Authors.)

Each product was examined for visual consistency, material adaptation, and conceptual coherence. Observations were recorded in detailed analytical memos, which were later triangulated with interview responses to identify recurring themes and relationships between heritage interpretation and design innovation.

### 3.3.3 Instrument Validation

To ensure content validity, both the interview guide and visual analysis checklist were reviewed by an expert panel consisting of three senior scholars in art design, cultural heritage, and creative industry management. Their feedback was incorporated to refine question phrasing, thematic focus, and alignment with theoretical frameworks (Choi, 2019; Li & Zhao, 2020; Norman, 2004). Additionally, the instruments were evaluated for reliability through pilot testing, ensuring that questions elicited consistent, meaningful, and contextually relevant responses.

### 3.4 Data Collection Procedures

#### 3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain expert perspectives on the transformation of traditional artistic heritage into contemporary product design. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore complex issues while maintaining flexibility for probing deeper insights (Kallio et al., 2016).

Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and followed a structured interview guide addressing:

- (1) Interpretation of traditional cultural symbols in product design
- (2) Strategies for integrating heritage aesthetics with modern product forms
- (3) Emotional meaning and storytelling in cultural products
- (4) Challenges and opportunities in heritage-based design innovation
- (5) All interviews were recorded with participant consent and later transcribed verbatim.

#### 3.4.2 Visual Analysis of Cultural Products

Visual analysis was conducted on selected examples of cultural and creative products derived from Blue Calico and Dunhuang artistic traditions. The products were collected from:

- (1) museum collections
- (2) cultural exhibitions
- (3) official cultural brand catalogues
- (4) design publications and archives

The selection criteria included:

- (1) clear reference to heritage motifs or symbolic elements
- (2) contemporary product reinterpretation
- (3) evidence of market presence or exhibition recognition

Visual analysis focused on identifying symbolic patterns, aesthetic transformations, and design reinterpretation strategies.

#### 3.4.3 Documentary Analysis

Documentary sources were also examined to provide contextual understanding of heritage design practices. These materials included:

- (1) museum exhibition catalogues
- (2) cultural design archives
- (3) academic publications
- (4) design project documentation

Documentary analysis helps contextualize the visual and interview data, providing historical and cultural background information relevant to the design reinterpretation process.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-step process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006):

- (1) Familiarization with the data
- (2) Initial code generation
- (3) Searching for themes
- (4) Reviewing themes
- (5) Defining and naming themes
- (6) Producing the report

Interview transcripts, visual observations, and documentary notes were coded using a manual qualitative coding process. Initial codes were derived from recurring concepts such as cultural symbolism, aesthetic reinterpretation, emotional resonance, and storytelling strategies.

Through iterative comparison and synthesis across data sources, four overarching themes emerged:

- (1) Symbolic Abstraction
- (2) Aesthetic Fusion
- (3) Cultural Storytelling
- (4) Product DNA Model

These themes represent the primary mechanisms through which traditional cultural heritage is translated into contemporary product design practices.

### 3.6 Trustworthiness and Research Rigor

To enhance the reliability and validity of the qualitative findings, several strategies were implemented.

#### 3.6.1 Credibility

Credibility was strengthened through data triangulation, integrating interview data, visual analysis, and documentary evidence to validate emerging interpretations.

#### 3.6.2 Transferability

Detailed descriptions of research context, participants, and data sources were provided to allow readers to assess the applicability of findings to other contexts.

#### 3.6.3 Dependability

The research process was documented through coding records, analytic memos, and systematic thematic development.

#### 3.6.4 Confirmability

Interpretations were grounded in empirical evidence from interview excerpts and visual observations, reducing researcher bias.

## 4. Findings

Data collected through semi-structured interviews and visual/documentary analyses revealed four major themes that illustrate how contemporary Chinese designers reinterpret artistic heritage to foster cultural identity, emotional resonance, and innovation. These themes—Symbolic Abstraction, Aesthetic Fusion, Cultural Storytelling, and the Product DNA Model—emerged through the integration of insights from both instruments and reflect the collective strategies designers employ to transform traditional art forms into modern design expressions.

### 4.1 Symbolic Abstraction

Analysis of both interview data and product visuals revealed that designers frequently employed symbolic abstraction to reinterpret traditional motifs such as Qiang embroidery patterns, lotus petals, and Dunhuang Feitian drapery. This approach involves simplifying intricate visual elements into geometric or minimalist representations while maintaining their underlying symbolic meaning.

Designers described this process as an intentional act of visual translation—balancing aesthetic modernity with cultural authenticity.

One participant noted, “*Abstraction allows us to retain the spirit of traditional motifs without overwhelming modern users with historical detail.*” (Designer Interview 3).

Another designer emphasized that abstraction helps balance heritage preservation with contemporary aesthetics, “*If we reproduce traditional motifs exactly as they appear in historical artifacts, modern audiences*

may perceive them as outdated. Abstraction allows us to reinterpret the essence of the symbol while keeping the design visually modern.” (Designer Interview 2).

Visual analysis of product samples supported this view: items exhibited a clear continuity between traditional color harmony and contemporary minimalism. Through abstraction, designers preserved key symbolic associations—such as unity, vitality, and transcendence—while aligning with modern design principles of balance, proportion, and functional clarity. This finding corresponds with the first objective, emphasizing how cultural identity manifests through symbolic reinterpretation within design innovation.

## 4.2 Aesthetic Fusion

Findings from the interview and visual analysis demonstrated that aesthetic fusion functions as a central strategy in heritage-inspired design. Designers consciously merged traditional art aesthetics—particularly from Dunhuang Feitian imagery—with modern material technologies and digital fabrication methods. The aim was to create products that simultaneously evoke cultural depth and modern usability.

Designers articulated that combining ancient aesthetic philosophies with contemporary ergonomics produces a sense of “timeless flow.” As one designer stated, “The movement and spirituality of the Feitian figure can be expressed through curvature, form, and balance in modern product design.” (Designer Interview 1).

A second designer explained that technological integration is essential in heritage-based innovation:

“Digital modeling tools allow us to reinterpret classical patterns in ways that traditional craft alone could not achieve. Technology becomes a bridge between ancient aesthetics and modern usability.” (Designer Interview 5). Visual documentation revealed examples where curved lines and fluid textures derived from Feitian art were integrated into packaging, lighting, and furniture design, reinforcing both tactile appeal and emotional connection.

This fusion reflects the second research objective, which addresses how intangible cultural heritage (ICH) elements can be recontextualized in modern creative industries without losing symbolic authenticity.

## 4.3 Cultural Storytelling

The third major theme identified through interviews and design analyses was cultural storytelling—the process of embedding historical, mythological, or regional narratives into the product concept. This approach aligns with meaning-driven innovation (Verganti, 2017), where cultural symbolism transcends decoration and becomes a narrative device that connects emotionally with users.

Designers reported that storytelling transforms products into “cultural messengers.” For example, a designer adapting Qiang embroidery into a handbag collection explained, “Every pattern has a story—it’s about family, unity, and protection. By reinterpreting it, we allow new generations to wear those stories again.” (Designer Interview 4).

Another participant highlighted the role of storytelling in strengthening cultural engagement:

“People do not only buy a product—they buy the meaning behind it. When a product carries a cultural story, it becomes something personal and memorable for the user.” (Designer Interview 2)

The documentary review confirmed that heritage-based design brands often accompany products with interpretive text, QR codes, or visual storytelling elements that communicate their historical inspiration. This enhances emotional engagement (Norman, 2004) and strengthens users’ perception of authenticity, fulfilling Objective 3 by linking emotional design with cultural appreciation.

## 4.4 The Product DNA Model

From the synthesis of all qualitative findings, the study developed a Product DNA Model that encapsulates how designers operationalize cultural and emotional innovation. This model emerged from patterns observed across all data sources and reflects four interrelated components:

Heritage Origin – The source of cultural identity, including regional art forms, materials, and symbols that inspire design concepts.

Symbolic Transformation – The reinterpretation of traditional motifs through abstraction, stylization, or digital enhancement to align with modern aesthetics.

Material Adaptation – The integration of new materials and production technologies while retaining the tactile and symbolic essence of traditional craftsmanship.

User Emotion and Storytelling – The deliberate design of emotional connections and cultural narratives that enable users to experience products as meaningful cultural artifacts.

The Product DNA Model reflects how Chinese designers embed emotional and cultural significance into contemporary design systems, achieving a balance between innovation, authenticity, and market relevance. It provides a conceptual framework addressing Objective 5, offering a structured approach to heritage-based design innovation that can inform future research and creative industry practices.

**Table 4.**

*Summary of Key Findings*

Theme	Description	Supporting Evidence (from Instruments)	Related Research Objective(s)
Symbolic Abstraction	Designers simplified traditional motifs—such as Qiang embroidery and Dunhuang imagery—into minimalist, geometric forms while preserving symbolic meaning. This reflects a balance between visual modernity and cultural authenticity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview data revealed designers’ emphasis on “translating meaning rather than replicating form.”</li> <li>• Visual analysis showed consistent use of color harmony and geometric pattern adaptation in modern product samples.</li> </ul>	Objective 1: Examine the role of cultural identity in shaping design innovation.
Aesthetic Fusion	Traditional art aesthetics were merged with modern ergonomics and digital modeling techniques to achieve cultural depth and contemporary usability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews indicated a recurring design philosophy of “fusion between tradition and modern technology.”</li> <li>• Product documentation illustrated the integration of classical motifs with new materials and fabrication techniques.</li> </ul>	Objective 2: Analyze how intangible heritage can be adapted into modern design while preserving authenticity.
Cultural Storytelling	Products incorporated mythological or historical narratives, transforming heritage symbols into emotionally resonant design narratives that connect users to cultural meaning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designers described products as “cultural messengers” that embody personal and collective identity.</li> <li>• Documentary review showed brands using storytelling tools such as QR codes and packaging texts to explain cultural origins.</li> </ul>	Objective 3: Investigate how emotional design enhances cultural appreciation and user engagement.
Product DNA Model	A conceptual model emerged that integrates four core components—heritage origin, symbolic transformation, material adaptation, and user emotion—providing a structured approach for cultural design innovation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synthesized from triangulation of interview insights, product analyses, and archival review.</li> <li>• Expert validation confirmed the model’s alignment with cultural sustainability and design innovation theory.</li> </ul>	Objectives 4 & 5: Identify effective design strategies and develop a framework for heritage-based product design.

(Source. Constructed by Authors.)

Table 4 illustrates how qualitative themes from designer interviews and visual/documentary analysis converge to support the study’s central aim: reinterpreting Chinese artistic heritage through emotionally and

culturally meaningful design. Together, these findings demonstrate a coherent relationship between cultural identity, intangible heritage, and design innovation, as envisioned in the conceptual framework.

**Table 5.**

Product DNA Model Components and Descriptors

Component	Definition	Design Implications	Illustrative Evidence (from Data Sources)
1. Heritage Origin	The foundational cultural source that informs design concepts, including traditional art forms, regional symbolism, and indigenous craftsmanship.	Serves as the cultural anchor that ensures authenticity and provides the narrative basis for creative reinterpretation. Designers must research deeply into cultural sources to retain integrity and symbolic relevance.	Interview data emphasized the role of Qiang embroidery and Dunhuang Feitian imagery as “cultural starting points” in design ideation. Visual analysis showed products maintaining regional color harmony and traditional motifs.
2. Symbolic Transformation	The creative reinterpretation of traditional motifs, patterns, or narratives through abstraction, stylization, and modern visualization techniques.	Enables heritage to evolve within contemporary design contexts without losing symbolic meaning. Encourages innovation through the simplification and modernization of traditional symbols.	Designers described this process as “visual translation” that maintains emotional value while fitting minimalist design trends. Observed use of geometric abstraction in embroidery-based product designs.
3. Material Adaptation	The integration of modern materials and production technologies with traditional crafting techniques to enhance usability and sustainability.	Balances cultural symbolism with functionality and environmental responsibility. Encourages innovation in materials science and production processes while maintaining tactile and symbolic qualities.	Designers reported using 3D printing and sustainable fibers inspired by traditional textile crafts. Archival data revealed examples of digital modeling applied to traditional pattern rendering.
4. User Emotion and Storytelling	The intentional design of emotional resonance through narrative, sensory experience, and cultural symbolism to strengthen user connection.	Transforms design from a functional product into an emotional experience that communicates heritage meaning. Enhances consumer engagement and loyalty through narrative depth and cultural immersion.	Interviewees described products as “story carriers.” Documentary review revealed that brands employed storytelling via packaging, labeling, and exhibition curation to connect with users.

(Source. Constructed by Authors.)

Table 5 presents the Product DNA Model, which encapsulates how designers integrate cultural and emotional dimensions into contemporary product design. By combining heritage origin, symbolic transformation, material adaptation, and user emotion and storytelling, this framework offers a replicable approach for embedding cultural identity into creative industry practices. It aligns with theoretical perspectives from Norman (2004) on emotional design and Verganti (2017) on meaning-driven innovation, positioning heritage as a dynamic source of design value and innovation.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that heritage-inspired design functions as a powerful conduit between cultural identity and creative innovation in China's evolving design industry. By integrating traditional art forms—such as Qiang embroidery and Dunhuang Feitian imagery—into modern product design, Chinese designers not only preserve intangible cultural heritage (ICH) but also generate new avenues for emotional and aesthetic engagement. These results provide empirical support for the theoretical linkages proposed by Norman (2004), Choi (2019), and Verganti (2017), illustrating how emotional design and meaning-driven innovation intersect with heritage-based creativity.

The theme of symbolic abstraction highlights how designers reinterpret traditional motifs through minimalist visual languages while retaining symbolic significance. This approach transforms cultural artifacts into adaptable design systems that remain relevant to global markets. Such abstraction resonates with Choi's (2019) notion of balancing authenticity and modernity in East Asian design, demonstrating that visual reduction does not dilute meaning but rather enhances symbolic clarity and emotional accessibility. By simplifying complex cultural forms, designers make heritage visually and emotionally intelligible to contemporary audiences.

The second theme, aesthetic fusion, underscores the ongoing dialogue between craftsmanship and technology. Findings revealed that designers actively merge classical art principles—line, form, and color harmony—with contemporary materials and digital modeling. This aligns with Li and Zhao's (2020) framework of sustainable cultural design, which positions tradition as a renewable resource for innovation. The incorporation of digital fabrication, eco-friendly materials, and ergonomic design reflects how cultural sustainability can coexist with modern production efficiency, creating products that are both meaningful and marketable.

The emergence of cultural storytelling further expands Norman's (2004) concept of emotional design by demonstrating that narrative context enhances user attachment. When designers embed mythological or regional stories within product form and branding, users experience the artifact as more than a functional object—it becomes a vessel of collective memory and identity. This approach fosters long-term emotional resonance, validating Verganti's (2017) argument that innovation derives its value not merely from utility but from the ability to generate new meaning through cultural reinterpretation.

Finally, the Product DNA Model provides a structured framework that operationalizes these principles into four interconnected dimensions—heritage origin, symbolic transformation, material adaptation, and user emotion/storytelling. Together, they represent a cyclical design process where cultural inspiration informs innovation, and innovation revitalizes cultural expression. This model synthesizes empirical insights with theoretical constructs, offering a replicable and scalable pathway for cultural design integration. It supports UNESCO's (2022) emphasis on creative industries as engines of cultural sustainability and economic development, positioning design as a mechanism for both heritage preservation and creative renewal. For firms in the creative industries, the Product DNA Model provides a strategic tool for translating cultural heritage into brand differentiation, product storytelling, and culturally authentic market positioning.

Beyond its theoretical implications, the Product DNA Model also offers strategic value for the cultural and creative industries (CCIs). By systematically linking heritage origin, symbolic transformation, material adaptation, and emotional storytelling, the model provides designers and firms with a structured approach to translate cultural heritage into distinctive brand identities. This process enhances brand equity by embedding authentic cultural narratives into product design, thereby strengthening emotional connections with consumers. In competitive creative markets, such culturally grounded storytelling supports clearer market positioning, allowing firms to differentiate their products through cultural authenticity and experiential value. Moreover, the model facilitates the commercial scalability of cultural and creative products (CCPs) by enabling designers to adapt heritage elements into modular design systems that can be applied across multiple product categories, including fashion, packaging, and lifestyle goods.

In addition to its cultural and aesthetic implications, the Product DNA Model also carries important economic relevance for cultural and creative industries (CCIs). Heritage-informed design can enhance the perceived value and market differentiation of cultural and creative products (CCPs), allowing firms to position their offerings as culturally authentic and emotionally meaningful goods rather than purely functional commodities. By embedding symbolic heritage elements into product narratives, designers can strengthen consumer engagement and brand

identity, which in turn contributes to higher willingness to pay and stronger brand loyalty. Within the rapidly expanding Asian creative economy, such heritage-driven differentiation represents a viable strategy for increasing the commercial competitiveness of CCPs while simultaneously preserving cultural heritage.

Overall, this discussion demonstrates that the reinterpretation of Chinese artistic heritage is not merely aesthetic replication but a strategic design methodology rooted in emotional resonance, cultural continuity, and sustainable innovation. By bridging the gap between tradition and technology, Chinese designers contribute to a new paradigm of design thinking—one that integrates cultural depth with creative dynamism.

**Table 6.**  
*Summary of Discussion Themes and Theoretical Linkages*

Discussion Theme	Interpretation from Findings	Supporting Theory/Framework	Key Scholarly References
Symbolic Abstraction	Simplifying traditional motifs into minimalist modern forms enhances cultural clarity and global accessibility.	Balancing authenticity and modernity through abstraction and visual reduction.	Choi (2019); Norman (2004)
Aesthetic Fusion	Combining traditional craftsmanship with modern technology creates sustainable and market-relevant designs.	Sustainable cultural design: tradition as a renewable resource for innovation.	Li & Zhao (2020); UNESCO (2022)
Cultural Storytelling	Embedding mythological and regional narratives into products enhances user emotion and identity connection.	Emotional design and meaning-driven innovation through narrative experience.	Norman (2004); Verganti (2017)
Product DNA Model	Heritage origin, symbolic transformation, material adaptation, and storytelling form a replicable design system.	Integrated cultural identity and emotional innovation framework for creative industries.	Choi (2019); Verganti (2017); Li & Zhao (2020)

*(Source. Constructed by Authors.)*

The discussion establishes that Chinese artistic heritage serves as both inspiration and infrastructure for modern design innovation. The integration of emotional design, meaning-driven innovation, and intangible cultural heritage enables designers to produce work that is simultaneously culturally grounded and globally resonant (Table 6). Through symbolic abstraction, aesthetic fusion, and cultural storytelling, the Product DNA Model offers a practical framework that advances the goals of cultural sustainability and design creativity in the 21st century.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that the reinterpretation of Chinese artistic heritage serves as a dynamic catalyst for innovation, emotional engagement, and cultural continuity in contemporary product design. By analyzing the integration of Qiang embroidery and Dunhuang Feitian imagery, the research demonstrates that traditional art forms—when creatively adapted—can transcend their historical boundaries to shape modern aesthetics and consumer experiences. The qualitative findings reveal that Chinese designers employ symbolic abstraction, aesthetic fusion, and cultural storytelling as core strategies for transforming intangible heritage into modern creative products (CCPs).

The resulting Product DNA Model provides a structured framework for embedding cultural identity into design innovation. It highlights the interdependence between four essential components: heritage origin, symbolic transformation, material adaptation, and user emotion/storytelling. This cyclical model encapsulates how heritage-informed design can sustain both creative and cultural vitality. The research therefore bridges theoretical and practical dimensions—confirming Norman’s (2004) view of emotional design as a source of attachment, Choi’s (2019) emphasis on balancing authenticity and modernity, and Verganti’s (2017) argument for meaning-driven innovation.

While the Product DNA Model was developed through case studies of Chinese artistic heritage—specifically Qiang embroidery and Dunhuang Feitian imagery—its broader applicability may vary across different industrial contexts. The framework is particularly well suited to sectors where cultural symbolism and narrative value play a central role, such as cultural products, fashion, tourism design, and lifestyle branding. However, applying the model to non-artistic or high-technology product sectors may require adaptation, as these industries often prioritize functional performance, technological innovation, and engineering constraints over symbolic expression. Future research could therefore explore how heritage-inspired design principles can be integrated into technology-driven sectors such as digital products, smart devices, or industrial design, thereby expanding the applicability of the model across diverse innovation ecosystems.

Ultimately, the study contributes to the broader discourse on cultural sustainability and creative economy development in China. It affirms that heritage is not a static legacy but a renewable source of creative potential that fosters national identity, artistic expression, and economic opportunity in the global design landscape.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and the operational framework of the Product DNA Model, several actionable recommendations are proposed for design practitioners, academic institutions, creative industries, and future researchers.

### **6.2.1 For Designers**

Embrace symbolic abstraction and story-driven design to reinterpret heritage meaningfully rather than replicating it superficially.

Apply the Product DNA Model to ensure that heritage origin, emotional resonance, and functional innovation coexist harmoniously.

Incorporate user-centered and emotional design methods to strengthen the psychological and cultural connection between users and heritage-based products.

### **6.2.2 For Universities and Art Institutions**

Introduce interdisciplinary design programs that integrate art history, cultural heritage studies, and innovation management.

Encourage studio-based research combining traditional craft techniques with digital fabrication, materials science, and human-centered design.

Promote collaborative learning projects with local artisans and cultural organizations to foster experiential understanding of intangible heritage in practice.

### **6.2.3 For Creative Industries and Policymakers**

Support cross-sector collaboration between artisans, designers, and entrepreneurs to transform traditional crafts into competitive cultural and creative products.

Establish innovation incubators and funding initiatives that promote sustainable cultural design as part of regional creative economy strategies.

Encourage industry-wide standards for heritage authenticity and ethical cultural representation to protect traditional knowledge while fostering innovation.

For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating within the creative sector, the Product DNA Model offers a practical framework that can be implemented even with limited resources. SMEs can begin by identifying

a single heritage element—such as a motif, craft technique, or regional narrative—as the heritage origin of their product line. Through symbolic transformation and storytelling, this cultural element can be incorporated into branding, packaging, and product aesthetics without requiring large-scale technological investment. By leveraging digital marketing platforms and collaborative networks with local artisans, SMEs can develop culturally distinctive products that enhance brand authenticity and attract niche cultural markets.

#### **6.2.4 For Future Research**

Expand the scope of the Product DNA Model by examining its application in non-art industries such as technology, fashion, or urban design.

Conduct comparative cross-cultural studies to explore how heritage-inspired design functions in different cultural contexts across Asia and beyond.

Investigate consumer perception and emotional response to heritage-based design using quantitative or mixed-method approaches to complement this study's qualitative insights.

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