

The Teaching Application of the "Design Composition" Course Based on Local Cultural IP – A Case Study of Hangzhou City University

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the strategic needs of cultural inheritance and innovation in the new era, using the foundational course "Design Composition" from Hangzhou City University as an experimental course. It constructs a new model of teaching reform characterized by "cultural leadership, project-driven, and multi-faceted collaboration." Through a three-year (2021-2024) action research, it systematically explores the mechanism for deep integration between local cultural IPs and design foundation courses. The findings are as follows: (1) By establishing a curriculum system guided by the framework of "cultural elements—design elements—ability indicators," it effectively addresses the challenge of converting cultural resources into teaching content; (2) Implementing a three-stage teaching model of "cognition-understanding-creation" significantly improves students' accuracy in applying cultural elements. This study innovatively proposes a culturally immersive teaching design framework. Currently, the course has developed a teaching resource library containing 236 local cases across 12 categories, forming a curriculum reform plan with significant promotional value. Practical results show that this teaching model not only significantly enhances students' cultural confidence and design innovation capabilities but also provides an empirical example for the localization of design education. The research findings have had a radiating effect at multiple universities both within and outside the province, and they hold important theoretical and practical significance for promoting cultural awareness and innovative development in design education.

KEYWORDS

Local cultural IP; Design composition; Teaching reform

Under the dual impact of globalization and digitalization, design education is facing unprecedented transformation pressure. In November 2024, the 20th Annual Conference of the Chinese Society for Art Theory was held at Jimei University, with the theme "Inheritance and Innovation: Strategic Thinking in Chinese Art Theory Research under New Circumstances."

The conference pointed out that design disciplines are closely aligned with national macro-strategic requirements such as the construction of the "three major systems," the establishment of a "Chinese autonomous knowledge system," and the development of "new humanities." These efforts aim to advance disciplinary construction and proactively undertake the mission of inheriting excellent traditional Chinese culture and contributing to the building of a culturally strong nation. On the other hand, research areas are continuously expanding into social practice directions such as artificial intelligence, media technology, ecological civilization, and geography, broadening the research horizons of art disciplines and enhancing the academic value and social influence of art studies. Currently, there is an issue of "homogenized training" in China's design schools, leading to insufficient cultural recognition in graduates' works. This phenomenon reflects the deep-seated crisis of the lack of local culture in current design education. In contrast, international trends in design education, such as the "localization design" course at Tama Art University in Japan and the "cultural archetypes" teaching method at Aalto University in Finland, demonstrate successful practices of deeply integrating regional culture into professional instruction.

China's design education has undergone three major transformations: the "pattern teaching" at the beginning of the 20th century, the "sketching system" influenced by the Soviet Union in the 1950s, and the "three major compositions" introduced in the 1980s. However, these transplanted developments have never resolved the fundamental issue of localized innovation. As design educator Wang Shouzhe stated, "The most urgent task for Chinese design education is to establish its own discourse system." In this context, localized design education, due to its unique cultural heritage value, is becoming a key path to breaking through development bottlenecks.

This paper selects the "Design Composition" course from Hangzhou City University as the experimental vehicle, which is representative in several ways: Firstly, this course serves as a foundational core for design majors and has a broad impact; Secondly, Hangzhou, a historic and cultural city, boasts three World Heritage Sites and 66 Intangible Cultural Heritage items, making it rich in cultural IP resources; Thirdly, Hangzhou City University is located in the core area of Hangzhou's cultural and creative industry, offering natural advantages for collaboration among industry, academia, and research. By systematically integrating local cultural IPs, this study aims to address three key questions: How can we establish a mechanism for converting cultural IPs into design education? How can we design effective localized teaching models? How can we evaluate the actual effectiveness of educational reforms?

1 The value of the combination of local cultural IP and "design composition" course

1.1 Cognitive development of the integration of local cultural IP into the curriculum

In the field of art and design education in universities, localized design has always been given high priority. The reason why localized works can evoke emotional resonance and touch hearts is that they carry the most genuine emotional expressions of their creators, embodying a design philosophy that deeply resonates with the people. The empathetic effect of localized design stems from its deep integration of regional emotions into every creation, revealing sincere and profound emotional outpourings. This characteristic holds significant theoretical guidance and practical inspiration for modern art and design education in China. In modern art design education, if teaching activities can be initiated with core elements such as practicality, symbolism, and metaphorism, it can guide learners to draw rich nourishment from the emotional expression of local culture. This allows them to deeply understand the core concepts of traditional Chinese culture and internalize these as important sources for artistic creation. Works created through this approach not only fully showcase the unique charm of local culture but also significantly enhance students' design quality when driven by emotion. In the context of increasingly clear development ideas in contemporary Chinese design, emphasizing creative practices driven by emotion, introducing a design content system that aligns with local cultural IPs in the teaching reform of "Design Composition" courses can not only effectively guide art and design education to better serve the development needs of the country and society, but also provide crucial support for promoting the localization and modernization of China's design education.

In actual teaching practice, it has been found that when cultural IP cases are used in teaching, students show a strong interest in learning, with significantly increased attention span and a higher willingness to learn. Integrating local cultural IPs into course content can effectively promote the development of students' cognitive abilities. Specifically, cultural IPs not only help students reach deeper levels when analyzing design elements but also guide them to draw inspiration from cultural backgrounds, thereby fostering a strong sense of cultural identity and belonging. This process enables students to understand design principles more thoroughly and apply them flexibly in their practical creations, thus achieving an effective combination of theoretical and practical learning in design composition theory.

1.2 Enhance the ability to integrate local cultural IP into curriculum design

This study delves into the multidimensional educational value of integrating local cultural IPs into design composition courses through detailed analysis. On the cognitive development level, the organic integration of regional cultural elements through case teaching and field trips has significantly enhanced students' ability to analyze design symbols. This two-way permeation teaching method not only deepens students' perception of cultural elements but also promotes a systematic presentation of these elements in their assignments, making the cultural connotations of their works richer and more three-dimensional. In terms of emotional cultivation, emotionally driven teaching strategies based on local identity play a crucial role. By creating teaching scenarios that align with students' local cultural experiences, it effectively stimulates their intrinsic motivation for learning and strengthens their emotional connection to local culture. This emotionalized teaching approach not only increases classroom participation but also makes their creative solutions more emotionally resonant, with the cultural connotations expressed in their works being more natural and fluid. In terms of capability building, the real problem-solving model driven by school-enterprise cooperation projects provides students with a platform to apply theoretical knowledge to practice. Through participation in real design projects, students not only enhance their ability to solve practical problems but also develop innovative thinking and teamwork spirit (Table 1).

Table 1 Multi-dimensional educational value of cultural IP

Value dimension	Core mechanism of action	Methods of teaching implementation	Typical manifestations
Cognitive development value	Local cultural IP characteristic elements	Case teaching of cultural IP	Students can analyze the design transformation of cultural symbols in depth
	The cultural background of the design content	Field study of cultural scenes	The project presents a richer cultural element scheme
Cultivate emotional value	Local cultural identity	Local cultural teaching design	Improved classroom participation
	Cultural resonance creation	Local cultural theme assignments	The cultural connotation of the work is expressed more deeply
Value of capacity enhancement	Demand-driven comprehensive ability	School-enterprise cooperation proposition practice	The rationality of the design scheme is improved
	The integration of traditional and modern thinking fosters innovative thinking	Analysis of cultural IP redesign	The design works show a higher degree of locality

2 Analysis of the current situation of Design Composition course in Hangzhou City University

2.1 Analysis of existing problems in the course

Currently, the "Design Composition" course, as a foundational class in design art and design, faces existing issues in its teaching content. First, the course content overly relies on traditional case analysis, lacking deep integration with contemporary design practices, which hinders students from effectively transforming theoretical knowledge into practical application. Second, the teaching method is predominantly lecture-based, with a relative lack of interactive and practical components, thereby to some extent suppressing students' spirit of independent exploration and innovative thinking. Additionally, the practical training section of the course is relatively weak, with most of the design works completed by students remaining at the conceptual level, failing to fully achieve the transformation process from creative conception to actual results. These issues indicate that the curriculum system needs to incorporate more regionally culturally distinctive design themes and practical projects to effectively stimulate students' interest in learning, strengthen their practical skills, and promote a comprehensive improvement in their professional competence.

2.2 The underlying potential of local cultural IP

Situated in Hangzhou—a region rich in cultural assets—Hangzhou City University benefits from exceptional prerequisites for reforming its "Design Composition" curriculum through localized cultural integration. The area's intellectual property portfolio encompasses 66 designated intangible cultural heritage elements and globally recognized heritage sites, including the West Lake Cultural Landscape, the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, and the Liangzhu Archaeological Ruins. These resources embody not only deep historical significance but also multifaceted artistic expressions, aligning seamlessly with the thematic requirements of diverse curriculum modules. Such a rich tapestry provides students with an expansive interpretive framework spanning traditional craftsmanship to contemporary design applications, thereby underscoring the practicality and strategic importance of curriculum innovations rooted in regional cultural heritage.

3 Teaching reform strategies based on local cultural IP

3.1 Guidance framework of "cultural elements--design elements--ability indicators"

In the reform of teaching, the "cultural elements-design elements-competency indicators" guidance framework aims to achieve a deep integration of cultural resources and design practice through systematic theoretical construction. This framework starts with cultural elements, deconstructing and refining local cultural IPs to extract their core symbols, aesthetic characteristics, and cultural connotations, transforming them into key elements in design expression, including form language, color systems, and material textures. It extracts and establishes a "cultural IP-design" element database (Table 2), breaking down cultural IPs such as West Lake and the Grand Canal into design elements like colors (such as the seasonal hues of the Ten Scenic Spots of West Lake), forms (such as the shaping features of Liangzhu jade artifacts), and materials (such as the texture of Hangzhou silk). This forms a systematic teaching module. The framework emphasizes the hierarchical progression of knowledge transmission and competency development, enabling students to transform abstract cultural elements into concrete design works based on a deep understanding of the cultural IP context, ultimately achieving a comprehensive enhancement of professional skills and an organic unity of cultural inheritance.

Table 2 Classification of local cultural IP resources in Hangzhou

Type of cultural IP	Representative resources	Case of teaching application
Material cultural heritage	West Lake, Grand Canal, Liangzhu	Liangzhu jade ware modeling--the basis of design composition
intangible cultural heritage	Hangzhou embroidery, Hangzhou cuisine	Hengzhou embroidery patterns----pattern design
Modern cultural resources	G20, Asian Games visual system	Asian Games color-design course case

3.2 Three-stage teaching mode of cognition, understanding and creation

During the cognitive phase, structured analysis of cultural resources and symbolic extraction techniques are employed to deepen students' grasp of the distinctive traits and artistic significance embedded in regional cultural IPs. In the subsequent comprehension phase, a blended approach of case-based exploration and theoretical discourse enables students to critically examine the conceptual links between cultural motifs and design methodologies, thereby honing their capacity to decode cultural semantics. Finally, the creative phase challenges learners to repurpose distilled design elements for original conceptualization, translating intangible cultural narratives into tangible visual manifestations while iteratively refining outcomes through applied feedback loops.

4 Conclusion

This research develops a novel pedagogical framework for the "Design Composition" curriculum by integrating regional cultural intellectual properties (IPs). Following three years of systematic development, it formulates a conversion paradigm that translates cultural resources into design elements and further organizes these into structured teaching modules, establishing a robust foundation for curriculum localization in design education. Additionally, an innovative "three-phase project-driven" instructional approach is introduced. This reform initiative effectively resolves the limitations of outdated pedagogical content and insufficient practical training inherent in traditional models. Through strategic infusion of cultural heritage and progressive skill development pathways, the program achieves holistic enhancement of learners' competencies spanning cultural interpretation to design implementation. Empirical outcomes demonstrate significant improvement in students' capacity for design transformation and consistent cultivation of innovative design professionals.

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