

Emotional Design of Traditional Cultural Symbols in Cultural and Creative Products: A Case Study of the Eight Immortals

Zhang Yu Ting¹, Chen Qiu Yun¹, Qiu Lu Ning¹, Liao Yan¹, Chen Xiang Fei¹
Corresponding Author: Huang Ting Ting*

¹*Sichuan Normal University*

Abstract: Against the background of the rapid development of the global cultural and creative industry, the modern transformation and communication of traditional cultural symbols have become a common topic in cultural research and cultural and creative practices. Establishing an emotional connection between traditional culture and contemporary users through design is the core of cultural inheritance and innovation. At present, most traditional cultural and creative products are superficially developed, with problems such as simple replication of visual symbols, disconnection between functions and cultural connotations, and insufficient emotional resonance. Based on Donald Norman's Emotional Design theory, this study takes the Eight Immortals culture as a case, adopts the case study method, and explores the cognition, aesthetics and emotional needs of different groups for Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products through 303 valid questionnaires and SPSS analysis. The results show that young people aged 18–24 have a basic understanding of the Eight Immortals and their stories, but a low awareness of the Eight Immortals hidden motifs. They prefer cultural and creative products that combine traditional patterns with modern design and integrate practicality and cultural connotations. The emotional design framework constructed in this study can provide references for the development of Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products and the transformation of traditional cultural symbols in various countries, thus promoting the communication of world cultural diversity.

Keywords: Eight Immortals, Emotional design, Cultural and creative products, Traditional culture, User perception

1. Introduction

In recent years, the global cultural and creative industry has achieved leapfrog development and become a key engine for countries to promote cultural inheritance, stimulate economic growth and enhance cultural soft power. As the core resource of the cultural and creative industry, cultural heritage has attracted great attention from governments and cultural institutions worldwide for its innovative and economic values. How to transform traditional cultural symbols and narratives into product forms that meet contemporary consumer demands and aesthetic preferences has become a common issue for the global development of the cultural and creative industry. As an important material carrier of the cultural and creative industry, cultural and creative products undertake the mission of inheriting historical narratives, conveying the meaning of cultural symbols, and realizing the contemporary communication of traditional culture. Their core value lies not only in practical functions, but also in integrating traditional culture into contemporary life through design, establishing emotional connections with users, and thus strengthening cultural identity.

In China, with the enhancement of cultural confidence and the in-depth advancement of intangible cultural heritage protection, traditional cultural symbols have been widely applied in the field of cultural and creative design. Most of these symbols originate from myths, legends, folk tales, literary works and traditional art forms, covering various forms such as figures, patterns and artifacts. Rational design and application can enable traditional culture to spread in a more accessible way to the public. However, the current development shows that most traditional cultural and creative products fail to achieve an in-depth integration of tradition and modernity: some merely replicate visual symbols superficially without exploring cultural connotations; some excessively pursue formal innovation and lose the cultural core; others emphasize decoration over function, failing to meet daily usage needs. These problems result in a lack of emotional resonance between products and users, restricting the effective modern transformation of traditional culture.

The Eight Immortals are the most representative secular immortal group in Chinese folk legends and Taoist mythology, consisting of eight figures: Li Tieguai, Zhongli Quan, Zhang Guolao, Lü Dongbin, He Xiangyu, Lan Caihe, Han Xiangzi and Cao Guojiu. Their images can be traced back to folk legends of the Tang and Song dynasties, gradually appeared in literary and artistic works such as zaju in the Yuan Dynasty, and were finalized in terms of images and narratives in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Classic

themes such as the Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea and the Eight Immortals Celebrating Longevity have been derived, making it a highly influential cultural motif in folk culture. The Eight Immortals cover different genders, ages and social classes, representing the diverse social forms of men, women, the elderly, the young, the poor, the rich, the noble and the humble, and thus enjoy a broad mass base. The exclusive magic weapons of each immortal (sword, gourd, fan, flute, lotus, fish drum, flower basket and jade tablet) are collectively known as the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs, which carry auspicious meanings such as blessing, protection and longevity. With distinctive shapes and high recognizability, they have become highly expressive visual elements in contemporary cultural and creative design.

The academic community has conducted numerous studies on the origin and development of the Eight Immortals legends from historical, cultural and artistic perspectives, confirming that they integrate the core spirit of Taoism and folk secular connotations. Their images and patterns are widely used in traditional art forms such as New Year paintings, sculptures and ceramics. In contemporary design practice, Penglai, Yantai and other regions have developed the Eight Immortals culture as a local characteristic IP. However, most products remain at the level of decorative tourist souvenirs, failing to deeply explore cultural connotations or combine users' emotional and usage needs, making it difficult to establish in-depth emotional connections.

The theory of emotional design provides an important framework for solving this problem. It emphasizes that product experience is not only determined by functions, but also by emotional responses triggered by visual appearance, usability and symbolic significance. The three-level experience framework of visceral, behavioral and reflective levels constructed by the theory precisely meets the design needs of traditional cultural and creative products. Taking the Eight Immortals culture as the research object, this study adopts empirical research methods to explore user needs and proposes an emotional design path based on the theory. It aims to support the modern transformation of the Eight Immortals culture and provide a reference for the cultural and creative development of other traditional cultural symbols.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Significance of the Eight Immortals

The Eight Immortals are one of the most recognizable and widely spread immortal groups in Chinese folk culture. Passed down for hundreds of years, their legends have permeated folk life through literature, operas, paintings, sculptures and other forms, carrying the public's aesthetic pursuits and spiritual yearnings, which is the core reason for their enduring popularity.

The academic community has conducted systematic research on the origin and cultural connotations of the Eight Immortals from multiple perspectives. Historical studies have sorted out their development context in Taoist tradition and folk belief. Yang R.F. (1958) carried out a systematic textual research on the origin of the Eight Immortals legends, clarified their integration process in Taoist culture and folk narratives [4], and confirmed that the Eight Immortals culture contains both the spiritual core of longevity and transcendence in Taoism and the secular connotations of praying for blessings and good fortune in folk culture. In the field of visual culture, Chen, Y. L. (2012) deeply analyzed the cultural connotations of the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs in folk decorative art, verifying their communication value as auspicious symbols [1]; Wu, X. B. (2015) took the images of the Eight Immortals in the Ming Dynasty as the research object and sorted out the evolution and artistic style of their visual images [11]; Qi, J. (2020) focused on the folk images of the Eight Immortals in the Qing Dynasty and explored their expressive forms in folk art [12]. These studies have laid a theoretical foundation for the modern reconstruction of the Eight Immortals visual symbols.

The core value of the Eight Immortals culture lies in its popularity and inclusiveness. Its members cover different social classes and can be accepted by the public across class boundaries. Compared with figure images, the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs are more abstract and decorative, with higher adaptability in modern design. Zhang X. (2023) explored the path of modernization of the Eight Immortals culture through illustration and authorization [3], confirming its modern communication potential. However, the current development is still concentrated on single-form tourist souvenirs, and international communication is relatively limited, leaving room for its modernization and international development.

2.2 Emotional Design Theory

The core of emotional design theory is to emphasize the central role of emotion in the interaction between users and products, breaking the traditional design idea that takes function and efficiency as the sole core, and promoting the shift of design thinking from object-centered to human-centered. The theory was formally proposed by Donald A. Norman in 2004 in his book *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things*. Its core framework is the three-level experience of visceral, behavioral and

reflective levels: the visceral level refers to immediate sensory experience, the behavioral level focuses on usability and functional performance, and the reflective level is associated with deep cultural meaning and value identity [5]. Norman further improved the theory of the relationship between emotion and design in subsequent studies [6, 7]. Ho, A. G., & Siu, K. W. M. (2012) and other scholars sorted out the relationship between concepts related to emotional design from new perspectives, enriching the theoretical system [8].

Since its introduction, the theory has been widely used in industrial products, daily necessities, cultural and creative products and other fields, providing a systematic approach for analyzing user needs and guiding product design. In the international design field, it is mostly applied to modern industrial products and intelligent products, focusing on function optimization and sensory design. In China, with the development of the traditional cultural and creative industry, emotional design theory has been gradually integrated with traditional culture, becoming an important tool for the modern transformation of traditional culture and helping designers create products with both contemporary aesthetics and cultural connotations.

2.3 Emotional Design of Cultural and Creative Products

In recent years, emotional design has gradually become an important research direction of cultural and creative product design. The core difference between cultural and creative products and ordinary products lies in their carried cultural connotations, and their value realization depends on establishing emotional resonance with users through cultural expression. Yu L. (2022) and other scholars explored the emotional design mechanism of Chinese cultural and creative products, confirming that emotional design can effectively improve the cultural value and user acceptance of products [10].

In the research of traditional cultural-themed cultural and creative products, many scholars have combined emotional design theory with specific cultural symbols, forming rich practical achievements. Li J.Z. (2024) et al. applied it to the cultural and creative design of Sanxingdui bronze wares, realizing the integration of Ancient Shu culture and modern cultural and creative products [9]; Chen, X. B., & Qian, Y. N. (2025) took Yunnan Wa Cat culture as the object and explored the application path of emotional design in the development of regional cultural and creative products [14]; Li, S., Yi, S. S., Zheng, R. H., et al. (2022) conducted research on museum cultural and creative products and sorted out relevant design rules and methods [13]. These studies have confirmed the effectiveness of emotional design in the modern transformation of traditional culture.

However, common problems still exist in current traditional cultural and creative products: some products lack cultural depth, some ignore practical functions, and others fail to meet user needs. In the research of Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products, existing achievements mostly focus on visual replication or semiotic analysis [2], lacking systematic exploration and empirical research based on the emotional design framework, and are mostly limited to the perspective of domestic communication, which is the core entry point of this study.

3. Methodology

This study adopts the case study method, and takes questionnaire survey as the core approach for data collection. The questionnaire is designed around users' cognition, aesthetic preferences and consumption attitudes toward the Eight Immortals culture, so as to quantify the characteristics of users' emotional demands and provide scientific support for the emotional design of Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products. The overall research logic is as follows: taking the emotional design theory as the framework, a targeted questionnaire is designed; data are collected online; reliability, validity tests and descriptive statistical analysis are conducted via statistical software; and finally, design paths are proposed by combining theory and data.

Based on the three-level theory of emotional design, combined with the communication status of the Eight Immortals culture and the design characteristics of cultural and creative products, the questionnaire is divided into four core sections. The first section collects demographic information, including age and occupation, to identify the target user group. The second section is a cultural cognition survey, covering the degree of understanding of the Eight Immortals figures, stories and the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs, so as to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of cultural communication. The third section is an aesthetic preference survey, including cognition of problems in the communication of traditional shapes, preference for innovation, choice of modern styles and recognition of innovative principles, corresponding to the visceral level needs. The fourth section is a consumption attitude survey, including views on practical functions, auspicious implications, cultural storytelling, social sharing value, cultural identity and acceptance of auspicious patterns, covering needs at the behavioral and reflective levels. Except for the single-choice questions in the demographic information section, all other items adopt the Likert 5-point

scale, quantifying users' attitudes with scores from 5 to 1 corresponding to "completely agree" to "completely disagree".

The questionnaire was distributed through a combination of online professional research platforms and social media. The respondents were potential consumers of cultural and creative products, with no restrictions on region or occupation. A total of 320 questionnaires were distributed. After excluding incomplete, homogeneous and overly quickly answered questionnaires, 303 valid questionnaires were finally obtained, with an effective recovery rate of 94.69%. The sample size meets the requirements of quantitative research and can effectively reflect users' real attitudes.

This study uses SPSS 26.0 statistical software to conduct three-step analysis. The first step is reliability analysis, which uses Cronbach's α coefficient to test the internal consistency of the scale. The second step is validity analysis, which verifies the construct validity through KMO test, Bartlett's test of sphericity and factor analysis. The third step is descriptive statistical analysis, which explores the characteristics of users' cognition, preferences and demands through indicators such as mean and percentage.

4. Results

This study conducted reliability, validity tests and descriptive statistical analysis on the data of 303 valid questionnaires using SPSS 26.0 statistical software. The results show that the research questionnaire has good reliability and validity, and the research data are true, reliable and effective, which can accurately reflect the perception, preferences and demand characteristics of potential consumers of cultural and creative products for Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products, providing scientific data support for the subsequent proposal of design strategies. The specific research results are as follows.

4.1 Results of Reliability and Validity Tests

The reliability test results show that the Cronbach's α coefficient of the scale in this survey is 0.915, which is much higher than the critical value of 0.7, indicating that the questionnaire scale has excellent internal consistency, the items are highly correlated with each other, and the survey data have high reliability, which can effectively reflect the real attitudes of users.

The validity test results show that the KMO value is 0.923, which is greater than the critical value of 0.7, indicating that the survey data have good appropriateness and are suitable for factor analysis; the chi-square value of Bartlett's test of sphericity is 2502.289, with 105 degrees of freedom and $p < 0.001$, indicating that there is a significant correlation between the items of the questionnaire, and the scale has good construct validity. The factor analysis results show that a total of 3 common factors were extracted after rotation, which are highly consistent with the three levels of visceral, behavioral and reflective levels of emotional design, with a cumulative variance explanation rate of 65.70%, which can explain most of the variable information. The communalities of all items are greater than 0.5, indicating that there is a strong correlation between the items and the common factors, which further verifies the validity of the questionnaire and also proves the rationality of this study taking the three-level theory of emotional design as the framework. In terms of demographic characteristics, the survey sample is dominated by young groups, with the 18-24 age group accounting for 72.94% (a total of 221 people), while the group aged 31 and above accounts for only 4.29% (only 13 people). The distribution of occupational identities is highly consistent with the age distribution, with college students accounting for 69.31% (a total of 210 people), which is consistent with the characteristics of the core consumer group of cultural and creative products.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity Test Results

Test Type	Indicator	Value
Reliability Test	Sample size	303
	Number of items	13
	Cronbach's α coefficient	0.915
Validity Test	KMO	0.923
	Bartlett sphericity χ^2 value	2502.289
	df	105.000

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Samples

The age distribution results of the survey samples show that there are 28 people under 18 years old, accounting for 9.24%; 221 people aged 18-24, accounting for 72.94%; 41 people aged 25-30, accounting for 13.53%; and only 13 people aged 31 and above, accounting for 4.29%. It can be seen that the survey sample is dominated by young people aged 18-24, who account for more than 70% of the survey samples

and are the core potential consumer group of Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products. This result is highly consistent with the overall characteristics of the cultural and creative product consumption market. With the upgrading of consumption concepts, young groups have become the main consumer group of cultural and creative products. They have an open consumption concept, pay attention to the aesthetic value, emotional value and cultural value of products, and are willing to pay for cultural and creative products with cultural connotations and design sense.

The occupational identity distribution results of the survey samples show that there are 210 college students, accounting for 69.31%; 40 enterprise employees, accounting for 13.20%; 33 freelancers, accounting for 10.89%; 19 institution/civil servants, accounting for 6.27%; and only 1 person with other identities, accounting for 0.33%. College students are the core group of this survey, and this result is highly consistent with the age distribution. Most young people aged 18-24 are college students, who have sufficient disposable time and a certain amount of disposable income, making them the core consumer group of cultural and creative products. At the same time, college students have a high level of cultural literacy and relatively high acceptance and recognition of traditional culture, making them the key audience for the modern communication of traditional culture.

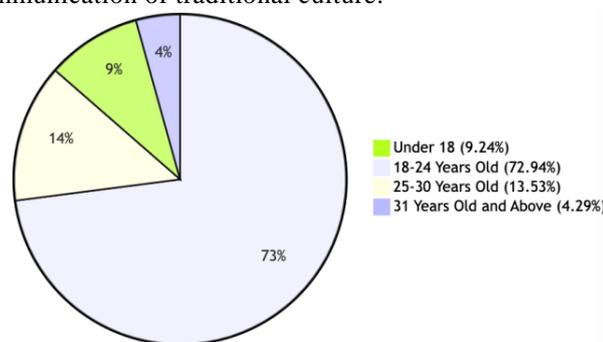


Figure 1: Pie Chart of Age Distribution of Survey Samples

4.3 Users' Cognitive Characteristics of the Eight Immortals Culture

According to the survey results on users' understanding of the images and classic stories of the Eight Immortals, the mean score of this item is 3.02, at a medium level, indicating that users have basic cognition of the Eight Immortals culture, but the proportion of users with in-depth understanding is relatively low. Specifically, 5.94% of users rated "fully familiar" as completely consistent, 28.05% as relatively consistent, and 33.99% as basically consistent, with a total of 67.98% of users having certain knowledge of the Eight Immortals and their classic stories; 26.40% of users rated it as barely consistent and 5.61% as completely inconsistent, accounting for 32.01% in total, meaning about 30% of users still have weak cognition of the Eight Immortals culture. The results show that the Eight Immortals culture has a certain cognitive foundation among the public, and classic stories such as the Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea are widely spread, laying a good user foundation for the development of Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products.

The survey results on users' understanding of the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs show that the mean score of this item is 2.62, below the medium level, indicating that users' awareness of the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs is significantly low, which is a weak link in the communication of the Eight Immortals culture. Specifically, only 5.61% of users rated "fully familiar" as completely consistent, 16.83% as relatively consistent, and 27.72% as basically consistent, totaling 50.16%, just over half; 33.33% of users rated it as barely consistent and 16.50% as completely inconsistent, accounting for 49.83% in total, nearly half. As an important part of the Eight Immortals culture, the awareness of the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs is much lower than that of the images of the Eight Immortals, mainly because the communication forms of the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs are relatively single, mostly concentrated in traditional artifacts and decorative arts, lacking effective popularization and promotion in modern communication scenarios, resulting in low user awareness. Meanwhile, some users have seen the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs but do not understand their cultural connotations and symbolic meanings, which also prevents the full play of the cultural communication value of the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs.

4.4 Users' Aesthetic Preference Characteristics for the Images of the Eight Immortals

The survey results on users' cognition of the communication problems of traditional images of the Eight Immortals show that the mean score of this item is 3.36, indicating that most users regard the single

form of traditional images as an important restrictive factor for their modern communication. Specifically, 11.22% of users completely agreed and 42.24% relatively agreed that “the single style of traditional images of the Eight Immortals that fails to meet modern aesthetics is a major obstacle to communication”, totaling 53.46%, more than half of the users; 22.44% of users rated it as basically consistent, 19.47% as barely consistent, and 4.62% as completely inconsistent. The results indicate that the realistic style and single form of traditional images of the Eight Immortals can hardly meet the aesthetic needs of contemporary users, and the modern innovation of visual forms is an inevitable requirement for the contemporary communication of the Eight Immortals culture.

The survey results on users' preference for the innovation of images of the Eight Immortals show that the mean score of this item is 3.50, indicating that users have high acceptance and preference for the innovative design of images of the Eight Immortals. Specifically, 16.17% of users completely agreed and 38.94% relatively agreed that “innovative images of the Eight Immortals are more attractive”, totaling 55.11%; 26.07% rated it as basically consistent, 15.84% as barely consistent, and only 2.97% as completely inconsistent. The results show that contemporary users, especially young users, have high acceptance of the modern innovation of traditional culture and are willing to accept innovative designs of traditional culture in line with modern aesthetics, providing a user foundation for the modern reconstruction of images of the Eight Immortals.

The survey results on users' choice of modern styles for images of the Eight Immortals show that the mean score of this item is 3.50, consistent with the score of preference for image innovation, indicating that modern design styles such as Guochao (Chinese Trend) and New Chinese Style better meet the aesthetic needs of contemporary users. Specifically, 19.14% of users completely agreed and 38.28% relatively agreed that “I prefer Guochao/New Chinese innovative styles to traditional realistic styles”, totaling 57.42%; 21.78% rated it as basically consistent, 15.18% as barely consistent, and only 5.61% as completely inconsistent. Guochao and New Chinese Style are popular among young groups in recent years, whose core is to combine traditional Chinese cultural elements with modern design language, retaining the core of traditional culture while conforming to contemporary aesthetic orientation, which is highly consistent with the modern transformation demand of the Eight Immortals culture.

The survey results on users' recognition of the innovation principles of images of the Eight Immortals show that the mean score of this item is 3.67, the highest in the aesthetic preference dimension, indicating that users do not pursue complete modernization in the innovation of images of the Eight Immortals, but require design reconstruction on the basis of retaining the cultural core and image characteristics, which is the core principle of innovative design of images of the Eight Immortals. Specifically, 25.08% of users completely agreed and 37.29% relatively agreed that “traditional images of the Eight Immortals should be innovated on the basis of retaining the characteristics of traditional figures”, totaling 62.37%; 22.11% rated it as basically consistent, only 10.89% as barely consistent, and 4.62% as completely inconsistent. The results show that contemporary users have a clear cognition of the innovative design of traditional culture, opposing both rigid replication of traditions and excessive innovation that loses the cultural core, and “upholding integrity while promoting innovation” is the core principle for the modern reconstruction of traditional cultural images.

4.5 Users' Consumption Attitude Characteristics toward Cultural and Creative Products

The survey results on users' emphasis on the practical functions of cultural and creative products show that the mean score of this item is 3.67, indicating that practical functions are an important indicator for users to evaluate cultural and creative products. The design of cultural and creative products should not only focus on the expression of cultural symbols, but also take into account practical use value. Specifically, 29.04% of users completely agreed and 33.66% relatively agreed that “practical functions are very important”, totaling 62.70%; 18.48% rated it as basically consistent, 13.20% as barely consistent, and only 5.61% as completely inconsistent. The results reflect an important change in the consumption market of cultural and creative products, that is, cultural and creative products are transforming from “collection-oriented” to “practical-oriented”. Users are no longer satisfied with cultural and creative products only with decorative and collection value, but hope that they can integrate into daily life with practical functions, realizing the unity of culture and practicality.

The survey results on users' acceptance of integrating auspicious motifs into daily life show that the mean score of this item is 3.72, indicating that users have high acceptance of traditional cultural motifs carrying auspicious implications and are willing to integrate them into daily consumption and life scenarios. Specifically, 26.73% of users completely agreed and 37.95% relatively agreed that “I am willing to use decorations with auspicious motifs in daily life”, totaling 64.68%; 19.47% rated it as basically consistent, 12.21% as barely consistent, and only 3.63% as completely inconsistent. The Eight Immortals

culture and the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs carry rich auspicious implications that meet the public's prayer psychology. The results provide a good market foundation for the contemporary application of the Eight Immortals and the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs, and designers can combine them with daily necessities to integrate auspicious culture into daily life.

The survey results on users' recognition of the auspicious implications of cultural and creative products show that the mean score of this item is 3.74, indicating that the auspicious implications of cultural and creative products can effectively improve users' purchase intention. Specifically, 25.08% of users completely agreed and 40.92% relatively agreed that "auspicious implications increase my purchase intention", totaling 66.00%; 20.13% rated it as basically consistent, 10.89% as barely consistent, and only 2.97% as completely inconsistent. Auspicious culture is an important part of Chinese folk culture, and the public often pays attention to the auspicious implications of products in the consumption process. The results show that in-depth exploration of the auspicious connotations of the Eight Immortals culture and its integration into the design of cultural and creative products can effectively enhance the market attractiveness of products.

The survey results on users' recognition of the social sharing value of cultural and creative products show that the mean score of this item is 3.68, indicating that users have high recognition of the social sharing value of cultural and creative products, and products with such value are more popular. Specifically, 25.74% of users completely agreed and 36.96% relatively agreed that "I am willing to buy cultural and creative products with social sharing value", totaling 62.70%; 20.79% rated it as basically consistent, 12.87% as barely consistent, and only 3.63% as completely inconsistent. Young groups are the main users of social media, and their consumption behavior has strong social attributes. They are willing to share products with design sense and cultural connotations on social media. The results indicate that integrating social sharing attributes into the design of Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products can effectively improve the communication power and attractiveness of products.

The survey results on users' recognition of the cultural storytelling of cultural and creative products show that the mean score of this item is 3.77, indicating that users believe that cultural storytelling can effectively enhance the value of cultural and creative products, and products with rich storytelling are more likely to establish emotional connections with users. Specifically, 27.06% of users completely agreed and 39.93% relatively agreed that "cultural storytelling can enhance the value of cultural and creative products", totaling 66.99%; 18.48% rated it as basically consistent, 11.55% as barely consistent, and only 2.97% as completely inconsistent. The Eight Immortals culture has rich classic narratives, and stories such as the Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea and the Eight Immortals Celebrating Longevity enjoy a broad cognitive foundation. The results show that in-depth exploration of the storytelling connotations of the Eight Immortals culture and integrating narrativity into the design of cultural and creative products can effectively improve the cultural and emotional value of products.

The survey results on users' recognition of cultural identity of cultural and creative products show that the mean score of this item is 3.79, the highest among all scale items, indicating that cultural connotation is the core factor for cultural and creative products to trigger users' emotional resonance and form cultural identity, and also an important entry point for the design of Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products. Specifically, 29.04% of users completely agreed and 39.27% relatively agreed that "cultural and creative products with rich cultural connotations can arouse my cultural identity during use", totaling 68.31%; 15.84% rated it as basically consistent, 13.20% as barely consistent, and only 2.64% as completely inconsistent. The results show that contemporary users, especially young users, have strong cultural confidence and high recognition of traditional culture, and can obtain emotional resonance and cultural identity from cultural and creative products with rich connotations, which is also the core value of traditional cultural and creative products.

Table 2: Core Valid Data (Based on Questionnaire and SPSS Analysis)

Dimension	Key Items	Mean Score
Cognition Dimension	Understanding of the Eight Immortals	3.02
	Understanding of the Hidden Eight Immortals	2.62
Aesthetic Preference	Recognition of Innovation on Traditional Basis	3.67
	Preference for Guochao/Neo-Chinese Style	3.50
Consumption Attitude	Attention to Practical Functions	3.67
	Awakening of Cultural Identity	3.79

5. Discussion

Based on the three-level framework of Emotional Design (visceral, behavioral, and reflective) and the analytical results of the survey data, this study conducts a systematic discussion on the emotional design path of Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products. It explores how to deeply integrate the Eight Immortals culture into product design from the perspective of users' emotional demands, so as to realize effective emotional expression and cultural communication of Eight Immortals cultural symbols in contemporary design. The core design concept of this study is "upholding integrity while promoting innovation". That is, on the basis of retaining the core connotation and visual characteristics of the Eight Immortals culture, design innovation is carried out from the three dimensions of visceral, behavioral and reflective levels, so as to create Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products with aesthetic, practical and cultural values, and achieve a deep emotional connection between products and users.

5.1 Visceral Level: Modern Reconstruction of Visual Form to Enhance Symbol Recognition and Aesthetic Appeal

The visceral level represents users' first sensory experience of products, and visual appearance is the core factor shaping visceral experience. The survey results show that users have an obvious perception of the monotony of traditional images of the Eight Immortals, and highly prefer modern design styles such as Guochao and New Chinese Style. Meanwhile, they require innovation on the basis of retaining traditional characteristics. This points out the core direction for the visceral design of Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products: to carry out modern reconstruction of visual forms on the basis of retaining the core characteristics of the Eight Immortals figures and the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs, so as to strengthen symbol recognition and improve the aesthetic appeal of products.

In the visual design of the Eight Immortals figures, designers should abandon the traditional realistic modeling style, take contemporary aesthetics such as Guochao and New Chinese Style as the guidance, simplify and refine the image characteristics of the Eight Immortals, and grasp the iconic visual elements of each immortal, such as the iron crutch and gourd of Li Tieguai, the lotus of He Xiangyu, the fish drum of Zhang Guolao, etc. On the premise of retaining image recognition, modern design lines, color matching and composition methods are adopted to make the images of the Eight Immortals more in line with the visual aesthetics of contemporary users. For example, flat and cartoon design techniques can be used to reconstruct the images of the Eight Immortals, simplify the detailed depiction of figures, strengthen their personality traits, and make the images more vivid and closer to the aesthetics of young groups. Guochao-style color matching can also be adopted, such as the combination of high-saturation red, yellow, blue and traditional ink colors, making the images of the Eight Immortals have both traditional charm and modern visual impact.

In response to the low recognition of the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs, designers should start from two aspects. First, simplify the visual form of the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs and strengthen their symbolic features. The shapes of the eight magic weapons are refined and reconstructed, abandoning complex traditional decorative details to create concise, modern and highly recognizable symbols of the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs. For instance, the lotus can be simplified into a geometric petal shape, and the sword into a linear shape, making the motifs more suitable for decorative application in modern products. Second, strengthen the associated communication between the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs and the images of the Eight Immortals. The motifs and corresponding figures are designed in combination, so that users can understand the connotation and symbolic meaning of the motifs while recognizing the figures, thus improving the recognition and communication power of the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs.

Meanwhile, designers should pay attention to the organic integration of the Eight Immortals visual symbols and product forms, avoiding simple splicing of cultural symbols and products. The images of the Eight Immortals and the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs should become an organic part of product design rather than mere decorative elements. For example, in the design of cups, the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs can be integrated into the line design of the cup body; in stationery design, the iconic features of the Eight Immortals can be integrated into the modeling design of stationery, so as to unify visual form and product form and improve the overall aesthetic value of products.

5.2 Behavioral Level: Balancing Practical Functions and Social Attributes to Realize Deep Integration of Culture and Life

The core of the behavioral level lies in the practical functions and usage experience of products. The survey data show that users regard practical functions as an important evaluation indicator of cultural and creative products, and also have a high recognition of their social sharing value. This requires that the design of Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products must break the current situation of

“emphasizing decoration over function”, realize the organic integration of cultural symbols and practical functions, and integrate social sharing attributes in combination with the social needs of young users. In this way, the Eight Immortals culture can be integrated into contemporary daily life through practical product carriers, achieving a deep integration of culture and life.

In product function design, designers should select product carriers closely related to users’ daily life in combination with the auspicious implications of the Eight Immortals culture, such as stationery, household goods, clothing accessories and daily gadgets. These carriers are close to users’ daily usage scenarios, enabling the Eight Immortals culture to truly integrate into users’ lives instead of being mere collections and decorative ornaments. After determining the product carrier, designers should first ensure the basic practical functions of the product, such as the writing function of notebooks, the drinking function of cups, and the comfort of throw pillows. On this basis, the cultural symbols and auspicious implications of the Eight Immortals are integrated to realize the unity of function and culture. For example, when designing an Eight Immortals-themed notebook, the basic practical functions such as paper quality and binding technology should be guaranteed first, and then the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs are integrated into the cover design, and the classic stories of the Eight Immortals are integrated into the inner page illustration design, making the product both practical and culturally connotative.

At the same time, designers should integrate social sharing attributes into product design in combination with the consumption characteristics and social needs of young users, so as to enhance the communication power and attractiveness of products. Young users have strong social attributes in their consumption behavior and like to share products with a sense of design, cultural connotation and personalization on social media. Designers can create the social sharing value of products from two aspects: first, create serialized and personalized product forms, such as Eight Immortals-themed blind boxes, stationery series of the Eight Immortals figures, and accessory series of the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs. Serialized products have stronger collection value and social topicality, which can stimulate users’ desire to collect and share. Second, pay attention to the detailed design of products and integrate creativity into them, such as adding rotatable Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs to Eight Immortals-themed keychains, and adding temperature-sensitive color-changing patterns of the Eight Immortals to Eight Immortals-themed cups, making products more interesting and interactive, and improving users’ usage experience and willingness to share.

In addition, designers should pay attention to the adaptability of products to usage scenarios, and design different product forms and functions according to different scenarios. For example, in office scenarios, design Eight Immortals-themed stationery and office ornaments; in home scenarios, design Eight Immortals-themed household goods and decorative ornaments; in travel scenarios, design Eight Immortals-themed accessories and portable gadgets. This enables products to adapt to users’ different usage scenarios and improves their practicality and frequency of use.

5.3 Reflective Level: Exploring Cultural Narrative and Auspicious Connotations to Stimulate Emotional Resonance and Cultural Identity

The reflective level is the key to establishing a deep emotional connection between products and users, whose core lies in the cultural meaning and symbol interpretation behind products. The survey results show that the cultural storytelling, auspicious implications and cultural identity of cultural and creative products are the dimensions that users care about most, with the highest average scores among all dimensions. This indicates that users’ spiritual and emotional demands for cultural and creative products are far higher than formal demands, which is also the core of the emotional design of Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products. The Eight Immortals culture is rich in folk narratives and auspicious implications. In product design, designers should not simply replicate the visual symbols of the Eight Immortals, but deeply explore the core connotation of the culture, integrate cultural narratives and auspicious implications into product design, so that users can perceive the spiritual connotation of the Eight Immortals culture in the process of using products, and trigger emotional resonance and cultural identity.

Firstly, deeply explore the auspicious implications of the Eight Immortals culture and carry out design expression in combination with contemporary users’ prayer psychology. The Eight Immortals culture carries abundant folk auspicious implications, such as longevity, peace, smoothness, blessing and good fortune. The Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs also have their own exclusive symbolic meanings, such as the gourd representing fortune and official rank, the lotus representing purity, and the sword representing exorcising evil spirits. Designers should combine these auspicious implications with the functions and forms of products, making them the core connotation of product design rather than mere decorative elements. For example, in Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products designed for

birthday scenes, the longevity implication of “the Eight Immortals Celebrating Longevity” can be highlighted, integrating auspicious elements such as peaches and auspicious clouds; in daily-use Eight Immortals-themed products, the auspicious implications of peace and smoothness can be emphasized, allowing users to gain psychological comfort and pleasure in using products and trigger emotional resonance.

Secondly, deeply explore the classic narratives of the Eight Immortals culture and integrate storytelling into product design, making products a carrier for the spread of cultural stories. The Eight Immortals culture has classic narratives such as “the Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea” and “the Eight Immortals Celebrating Longevity”, which have a broad cognitive foundation and contain rich spiritual connotations. For example, “the Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea” embodies the spirit of “displaying one’s divine power”, representing diversity, inclusiveness, enterprise and talent utilization, which is in line with the values of contemporary society; respecting the elderly embodied in “the Eight Immortals Celebrating Longevity” is an important part of traditional Chinese virtues. Designers can integrate these classic stories into product design, such as presenting the scene of “the Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea” on products through illustrations, reliefs, lettering and other forms, allowing users to revisit the classic stories and perceive the spiritual connotation behind them in the process of using products. Meanwhile, designers can also conduct a moderate modern interpretation of the classic stories of the Eight Immortals, combining contemporary values and lifestyles to make the stories closer to contemporary users’ lives and enhance their emotional resonance.

Finally, highlight the folk and inclusive nature of the Eight Immortals culture to make the culture closer to the public and strengthen users’ cultural identity. One of the core characteristics of the Eight Immortals culture is its folk and inclusive nature. Its members cover different social classes and are close to secular life, which enables the culture to be accepted and recognized by different user groups across class and age boundaries. In product design, designers should highlight this core characteristic of the Eight Immortals culture, avoid over-mystifying and religiousizing the culture, and carry out design expression in a way close to the public and life, so that users can feel the temperature of traditional culture from products and thus generate cultural identity. For young users, this cultural identity can be transformed into love for and willingness to spread traditional culture, promoting the inheritance and communication of the Eight Immortals culture.

6. Conclusion

Taking the Eight Immortals culture as a specific case, this study conducted an empirical research based on Donald Norman’s Emotional Design Theory, systematically explored the demand characteristics of the core consumer groups of traditional cultural-themed cultural and creative products, and proposed targeted emotional design paths. The results show that young people are the core target users of Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products. They have a basic cognition of the Eight Immortals figures and classic stories, but their awareness of the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs is relatively low. At the visceral, behavioral and reflective levels, users all highly prefer product forms that integrate traditional symbols with modern design language and attach equal importance to practical functions and cultural connotations.

Based on the survey results, this study constructs an emotional design path for Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products from the three dimensions of visceral, behavioral and reflective levels. At the visceral level, focusing on the core characteristics of the Eight Immortals figures and the Eight Immortals Hidden Motifs, the modern reconstruction of visual forms is carried out under the guidance of contemporary aesthetics. By simplifying the modeling and strengthening symbol recognition, the organic integration of visual expression and product form is realized. At the behavioral level, product carriers highly relevant to users’ daily life are selected, the basic practical functions of products are prioritized, and contemporary demands such as social sharing and personalized expression are integrated to create serialized and interesting product forms, enabling traditional cultural symbols to naturally integrate into contemporary life scenarios. At the reflective level, the core connotation and auspicious implications of the Eight Immortals culture are deeply explored, and cultural narratives are deeply integrated with product functions and forms, highlighting its folk and inclusive nature, so that users can perceive the spiritual value of traditional culture in the process of using products and form emotional resonance and cultural identity. This design path constructs a systematic emotional design framework for traditional cultural symbols, realizes the organic combination of theory and practice, and provides specific and operable practical guidance for the development of Eight Immortals-themed cultural and creative products.

The theoretical value of this study lies in applying the Emotional Design Theory to the research on the modern transformation of specific traditional cultural symbols, filling the research gap in the field of

emotional design of the Eight Immortals cultural plastic arts, enriching the application scenarios and research dimensions of the Emotional Design Theory in the design of traditional cultural-themed cultural and creative products, and providing a reference theoretical framework and research ideas for the modern transformation research of various other traditional cultural symbols. Meanwhile, this study carried out empirical research through the questionnaire survey method, completed data testing and analysis with the help of SPSS statistical software, explored the demand laws of core users of traditional cultural-themed cultural and creative products, and provided an empirical research paradigm from the user perspective for similar studies.

The practical value of this study is to provide specific and feasible emotional design strategies for the modern transformation of the Eight Immortals culture, a traditional cultural symbol, which can effectively solve the common problems of superficialization, homogenization and lack of emotional resonance in current similar cultural and creative products, and improve the market attractiveness and cultural communication efficiency of products. More importantly, the research ideas and design strategies of this study are not limited to a single cultural symbol, and its core logic can be transferred and applied to the cultural and creative development of various traditional cultural symbols, providing practical reference for the deep integration of traditional culture and modern life.

From the perspective of international research, the emotional design strategies proposed in this study provide a new reference path for the modern transformation of different types of traditional cultural symbols in various countries around the world. In the context of globalization, protecting and inheriting the diversity of world culture and realizing the modernization and contemporary communication of traditional culture are common research topics and practical problems faced by all countries in the world. Taking the Emotional Design Theory as the core framework, this study explores the core connotation of traditional cultural symbols through empirical research, combines the emotional needs of contemporary users, and uses modern design language to realize the deep integration of traditional culture and contemporary products. This research paradigm and practical ideas can provide a reference for countries around the world, especially those with rich folk culture and traditional art resources. Researchers and designers in various countries can combine local cultural characteristics and user needs, refer to the emotional design path of this study, promote the effective communication of local traditional culture through product forms that meet contemporary aesthetic and consumption needs, and contribute to the protection and contemporary development of world cultural diversity. The core value of this study lies in exploring effective research methods and design paths for the modern transformation of traditional cultural symbols, providing replicable and transferable experience for similar global research and practice, and promoting the innovative development of traditional cultural communication modes and cultural and creative design models.

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