From Form-Based Approach to Cross-Media Narrative Translation: Innovation and Practice in Book Design Teaching*

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Abstract: Under the background of media convergence and the transformation of the cultural industry, book design is shifting from the "form-oriented" teaching paradigm centered on material form to a cross-media design model guided by narrative system construction. Traditional teaching emphasizes binding techniques and visual expression, which is difficult to meet the demands of contemporary interactive publishing and cultural and creative industry for systematic narrative capabilities. Based on the cross-media narrative theory, this paper proposes a reconfiguration path of book design teaching through the "paper-based - digital - creative - spatial" collaboration. Taking the visual transformation project of the intangible cultural heritage of the Hezhe ethnic group as a practical case, this model is verified for its effectiveness in cultural decoding, narrative construction, and the cultivation of media integration capabilities. The research shows that this teaching paradigm can promote students' shift from single-form design to systematic narrative design, providing an operational path for the transformation of book design education.
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1. Introduction

Modern book design education is based on the Bauhaus layout system and has formed a "form-oriented" teaching paradigm centered on the physical form of the book. This paradigm emphasizes physical modeling elements such as layout grids, binding structures, printing techniques, and material selection. The course outcomes are usually in the form of paper publications, and the evaluation system focuses on visual aesthetics and craftsmanship completion. Although this paradigm has historical rationality in the industrial publishing system, in the context of the deep integration of digital media and the overall transformation of cultural production methods, its teaching logic centered on a single medium product gradually reveals structural limitations.

The development of cross-media narrative is reshaping the industrial logic and expression structure of book design. Interactive publishing practices represented by "Mystery Palace -如意琳琅图籍" have achieved the transformation from a single reading object to a systematic cultural product through a multi-media collaborative mechanism of "paper book + physical props + mobile application + offline space", and have set a crowdfunding record of over 20 million yuan, driving the systematic development of cultural heritage, study routes, and series sequels, and promoting the extension of the cultural development and consumption chain. [1] Similar practices have also been verified in cases such as "S. Thesus' Ship" and the MinaLima edition of "Harry Potter", indicating that book design is shifting from a medium design centered on form organization to an overall design logic centered on narrative system construction. However, existing research mostly focuses on product cases and form analysis, lacking a structural translation model for the teaching system [2][3].

In this context, book design teaching faces issues such as weakened narrative ability, single media structure, and an evaluation system that heavily emphasizes craftsmanship results. Therefore, how to achieve a transformation from the "form-oriented" teaching paradigm to the "cross-media narrative system construction" teaching paradigm has become a core issue that needs to be addressed urgently. Based on this, this paper takes the visual transformation project of the intangible cultural heritage of the Hezhe ethnic group as a practical carrier, constructs a cross-media narrative translation-oriented book design teaching model, integrates paper design, digital interaction, cultural development, and space display into a unified narrative structure, and explores the collaborative translation path

and teaching implementation mechanism of cultural content in the multi-media system.

2. Challenges and Transformation Demands in Book Design Education

The traditional teaching of book design has long been confined to the "form-oriented" paradigm, treating books as physical carriers of narratives, with the core of the teaching focusing on the closed-loop training of binding, layout, and printing techniques. Lu Jingren's concept of "book drama" contains narrative consciousness, but the teaching practice still adheres to the presentation of material forms [4]. This paradigm, although compatible with traditional book publishing business, forms a structural disconnection from the demands of emerging business models such as cultural puzzle books and IP-combined publications. This disconnection stems from the 固化 of book design concepts and urgently requires a shift from "binding" to the cultivation of overall design thinking. [5]Henry Jenkins' theory of "cross-media narrative" provides a theoretical framework to break through this limitation, emphasizing that stories should be developed collaboratively across multiple media platforms and construct a unified narrative world [6]. This theory has triggered a shift in the design field， such as the "Mystery Palace" series of the Palace Museum， which through the construction of an "实体书 +道具 + APP +实地探秘" experience system， achieved a successful transformation from a single publication to an immersive cultural product， creating a significant market premium [1]. This practice clearly indicates that cultural consumption is undergoing a profound transformation from "carrier consumption" to "narrative experience consumption".In response to this change， design teaching has shown systematic lag in course structure， training methods， and evaluation standards. The academic community has already paid attention to this issue (such as Jiang Xiao and Deng Xin pointing out the lagging teaching system [7]; Hang Jian emphasizing the ethical continuity of narrative in cultural translation [8])， but how to transform the cross-media narrative theory into an operational teaching system remains a core problem that needs to be solved urgently.

The current teaching system has significant limitations in three aspects： first， narrative takes a backseat to form，and layout design often sacrifices narrative rhythm for visual neatness； second， ability training is single， teaching stops at the production of paper-based products， lacking IP system development thinking； third， evaluation standards are narrow，with excessive emphasis on craftsmanship aesthetics，and the assessment of narrative integrity and commercial feasibility is absent [7]. This has led to a serious disconnection between talent cultivation and the demands of the industry for cross-media narrative architecture， IP system development， and user experience closed-loop design.

Therefore， promoting the transformation of book design teaching from the "form-centered" paradigm to the "narrative system-centered" paradigm is not only a response to theoretical development but also an inevitable choice to align with industrial upgrading and reshape educational competitiveness. Although existing research has identified problems and possible technologies， systematic teaching transformation plans are still lacking， which is precisely the starting point and practical value of this study.



Figure 1: The Paradigm Reconstruction Model from "Form-Based Orientation" to "Cross-Media Narrative Translation"

3. The reform path of book design teaching

This course is mainly targeted at undergraduate students of visual communication design who are in the third year or above. It consists of 48 class hours and adopts project-based teaching. It arranges four stages of teaching content. Centered on students, it encourages them to work in groups of 2-3. Oriented towards outcomes, it conducts experimental creation and design using the theme project of the Hezhe ethnic culture. During the course, it explores and practices the teaching reform path of transitioning from "form-centered" to "cross-media narrative system", gradually cultivating students' cross-media translation ability. The specific reform path is reflected in dimensions such as course goal reconfiguration → extraction and implementation path of cultural narrative core → cross-media system construction → evaluation system reconfiguration.

3.1 Reconfiguration of Course Objectives

The course adheres to the goal orientation of "knowledge as the foundation, ability shaping, and quality leading", and fully implements the OBE (Outcome-Based Education) concept. The traditional teaching model mostly revolves around proposition-based books (such as "The Hetai Ethnic Culture Album"), and the evaluation focuses on the binding technique and visual form aesthetics. The reformed course targets have been upgraded to guide students to construct a complete cross-media cultural narrative system. With the Hetai fishing and hunting culture as the unified narrative base, students are guided to complete a set of cross-media product system design with collaborative narration. It is transformed into a "five-in-one" cross-media narrative system integrating "physical puzzle books + intangible cultural heritage products + lightweight interaction (puzzle games) + AR recognition interaction + museum exhibition transformation".

The course goals thus form four progressive levels: First, cultural decoding ability, that is, the ability to extract narrative themes from literature, field materials, and case studies; Second, narrative construction ability, that is, the ability to organize scattered cultural materials into a narrative structure with characters, clues, situations, and rhythm; Third, medium translation ability, that is, allocating content according to the language logic of paper-based, physical, digital, and spatial media; Fourth, system integration ability, that is, coordinating the design of books, interaction, cultural products, and exhibitions as a unified IP system.

Table 1. Correspondence between curriculum goal reconstruction and student competency development

Target Levels	Morphological Paradigm	Cross-media narrative translation paradigm	Capability-oriented
Foundation Layer	Layout, Binding, Material Technology	Cultural Materials Organization and Visual Semantic Extraction	Cultural Decoding
Method Layer	Graphic layout and final presentation Narrative thread	Character relationships and world-building	Narrative construction
Expansion Layer	Single-vehicle medium of paper books	Differentiated expressions of paper-based, digital, cultural and creative, and spatial forms	Medium translation
Overall Layer	Evaluation of Homework Results	Integration of Cross-Media Outcomes and Design of Public Communication Scenarios	System Integration

3.2 The extraction of the core of cultural narrative and the implementation path of teaching

The project takes "Hezhe Ethnic Culture" as the unified narrative core, strictly adhering to the core principles of cross-media narrative translation, and constructing a product system with clear layers and complementary media. In the initial stage of the project, 26 students (9 teams) conducted data collection based on Hezhe Ethnic Culture, and under the guidance of the teacher, they classified the materials into five categories: "factual information, visual symbols, behavioral scenes, emotional memories, and communication value". This enabled books, digital interaction, cultural products, and spatial displays to share the same cultural foundation.

At the implementation level, the course was advanced in six phases: First, field research and data collection, emphasizing the establishment of problem awareness from intangible cultural heritage materials, historical context, and user insights; Second, AIGC-assisted knowledge integration, converting literature summaries, interview records, and visual samples into narrative keywords and image references, which is highly consistent with the current design practice model of "designers collaborating with AI for co-creation" [9]; Third, book prototype design, determining layout structure, binding method, reading clues, and graphic rhythm; Fourth, digital interaction expansion, designing interaction logic around H5 pages, AR recognition, and dynamic narrative; Relevant studies show that the digital protection of intangible cultural heritage based on AR technology can provide immersive dissemination channels for

ethnic cultures such as the Hezhe; This is highly consistent with the design module of digital interaction in the course [10]; Fifth, cultural product derivative development, combining cultural creativity to develop IP elements and cultural product design; Sixth, exhibition space translation, organizing the project results into scenarios for public display.



Figure 2: The Cross-Media Narrative Teaching Implementation Model for the Hezhe Ethnic Culture Project

3.3 Cross-media system construction

The organization method of the course outcomes determines whether the project can be transformed from classroom assignments into a system solution with the potential for display, dissemination, and industrial connection. The course outcomes are systematically organized in a matrix format of "paper-based - digital - cultural creation - space", enabling them to have the potential to transform from classroom assignments into a demonstrable, disseminable, and industry-connectable solution. The paper-based outcomes focus on theme books and reading systems; the digital outcomes cover interactive pages and online dissemination content; the cultural creation outcomes develop IP derivatives and brand expressions; the space outcomes point to exhibition design and public cultural touchpoints, and these several aspects form effective linkage. At the level of systematic output, the course requires students to form a "paper-based - digital - cultural creation - space" outcome matrix. The paper-based outcomes include theme books, binding and layout systems, reading trails, and narrative prototypes; the digital outcomes include H5 interactive pages, AR context expansion, dynamic narrative demonstrations, and online dissemination content; the cultural creation outcomes include IP visual elements, packaging souvenirs, series of derivative designs, and branding expressions; the space outcomes include exhibition concepts, wayfinding systems, public displays, and cultural dissemination touchpoints.

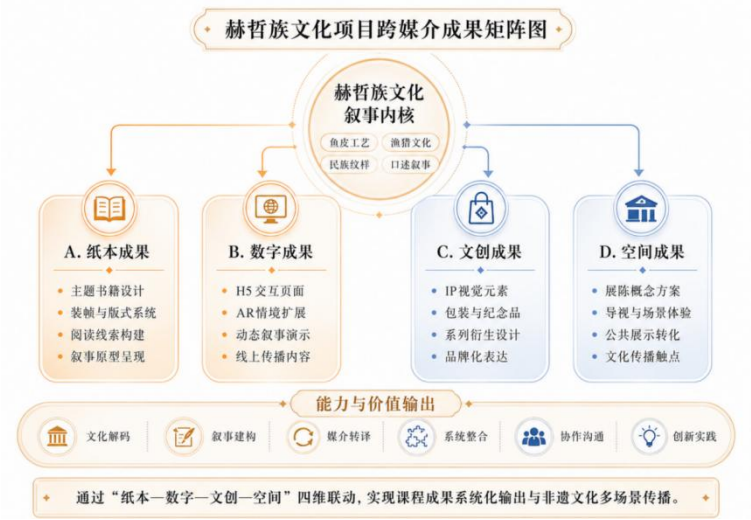


Figure 3: Cross-media Outcome Matrix of the Hezhe Ethnic Culture Project

The outcome matrix is further implemented at the application level, resulting in multi-media solutions that can be adopted by courses, school-enterprise cooperation, or local cultural and museum activities. Taking the "Hezhe Fishing Songs" theme as an example, the paper book serves the functions of knowledge dissemination and aesthetic reading; the digital interface undertakes the functions of online experience and interactive dissemination; cultural derivative products enhance the portability and consumption transformation of cultural symbols; and the spatial display can bring the project into museums, campus exhibitions, or study tours, completing the transformation from individual reading to public cultural experience.

3.4 Reconstruction of the evaluation system

The evaluation system is the key to the successful implementation of curriculum reform. The course evaluation has shifted from a single finished product evaluation to a comprehensive evaluation throughout the entire process. It not only focuses on the craftsmanship and visual quality of paper books and printed materials, but also pays attention to the depth of cultural decoding, narrative logic, the completeness of media translation, the application process of AIGC, and the completion degree of user experience.

The restructured evaluation system consists of five dimensions: cultural decoding and narrative depth account for 25%, examining whether students truly understand the cultural core and form meaningful narrative structures; media translation and system integration account for 25%, assessing whether there is a division of labor, complementarity, and closed-loop relationship among multiple media; AIGC application and process innovation account for 20%, examining whether the tool usage serves research, generation, iteration, and argumentation; user experience and interaction completion degree account for 15%, assessing whether the digital interface, AR experience, or exhibition flow is smooth; craftsmanship realization and visual quality account for 15%, ensuring that the professional basic skills of book design are not weakened. This evaluation structure retains the technical requirements of traditional book design while incorporating cultural narration, media systems, and innovation processes into the core indicators, fully aligning with the industry's demand for comprehensive design talents.

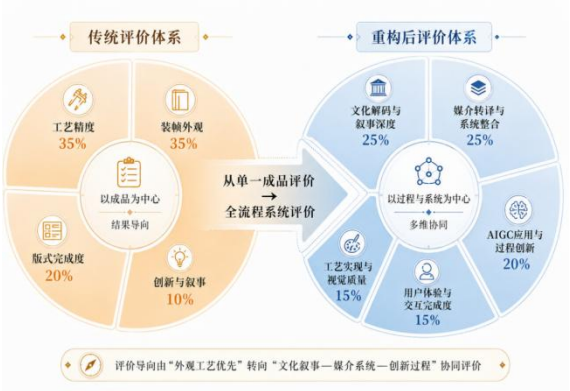


Figure 4. Reconstruction of the evaluation system for the book design course

4. Teaching effectiveness and discussion

After three rounds of comprehensive teaching practice exploration (2023-2026 academic year), the cross-media narrative teaching model has achieved observable and verifiable results in three aspects: outcome production, capacity building, and paradigm influence. This section aims to systematically present the professional recognition achieved by the teaching reform, quantify and verify its actual impact on students' ability cultivation, and then conduct theoretical discussions on the innovative value, implementation limits, and optimization direction of the model.

4.1 Professional certification of teaching outcomes

The effectiveness of the curriculum reform was first verified by industry recognition. Students' works received systematic recognition on national and international platforms, achieving a shift in evaluation from formal aesthetics to narrative construction. The work "Entering the Hezhe Ethnic Group" won the national first prize in the Visual Communication category of the "China Good Idea and National Digital Art Design Competition" in 2024, thanks to its cross-media narrative system. Other works received a total of 2 national awards and 3 provincial first prizes in the "National University Digital Art Design Competition (NCDA)". The works "Hezhe Patterns - AI Traceability" and "Hezhe Clothing Rhythm" were selected for the "2026 International Book Binding Art Exhibition" and were awarded "Through Multi-Media Collaboration to Build a Complete Cultural Experience System". In the past three years, a total of 16 groups of works received provincial-level or higher awards, with 73% of them having clear

cross-media narrative features, confirming the effective shaping of students' systematic creative ability by the teaching.

4.2 Quantitative analysis of students' ability growth

To objectively evaluate the effect of the transformation of the teaching model, the development of abilities of 129 students from the 2020 grade (traditional model) and the 2022 grade, 2023 grade (new model) was tracked and compared. Through professional reviews of course assignments (expert ratings from both inside and outside the school), it was found that students in the new model showed significant improvement in the following dimensions: Cultural translation depth: 94% of the new model students could establish a translation logic between cultural symbols and contemporary context in their works, which was twice the rate of the traditional model (47%); Media system thinking: 78% of the students' works presented the collaborative narrative of three or more media, and could clearly explain the narrative division of each medium. AIGC application and process innovation: 83% of the students could apply the AIGC tool system to the research, generation and iteration stages; the innovation score increased to 80% (traditional model was 30%). User experience and interaction completion rate: The smoothness of AR experience and the excellent rate of exhibition flow reached 85% and 82% respectively, which was over 35 percentage points higher than the traditional model. Process realization and visual quality: In the context of introducing new technologies, the basic professional skills remained stable, the excellent rate of visual quality remained above 80%, and the score of design logic reached 70%. The results show that the new teaching model centered on cultural translation and media integration effectively promoted the structured development of students' systematic design thinking and innovative practical ability.

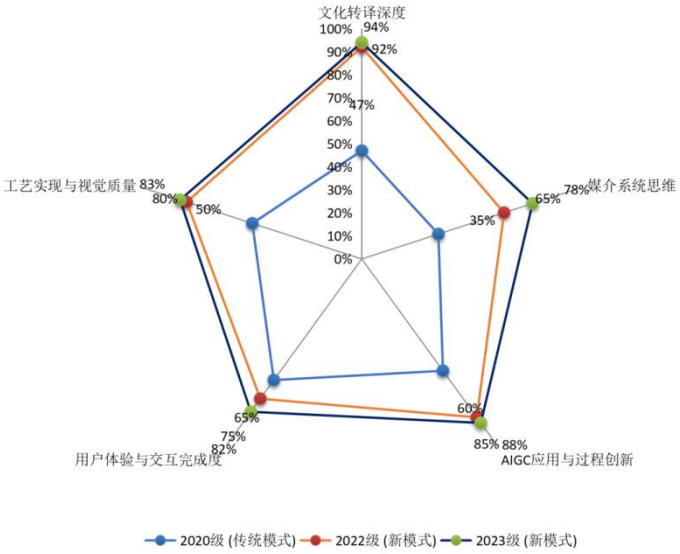


Figure 5: Comparison Chart of Students' Abilities in Cross-Media Narrative Teaching Model over the Past Four Years

4.3 The Boundaries and Iterative Path of Teaching Innovation

This study has confirmed that the cross-media teaching model centered on narrative-driven approach can effectively break through the limitations of traditional form-based teaching, helping students to construct a cultural translation logic of "symbol extraction - context transformation - media adaptation" and a multi-dimensional immersive narrative experience loop of "paper-based - digital - physical", and the cultivated comprehensive design ability highly meets the talent demands of the digital transformation of the publishing industry. However, this teaching model still has structural contradictions in its practical implementation, manifested as insufficient depth of media research caused by cross-media extensive learning, mismatch between long-term creative needs and traditional course class hours settings, and the difficulty of quantifying the effectiveness of media narrative collaboration in the existing evaluation system. To address these issues, in the future, we can decompose and restructure cultural research, media grammar, and modularized system integration course systems, build a gradient technical support system to balance technical barriers and creative freedom, and introduce dynamic evaluation indicators such as narrative coherence and media contribution, combine user real measurement data to improve the scientific teaching evaluation mechanism, and achieve the optimization and iteration of the teaching model.

5. Conclusion

This article takes the structural transformation of book design education in the context of media convergence as the starting point, and conducts research by focusing on the limitations of the "form-based" teaching paradigm and the construction path of the "cross-media narrative system". Through the teaching practice of non-material cultural heritage design of the Hezhe ethnic group, the feasibility of driving collaborative design of paper, digital, cultural products and space with a unified cultural theme has been verified.

The research shows that the core issue of book design has shifted from simple form and process training to the cultivation of the system organization ability of cultural narrative. Cross-media narrative translation not only redefines the media boundaries of books, but also promotes the shift of design education from a single outcome-oriented approach to the cultivation of systematic design thinking. During this process, the teaching model has achieved progressive ability shaping of cultural decoding, narrative construction and media translation through structured project design. Future research can further expand to real industry collaboration and cross-cultural context verification to enhance the applicability and promotion value of this teaching model.

Note:

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