

Contemporary Translation of Local Historical and Cultural Symbols and Research on IP Routing

-- A Case Study of Lu Xun IP in Shaoxing

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Abstract

This study explores the contemporary translation and IP development of local historical and cultural symbols, taking the Lu Xun IP in Shaoxing as a representative case. Against the backdrop of increasingly diverse local cultural IP developments and the insufficient research on spiritual symbol IPs centered on historical figures, this research deconstructs the full-chain practice of Lu Xun IP creation. Through the methods of literature review, case study and semiotic analysis, the study first identified the core values extracted from Lu Xun's spiritual legacy for IP transformation. Then decoding the symbolic meaning of "brother Xun" persona and analyzing the translation mechanism from a serious literary mater to an approachable cultural figure. Furthermore, this research examines the collaborative logic behind the "product-space-communication" ecosystem. Based on these analysis, it proposes a three-level dynamic translation model and extracts a five-stage method for the personification translation of historical figures. Furthermore, this paper investigates the ethical boundaries surrounding the creation of intellectual property rights for famous individuals and the tension between entertainment values and cultural authenticity. This research aims to develop a theoretical model for transforming famous historical figures into intellectual property and to outline effective strategies for the sustainable development of cultural tourism and creative industries.

Keywords

Local Historical and Cultural Symbols; IP Routing; Lu Xun; Personification Translation; Shaoxing.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the use of intellectual property (IP) to revitalise local cultural heritage has become an emerging global trend. An increasing number of regions are recognising the value of transforming cultural resources. Historical and cultural assets, in particular, can be successfully transformed into highly distinctive intellectual property that evokes an emotional response in the public, thereby stimulating the development of the creative industries and boosting tourism. In China, there has been a significant increase in local intellectual property projects, ranging from the pioneering success of the Palace Museum's cultural and creative products to the immersive experiences offered by Xi'an's Tang Dynasty Everbright City, to name but a few. However, within this diverse landscape, one specific area remains relatively untapped: intellectual property centred on significant historical figures and imbued with spiritual symbolism. Unlike physical heritage sites or traditional crafts, the legacy of historical figures is of an abstract nature – it consists of ideas, writings and intellectual values. This abstract nature, of course, presents unique challenges for the development of intellectual

property rights and raises a fundamental question: how can intangible cultural heritage be transformed into cultural products for consumers without losing its essence in the process?

Worldwide, research into the development of cultural intellectual property is gradually shifting from small-scale 'form-oriented design' towards bespoke approaches to brand building. At a global level, theoretical frameworks such as the 'theory of cultural heritage interpretation' and 'destination marketing theory' offer valuable insights into how cultural resources can be transformed into meaningful experiences [1, 2]. However, a significant gap remains: the symbolic and spiritual capital associated with historical figures has so far received little systematic attention. Whilst there are numerous case studies, few have attempted to explore the underlying mechanisms of their transformation and develop models based on them. The intellectual property derived from Lu Xun's connection to Shaoxing is an excellent example of such a case, as this literary giant has been transformed into a widely recognised figure known as 'Lu Xiong'. His success encourages us to systematically explore the logic behind this phenomenon.

Based on the above research gaps, this study proposes four interrelated core research questions.

RQ 1- How is the "spiritual core" of the Lu Xun IP identified and refined for IP transformation?

RQ 2- What is the mechanism through the transformation from a serious literary master to the approachable "Brother Xun"?

RQ 3- How can the three dimensions of "product", "space" and "dissemination" interact within Lu Xun's IP ecosystem to create a mutually reinforcing cycle?

RQ 4- Can the experience with Lu Xun's IP in Shaoxing provide universal strategies for other hometowns of historical figures?

To answer these questions, this study adopts a qualitative approach using a range of methods. The case study focuses on Lu Xun's IP in Shaoxing, as this is particularly suitable due to its typical nature, comprehensiveness and transferability potential. The data were drawn from various sources, including official documents, databases and social media content. Three analytical methods were applied. The literature review serves to establish a "database on the legacy of Lu Xun's spirit" as a theoretical foundation. The case analysis reconstructs the contextual scenarios of IP development practices. The semiotic analysis deciphers the hidden symbolic meanings in the figure of "Brother Xun". This study aims to deconstruct the holistic mechanism of Lu Xun's IP in Shaoxing, to develop a translation model for symbol-based intellectual property, and to provide theoretical and practical guidance for the development of Other IP based on historical and cultural figures.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Domestic Literature

The research on the development of local cultural IPs in China has undergone through three distinct and identifiable stages.

In the early stage (around 2010), research focused on symbolic extraction and product design. Scholars' primary focus was on researching how to incorporate traditional patterns, ornamentation and architectural elements directly into modern product design. However, at that time, this research remained largely confined to the field of design and had not yet developed into a systematic concept of 'intellectual property'.

During the development phase (2015–2019), cultural and creative products experienced exponential growth, epitomised by the success of the 'Palace Museum' series. During this period, researchers began to shift their focus from 'how to design?' to 'why has this been so successful?', emphasising the narrative strategies, emotional triggers and brand-building behind these

symbols. At this stage, the term 'cultural intellectual property' indeed attracted widespread attention and gained general recognition within academic circles.

The in-depth phase (since 2020) is characterised by typological distinctions and the investigation of mechanisms. With the emergence of diverse case studies such as the Tao Xi River in Jingdezhen and the 'City of Eternal Night' from the Tang Dynasty in Xi'an, scholars gradually realised that 'intellectual property of local culture' cannot be confined to a single field of research [3].

Nevertheless, significant gaps remain: 'spiritual and symbolic intellectual property', which focuses on historical figures, has not yet received sufficient systematic attention. Whilst there are numerous case studies, only a few investigations have developed the underlying translation mechanisms into transferable theoretical models [4]. Furthermore, the contradiction between the short-term use of cultural assets and long-term ecological development has not yet been resolved. Many projects lack the patience and skills required for the systematic promotion of a worldview. This leads to insufficient further development of the resulting outcomes and hinders the realisation of sustainable development.

2.2. International Literature

Although there is no exact equivalent concept for "local historical figure IP" exists in international scholarship, western scholarship does offer valuable theoretical support. The heritage interpretation theory proposed by Freeman Tilden in 1957 remains deeply influential today, arguing that the goal of heritage interpretation is not "to convey information", but "to evoke resonance"; not "to explain its appearance" but "to reveal essence"[1]. This matches closely with the logic of translating symbols into meanings that this study explores. Contemporary scholars have extended this line. One influential framework suggests that successful heritage interpretation should achieve transformation across a "cognitive - emotional - behavioral" hierarchical level [5], which provides valuable reference for the evaluation of cultural IP development. Philip Kotler and his colleagues put forward the theory of place marketing, which essentially treats cities or regions as marketable brands [2]. Simon Anholt's further developed this idea with the concept of "competitive identity", arguing that place branding requires integrating multiple dimensions of policy, investment, tourism, culture and talent. All of these elements contribute to a coherent narrative system [6].

International relevant practice cases also offer valuable references for the research. In the UK, Stratford-upon-Avon has transformed Shakespeare's cultural heritage into a competitive tourism destination by spatially integrating his birthplace, former residence and theatres, together with year-round drama festivals. This practice provides a typical model for the integrated development of regional IP. Meanwhile, though the Harry Potter IP a fictional character rather than a real historical celebrity, its full-industry-chain development mode, including studio tours, themed merchandise and transmedia expansion, also offers significant implications for the industrialization of historical celebrity IP.

3. Findings and Results

This section presents the key empirical findings derived from the analysis of Shaoxing's Lu Xun IP, structured in accordance with the four research questions proposed previously. Through literature review, case study, and semiotic analysis, this study reveals the core logic, operational mechanism, ecosystem synergy, and transferable implications of spiritual symbol-type IP development.

3.1. Spiritual Core Refinement: The Principles of Selective Extraction

The first key finding centers on the extraction and refinement of Lu Xun's spiritual legacy in the process of IP transformation. Analyses have shown that Shaoxing's image promotion (IP) did

not adopt Luo Xin's intellectual system in its entirety, but rather followed the principle of 'selective condensation', using three criteria to determine which aspects of Luo Xin's complex intellectual legacy should be adapted: priority given to accessibility, priority given to visual representation, and priority given to lifestyle. Based on Lu Xun's works, letters and diaries, more than forty elements relating to Shaoxing were identified from the 'Lu Xun Intellectual Heritage Database', including the 'Herb Garden', the 'Samui Library', the 'Black Boat' and 'Fertile Soil'. However, not all elements were given equal attention during the development process of the intellectual heritage. An analysis of the Lu Xun Museum's exhibition strategy and tourism promotional material reveals a clear selective logic in the presentation. The exhibition space did not focus exclusively on Lu Xun's role as the 'soul of the nation' or as a cultural critic, but shifted the focus to his childhood memories and details of local everyday life. This reflects a remarkable shift in his public image. In the mid-20th century, the official narrative portrayed Lu Xun as a revolutionary thinker and intellectual leader [7]. However, in the process of shaping Lu Xun's contemporary image, those responsible often resort to selectively drawing on Lu Xun's autobiographical works — particularly **Morning and Evening Fragments** — to create an image that is more readily accepted by the public. Among the elements that have been strategically 'omitted' are Lu Xun's polemical essays, as well as his complex personal relationships — content that is difficult to reduce to a single positive image. At the same time, the principle of 'editing' prioritised elements suitable for visual presentation over abstract philosophical concepts — such as the character for 'morning' engraved on his desk, and scenes woven into his daily life (the medicinal herb garden and attending village plays). This selective approach laid the foundation for the subsequent translation process. This reflects Tilden's realisation that interpretation does not lie in depicting everything, but in determining 'what should be revealed' [1].

3.2. Personification Translation Mechanism: From "Solemn Master" to "Approachable Brother Xun"

The second research question examines the mechanisms by which a serious author transforms the character of 'Brother Xun' into one with which readers can identify. A semiotic analysis of the portrayal of 'Brother Xun' in the 'Q' version reveals that this is a process of consciously deconstructing and reconstructing the visual symbols associated with Lu Xun. Classic elements are preserved, including the mustache, straight hair, stern expression, are retained, but exaggerated into cute feature — The beard reduces two small curved lines, the hairstyle simplified, and the stern expression soften into a gentle smile. Moreover, the enlarged head and oversized glasses follow "cute culture", conveying a signal of innocence and warmth [8]. This adaptation bridges the psychological gap between historical figures and contemporary audiences.

A narrative analysis of the 'Lu Xun Brothers' series shows how literary elements are transformed into a consumable narrative experience. Each character in this series is linked to a specific scene from Lu Xun's works, such as 'The Inscription of the Character "Morning"', 'The Wasp Sting' and 'A Visit to a Village Performance'. These adaptations present the narrative in the form of accessible, easy-to-understand narrative fragments, requiring no prior literary knowledge to be understood. This approach is essentially consistent with that proposed by Ham [4]. Namely, users first recognise literary metaphors (cognition), then form an emotional bond with characters they like (emotion), and finally develop a desire to collect or share related merchandise (action).

Ultimately, through participants' observations of the interactive performance by the characters known as 'Lu Xun's Brothers', staged in Lu Xun's hometown, we were able to identify a clear and well-defined set of behavioural norms.

This mascot follows a fixed route connecting key locations, uses standardised phrases when communicating with visitors, and strikes easily recognisable 'literary' poses. The interaction script deliberately avoids intrusive content, focusing primarily on friendly interactions, photo opportunities and a relaxed, casual atmosphere. Meanwhile, the 'Lu Xun Brothers' sticker pack on WeChat has been downloaded over 500,000 times, integrating the character into everyday digital communication. This fusion with social media represents the final phase of the process of adaptation through human embodiment: in this phase, the figure is no longer confined to sites of cultural heritage, but becomes an integral part of everyday social interactions. This reflects the concept of 'myth-making in everyday life' put forward by Barth [9].

3.3. Product-Space Ecosystem: Synergistic Collaboration Mechanisms

The third finding sheds light on the mechanisms behind the synergistic effects between the Lu Xun IP products and the communications ecosystem. The research findings show that the success of the Shaoxing model is not based on a one-dimensional development, but is the result of the comprehensive integration of these three subsystems.

From special books and stationery to creative kitchenware, our goal is to increase market penetration in the world of cultural products by translating brand value into tangible items, such as stickers, cool boxes, and entry-level products priced under 50 yuan, like stickers, cool boxes, and postcards, targeting a broad audience and emphasising aesthetic appeal. Mid-range products (such as mystery boxes, soft toys, and themed drinks) are priced between 50 and 200 yuan. These products are aimed at souvenir collectors and enhance the story-based experience. High-end products priced at over 200 yuan (such as umbrellas and limited-edition items from the Literary Masters Collaboration Series) are aimed at core supporters and focus on acquiring cultural capital.

The interior design of the "Lu Xun" house followed the "small renovation" strategy. The previously unused storeroom was transformed into a space called "Afternoon Tea in the Bai-Cao Garden", adding new, contemporary features whilst retaining the building's original structure. In addition, special photo spots were set up in areas corresponding to the illustrations, giving visitors ample opportunities to create their own content. Furthermore, new business ventures such as the Lu Xun Library, the "Sanwei" photography gallery and the cultural creative restaurant have helped to enhance the visitor experience, without diminishing the historical character. The spatial design of the Lu Xun House connects the historic section with the extensions of the literary environments and memorial spaces, thereby creating a much more profound tourist experience.

In the area of communication, the strategy focuses on cross-platform integration, which includes the official public account on WeChat, short-video platforms (Douyin), online lifestyle and social commerce platforms (Rednote), as well as collaborations with key opinion leaders (KOLs). The analysis reveals a clear division of labour between these platforms. The official public account on WeChat produces content such as explanations of cultural heritage sites, pre-event previews and post-event video summaries. WeChat produces content such as explanations of cultural heritage, pre-event previews and post-event video summaries, and serves as an authoritative voice for strengthening cultural influence; the videos on Douyin focus on live streaming and interactions with animal mascots, visits to themed locations, and product unboxing videos. All platforms have been optimised for algorithmic recommendations and rapid dissemination; however, Rednote pursues a different strategy for its content, focusing on the fusion of aesthetics and lifestyle, and bringing 'Brother Xun's' products and locations to the fore within the inspiring shopping contexts that consumers crave.

Consequently, product sales increase the number of people in physical stores; The in-store experience encourages sharing on social media; content on social media increases awareness of the product and the desire to purchase it. Crucially, each element reinforces the same core

message rather than competing narratives. - reinforces the concept of “Brother Shun”, which is easy to approach and friendly. This alignment confirms Kotler's theory of local marketing. According to it, successful local brands must maintain a consistent narrative across all communication channels [2]. An intellectual property only achieves sustainable development when products, places, and communication channels function as an integrated system, rather than as separate, independent projects. The Shaxing case demonstrates that an intellectual property (IP) ecosystem can achieve sustainable development only when products, spaces, and communication channels function as an integrated system, rather than as separate, independent projects.

3.4. Transferability: Toward a Model for Historical Celebrity IP Development

The following analysis aims to elucidate the key mechanisms behind the success of ‘IP Lu Xun’ in Shaoxing and the conditions for its implementation. The study identifies three fundamental mechanisms in this regard. The first mechanism is the strategy of ‘collaborative narrative innovation’, that is, the rearrangement of elements from the biographies of historical figures to construct a coherent and easily understandable narrative world. The narrative in Shaoxing is based primarily on Lu Xun’s autobiography **Morning Flowers Picked at Dusk**, and focuses on childhood memories, a sense of belonging to his hometown, and his personal development, rather than covering his entire intellectual legacy [10]. The second mechanism is the characterisation, whereby historical figures are transformed into endearing characters through visual design and interactive text. In his cartoon version, ‘Brother Sean’ retains a sufficient visual resemblance to the real Lu Xian, whilst at the same time incorporating the traditions of ‘charm culture’—a style that conveys harmless and unassuming traits [8]. Text-based interaction with the mascot reinforces this concrete characterisation and creates a consistent emotional connection across all touchpoints. The third mechanism is the integration of space, product and communication, which ensures that the physical environment and the commercial products are aligned and work together to reinforce the same narrative. Taking the ‘Hundred Herbs Garden’ as an example – a place now inextricably linked to the works of Lu Xun – visitors can perceive a coherent narrative at every level of the experience[11].

It depends on three main criteria as to whether this system can be transferred. First, there must be sufficient and meaningful biological information about the historical individual to enable the construction of a strategic narrative. Second, the heritage site must have adequate capacity to accommodate new activities without compromising its authenticity. Finally, development must be managed by a governance framework with integrated management skills, capable of uniting the preservation of cultural heritage with the development of the tourism and economic sectors. In addition to the lessons learned from successful case studies, and while always taking potential risks into account, this paper also recommends adapting strategies to local conditions.

4. Discussions

4.1. Three-Layer Dynamic Translation Model and Five-Step Personification Translation Method

Based on the findings of previous studies, this study proposes a three-layer dynamic translation model that considers the development of intellectual property related to historical figures as an integrated process. The first phase is ‘Extraction of the Self’, which involves a systematic evaluation of a historical figure's legacy to identify the elements suitable for modification; the second stage is ‘Characterisation’, which converts these extracted elements into archetypes of characters that are easy to understand; while the third stage is “Ecosystem Building”, which integrates the products, spaces and distribution channels into a single, self-reinforcing system.

Within the framework of this model, the following 'five-step method for character translation' explains the operational logic of the second level. 'Spiritual Definition' seeks to explain which aspects of a historical figure's legacy can effectively be transformed; 'Image Design' translates these elements into visual formats, striking a balance between recognisability and appeal; 'Contextual Integration' places the visualised figure within concrete and meaningful narrative contexts; 'Product Development' extends the figure to formats available for consumption; and finally, 'Community Engagement' enables the public to engage with the figure's evolving story.

4.2. Ethical Boundaries in Historical Celebrity IP Development

The most important lesson from the Shaoxing case is that the successful development of historical intellectual property depends not only on effective adaptation mechanisms but also on clearly defined ethical boundaries that serve to resolve the fundamental tension between economic sustainability and cultural authenticity. Three principles concerning ethical boundaries can be drawn from this case. First: spatial separation: while preserving the atmosphere of the original cultural heritage site, elements intended to attract visitors are located in the surrounding area. These areas allow visitors to experience the authentic historical ambience and comfortable commercial facilities without the two becoming mixed. Second: narrative accuracy: when presenting literary and historical images, it is important to adhere strictly to the principle of accuracy. The third ethical boundary is support for values that prohibit the trivialisation of a truly serious historical experience. Take Lu Xun as an example: his political struggles and personal suffering should under no circumstances be treated as entertainment. These three principles collectively constitute what is known as 'restricted innovation': the development of intellectual property whilst upholding cultural dignity. Without these restrictions, historical intellectual property risks falling prey to 'Disneyfication', whereby complex historical narratives are simplified into commodified spectacles [12].

5. Conclusion

This study aims to examine how local historical and cultural symbols can be translated into intellectual property, using the intellectual property of 'Xiaoxing Lu Shun' as a representative case study. Using methods of literature review, case study and semiotic analysis, the study examined four interrelated issues: the refinement of the spiritual core, the embodiment-based mechanisms of translation, the ecosystem comprising product, place and publication, and the conditions for transferability.

The success of the 'Shaoxing Lu Xun' IP demonstrates the achievements of a systematic translation mechanism. Firstly, elements from Lu Xun's complex intellectual legacy that evoke a sense of identification and lend themselves to visualisation have been selectively extracted. Secondly, through 'chibi-style' design and scripted interactions, this literary giant has been deliberately transformed into a warm and approachable 'Brother Lu Xun'. Thirdly, an integrated ecosystem has been established in which products, physical spaces and cross-platform communication mutually reinforce one another, collectively articulating a single core narrative. Based on these insights, this study proposes a dynamic translation model comprising three stages: 'core distillation', 'anthropomorphic transformation' and 'ecosystem construction'. Specifically addressing the second stage, it elaborates on a five-stage method for anthropomorphic translation (spiritual identification, image shaping, contextual embedding, product development and community activation).

In addition to the translation mechanism, this study also examines the ethical boundaries involved in the commercialisation of cultural heritage. The following three principles – spatial differentiation, narrative accuracy and preservation of value – complement one another to strike a balance between economic viability and cultural authenticity, to avoid the risk of 'Disneyfication'. Although the case in Saxony offers a system that could be applied in other

places, this study shows that its success ultimately depends on local circumstances. This includes the biographical complexity of historical figures, the flexibility of available space, and the presence of an integrated system of governance.

In conclusion, this study deepens the theoretical understanding of the development of symbolic-spiritual intellectual property rights, It has also influenced practical strategies for the sustainable development of cultural tourism and the creative industries.

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