

Sustaining traditional clothing styles and cultural heritage: A multiple case analysis approach

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Keywords: cultural heritage, traditional styles, Chinese styles, traditional textile techniques

Rationale and Research Questions. The importance of sustaining traditional clothing and textile techniques has been increasingly realized by nations in a rapidly globalizing world (Audita et al., 2023; Cao & Gao, 2022), especially by the nation with the world's largest consumer market, China (Liu & Xing, 2017; Sui & Liu, 2018). The Chinese traditional styles and textile heritage have been recognized as one of the most influential sources for Western designers to get oriental inspiration and create Asian chic designs (Sui & Liu, 2018; Yu et al., 2001). Global brands have utilized Chinese-inspired designs and patterns to launch product lines, catering to the rise of wealthy Chinese consumers. For China's domestic fashion practitioners, historical and traditional Chinese clothing styles and textile techniques provide a great repertoire for creative designs, a cultural context for the product, and brand positioning with less international competition. However, it is still challenging to preserve Chinese traditional clothing styles and textile techniques, especially among younger generations. With the diffusion of global fashion brands in China, younger generations are embracing Western-style clothing, making it difficult to sustain demand for traditional Chinese clothing styles or cultural fashion. In addition, cultural appropriation of Chinese traditions and cultural heritage also causes the dilution and loss of authentic traditional techniques and cultural identity. For instance, there has been a trend towards incorporating Chinese motifs, designs, and fabrics into Western-style clothing; however, many designs use Chinese elements in a way that is not respectful or with incorrect interpretations, creating a negative influence on acceptance of Chinese traditions in fashion consumption among young people.

The success of sustaining the traditional Chinese styles and textile techniques depends on winning younger generations' passion and acceptance. Young consumers are looking for fashionable and personalized products that empower them for self-expression. Simply extracting the silhouette structure and pattern elements from traditional clothing and pasting them into modern design cannot make appealing designs (Gu & Lu, 2021; Yen & Hsu, 2017). However, how could traditional clothing styles and cultural elements be infused with modern fashion design creatively to meet the modern aesthetic needs of young consumers while maintaining traditions and cultural heritage? The fashion industry is undergoing a dramatic transformation by information technologies. Increasing evidence shows that technologies facilitate expanding the scope of preservation and sustaining traditional clothing styles and textile techniques (Jiang et al., 2019). The advent of the metaverse extends consumer experiences to immersive digital market space. Scholars have started exploring the

possibility of virtually simulating historical costumes (Kang et al., 2015; Villarreal, 2020). Some practitioners believe metaverse virtual fashion shows or exhibitions could be created to showcase traditional styles and educate younger generations more entertainingly. However, can immersive experiences with traditional styles and cultural heritage in a metaverse gain younger consumers' appreciation and acceptance of traditional clothing styles and cultural heritage? In recent years, domestic brands have been exploring and practicing strategies to make use of traditions to differentiate their offerings with fashionability and uniqueness, and hence win the hearts of young people. Some other brands are infusing digital technologies with traditional styles and elements and gradually winning the young consumer market. To this end this study attempts to explore successful practical examples to search for answers to the following questions: (1) Can traditional clothing design elements be creatively expressed in modern fashion and cater to younger generations' need? And (2) How can digital strategies contribute to the preservation and promotion of traditional styles and cultural heritage? The purpose of this study is to search for success factors to better sustain traditional clothing styles and cultural heritage among younger generations.

Multiple Case Analysis and Findings

Chuhetingxiang 楚和听香. *An innovative expression of traditional clothing style in modern fashion: Reviving Traditional*

Beauty. Chuhetingxiang focuses on contemporizing Chinese traditional culture and aesthetics to lead modern lifestyles. For instance, the Autumn/ Winter 2021 collection called "Asking for



Figure 2. UOOYAA's Autumn/ Winter 2019 show (Topfashion, 2019)

Tea," was inspired by Tang Dynasty tea culture. Traditional clothing structures, such as the overlapping collar and right-front opening, adopted innovative designs, such as the intersecting collar and continuous shoulder sleeves. Fabrics made of natural material were used with jacquard weaving to showcase modern technology and craftsmanship. Chuhetingxiang continues to explore the novel aspects of oriental clothing aesthetics in modern design, integrating traditional clothing styles into modern daily life (Shen, 2021).

UOOYAA 乌丫: *Modernizing Cultural Heritage and Traditional Elements*. In recent years, clothing



Figure 1. Chuhetingxiang's Autumn/ Winter 2021 show

products with distinctive fashion styles and Chinese cultural characteristics have become important methods for attracting consumers and building competitive brands (Liu et al., 2022). UOOYAA is known for its avant-garde, artistic, and imaginative designs that blend traditional and modern elements to allow young consumers to express themselves playfully and creatively (Ricciardi, 2022). The Autumn/ Winter 2021 series called "Monster Inbreak", creatively incorporated traditional Chinese design elements into modern fashion design. The designer exaggerated the frog button features to seek harmony between traditional crafts and weird styling (Topfashion, 2019). Chinese tunic suit is redesigned to fit both men and women and adapt to various occasions from formal to casual (Ricciardi, 2022). Moreover, the Chinese tunic suit was deconstructed and recombined with punk style, while the Chinese style jacket with a double front was paired with monster jacquard fabric, resulting in a wonderful chemical reaction. The combination of fashion brands and Chinese traditional culture that creates a fashion trend with Chinese cultural characteristics is called China-chic (Guochao). Young consumers, especially Generation Z, show strong enthusiasm for this style of clothing. The trendification and deconstruction of traditional elements endow clothing lines with more fashionability, personality, and high wearability.

Metaverse and Digitization of Traditional Clothing Styles. The digitization of traditional costumes can not only overcome the limitations of time and space, making it easier to display traditional costume collections that are vulnerable in museums to visitors but also accurately convey the details and dressing styles of traditional costumes, enhancing their understanding and awareness of traditional culture (Luo et al., 2022). The "*Yiguan Dacheng: The Costume Culture Exhibition of Ming Dynasty*" used a variety of technological means and display media to disseminate Ming Dynasty costume culture in a 3D digital space (Zhu & Zhou, 2020). The virtual exhibition hall presents traditional costumes to the audience more vividly and interestingly. Users can use gesture operation to select navigation instructions to easily get immersive experiences. By clicking on the picture, 3D virtual costume models can be viewed to further understand the implicit information such as pattern meanings and cultural connotations of the costumes. The use of new media and digital technology attracting younger generations to appreciate the charm of traditional costume culture.

Conclusion and Discussion. The key to sustaining the traditional clothing styles and cultural heritages in modern fashion lies in the creative infusion of traditional intangible cultural heritage with modern design and lifestyles. Preserving and maintaining traditions is crucial, but innovation is necessary. Authenticity is important, but wide acceptance by the market is the basic approach to maintaining traditions. The multiple case analyses identified three strategic approaches to sustain traditional clothing styles and cultural heritages: (1) contemporizing traditional clothing styles and cultural aesthetics via



Figure 3. A virtual exhibition hall of traditional clothing

reproducing traditional clothing styles and elements (such as silhouette, structure, and pattern) from a certain historical period in more contemporary visions; (2) modernizing cultural heritage and traditional elements through extracting the cultural genes of traditional clothing and integrating contemporary aesthetics in an innovative way to be compatible with current lifestyles; (3) making use of digital technologies to educate young consumers about traditional clothing styles and cultural traditions in a way that is immersive, interactive, and engaging.

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