

# Teaching Practice of "Cultural and Creative Product Design" Based on Bashu Culture

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**Abstract:** Safeguarding and inheriting Bashu culture holds significant importance in protecting the ecological environment of the Yangtze River Basin and promoting high-quality cultural development in the Chengdu-Chongqing region. In the teaching work of product design majors in universities in Sichuan Province, it is crucial to leverage their own strengths to research, inherit and develop Bashu culture, and consider Bashu culture as an important resource for course content. Based on these considerations, this article explores the integration of Bashu culture into the "Cultural and Creative Product Design" course, aligning it with the requirements of cultivating applied talents in our college. The article discusses the objectives, significance, content, and methods of this course accordingly.

**Keywords:** Bashu culture, cultural and creative product design, curriculum teaching

## 1. Introduction

In a broad sense, Bashu culture refers to the ancient and modern regional culture of Sichuan. The geographical area of Ba culture mainly encompasses eastern Sichuan, Chongqing, and western Hubei, while Shu culture predominantly covers the central and western plains of the Sichuan Basin. "Bashu culture is one of the earliest regions where Chinese civilization originated and developed. It possesses independent and long-standing cultural origins and patterns, as well as rich and diverse ethnic cultural resources, making it an important component of the overall structure of Chinese culture, characterized by 'diversity within unity.'" [1] The significant archaeological discoveries at the Sanxingdui and Jinsha sites indicate that as early as the pre-Qin period, highly developed and continuously evolving ancient civilizations existed in this region. The ancestors of Bashu overcame the arduous conditions of the "difficulties of the Shu Road, harder than ascending to heaven," and were courageous in their external exchanges and internal governance. They made numerous pioneering inventions and creations that were ahead of their time, ranging from material technologies to philosophies, making outstanding contributions to Chinese civilization and even human civilization as a whole. The abundant cultural resources of Bashu provide an inexhaustible source of nourishment for today's cultural creativity. As students majoring in product design at Chengdu University, it is essential not only to understand the history of Bashu but also to feel, familiarize with, and comprehend its cultural resources. Moreover, it is crucial to learn how to streamline, refine, and elevate Bashu cultural elements, successfully transforming them into the visual language of modern design. In the face of new characteristics of the era and social demands, it is necessary and urgent to improve and optimize the content and form of the "Cultural and Creative Product Design" course in teaching.

## 2. Course Overview

### 2.1 Purpose and Significance of the Course

#### 2.1.1 Issues and the Need for Improvement in the "Cultural and Creative Design" Course

"Cultural and Creative Product Design" is a compulsory course for our university's product design major, scheduled in the seventh semester of the undergraduate program and spanning 10 weeks. The course is centered around the expression of cultural creativity in product design. Through a series of cultural thematic investigations and research, it aims to accurately extract and deeply analyze the elements of distinctive cultural symbols, explore their profound meanings, unique historical context, and artistic language. The objective is to integrate them with modern market demands, transforming them into creative and valuable cultural and creative products. However, teaching multiple cultural topics

within limited class hours poses a challenge. We have identified some areas where the original teaching arrangement was not sufficiently reasonable: firstly, due to the excessive content, there was a risk of skimming the surface without achieving in-depth understanding, which affected the effectiveness of teaching; secondly, the teaching content tended to be standardized and homogeneous, lacking in-depth exploration of the cultural connotations and local characteristics of the region. Therefore, in response to these issues, we formed a teaching team, conducted extensive discussions, visited other domestic universities to examine their teaching designs and implementations of similar courses, and consulted experts in the industry to understand market demands. Through the process of separating the genuine from the superfluous, we have gradually established the teaching objectives with a primary focus on Bashu culture as the creative direction.

### **2.1.2 Significance of Incorporating Bashu Regional Culture into the "Cultural and Creative Design" Course**

#### **(A) Enhancing Students' Humanistic Literacy and Professional Competence**

Design and art education should not only focus on developing students' skills but also aim to cultivate their humanistic knowledge. Integrating traditional Chinese culture, especially regional culture, into the course can effectively elevate design education in universities from knowledge-oriented to culture-oriented[2]. It strengthens students' empathy and understanding of outstanding traditional Chinese culture, enhances their comprehensive cultural qualities, and expands their creative perspectives and thinking dimensions, thereby further enhancing their professional competence.

#### **(B) Contributing to the Preservation, Dissemination, and Sustainable Development of Bashu Culture**

To promote cultural prosperity and enhance the country's cultural soft power, efforts are required in the areas of cultural inheritance, innovation, and development. Local universities, in addition to their own teaching and research roles, serve as carriers of regional culture. By collecting, summarizing, transforming, utilizing, innovating, and inheriting Bashu culture as a curriculum resource for product design majors, students' sense of identification with Bashu culture is strengthened, and their interest in participating in regional cultural innovation is nurtured. This enables them to create design works with genuine Bashu cultural characteristics and actively engage in the practical process of inheriting and innovating Bashu culture.

#### **(C) Contributing to the Development of the Regional Economy**

With the continuous adjustment and upgrading of China's industrial structure and the requirements outlined in the "14th Five-Year Plan" for accelerating the transformation of economic development and promoting the healthy and rapid development of regional cultural economy, the field of product design has gradually increased its integration of professional education with practical application, market demands, and collaboration with businesses. By focusing on Bashu culture in the course and conducting design activities in line with it, local cultural resources can be utilized in a close and efficient manner, aligning with the characteristics of the local culture and the needs of local businesses. This approach genuinely contributes to the development of the industrial and economic sectors in the Bashu region.

## **2.2 Teaching Content and Methods**

### **2.2.1 Teaching Content that Combines the Foundation of Cultural Theory with Specialized Topics**

Bashu civilization has a long history and rich content, including Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist culture in the conceptual state, material culture in popular and material state, and folk culture formed by the combination of concept and material. By combining a general understanding of Bashu's historical culture with in-depth studies of specific topics, students not only gain an overall understanding and grasp of Bashu culture but also have the opportunity to explore specific aspects that interest them. This approach avoids superficial coverage of teaching content while providing students with the basis of theory and historical culture to create design works with regional characteristics. Students form student-led study groups or collaborative project teams within the class, selecting specific aspects of Bashu culture that they are interested in for focused research, data analysis, and organization. They then engage in discussions and exchanges with teachers and classmates using diverse formats such as PowerPoints, videos, and more. Finally, they complete design proposals and implement them.

### **2.2.2 Practical Field Visits to Traditional Crafts and Museums**

The course incorporates a "going out" practical field visit approach to compensate for the limitations of school resources. On one hand, students are encouraged to visit and experience traditional crafts and

intangible cultural heritage art projects in Bashu region by visiting places such as Chengdu Lacquerware Factory, Wen shu Fang "Intangible Cultural Heritage Handicraft Theme Block," Ancient Shu Brocade Research Institute, and Silver Flower Silk Studio. They can learn directly from inheritors of intangible cultural heritage and folk artisans, observing and understanding the design and production processes. On the other hand, students are organized to visit museums such as the Sichuan Museum, Chengdu Museum, and Chongqing China Three Gorges Museum. They can observe the shapes, patterns, colors, and other aspects of relevant cultural relics on-site, thereby enhancing their interest in Bashu culture and purposefully collecting relevant materials and references. By immersing themselves in the charm of Bashu culture, students are more likely to be inspired and develop a genuine interest and passion for Bashu culture. They can then incorporate these emotions into their designs, creating outstanding works with cultural significance.

### **2.2.3 Design Training Mode through Competitions and Project-driven Approach**

The course adopts a project-driven approach and leverages cultural and intangible heritage resources in Sichuan to foster design training through competitions and projects. It emphasizes the exchange, collaboration, and co-creation with cultural and creative design enterprises and cultural institutions. On one hand, teachers introduce design competitions related to cultural and creative design in Sichuan, such as the "Chuanbo Cup" and "The Gift of Chengdu," in the course. Students can gain practical experience through these competitions while also having the opportunity to receive awards and recognition. This greatly motivates students' creative enthusiasm and achieves the teaching goal of cultivating applied design talents with rich cultural literacy. On the other hand, for senior students who have acquired basic skills in product design practice, teachers transform real design projects into students' assignments. The emphasis is placed on project experience, enabling students to enhance their innovative thinking and creative abilities through real project practices. This approach ensures that the course content aligns with the development needs of the new era and facilitates the transformation of teaching outcomes.

## **3. Module Design of the Course**

The region of Bashu boasts vast territory, a long history, and rich cultural heritage. In order to provide students with a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Bashu culture, we have divided the course into three main modules from the perspective of cultural forms and design subjects. Throughout the teaching process, our team of instructors consistently emphasizes the importance of students' awareness of autonomous learning and research abilities. We place great emphasis on encouraging students to engage in multidimensional thinking, exploration, and information extraction regarding the essence of culture (and cultural artifacts). Furthermore, we inspire students to apply their own innovative capabilities to endow Bashu cultural elements with diverse modes of existence and presentation.

Module 1: Cultural and Creative Product Design based on Bashu's Natural and Material Cultural Heritage

The Bashu region is home to at least 5 world natural heritage sites and 3 world cultural heritage sites, including the dual heritage of Mount Emei in terms of both nature and culture. These heritage sites account for 1/7 (14.3%) of China's 56 world heritage sites. In our classroom, we go beyond the introduction of cultural heritage listed in the World Heritage List. We also explore more representative and unique landscapes in Sichuan, as well as the distinctive Bashu culture of ethnic minorities in western Sichuan. For example, "from Mount Emei, Qingcheng Mountain, Dujiangyan, and Jiuzhai Valley, Huanglong, Hailuoguo Valley, Shangri-La, and the habitat of giant pandas... from Sanxingdui, Jinsha Site, Warring States boat coffins, to Danba ancient pillboxes, the Qiang ancient forts, Wind-Rain Bridges and plank roads built along a cliff." [3] During the theoretical teaching phase, instructors use images, videos, and other materials to focus on the historical context, architectural style, and aesthetic significance of Bashu's natural and cultural heritage. We aim to broaden students' perspectives and stimulate their interest in regional cultural research, providing a foundation for their subsequent design practice. In the project analysis phase, instructors guide students to conduct detailed practical research, encouraging them to appreciate the diversity, aesthetics, and charm of Bashu's natural and material cultural heritage. We help students summarize the formal characteristics, visual elements, organizational forms, and compositional techniques of Bashu's natural and material culture. This prepares them for creative transformation and the design of high-quality works in the subsequent design practice phase. For example, under the guidance of relevant teachers, student Tang Zijun conducted in-depth research on winged mythical animal stone carvings found in Han Dynasty tombs in Bashu. She collected almost all the winged animal images unearthed in the Bashu region. Based on meticulous summarization, analysis, and depiction of the types and characteristics of winged animals, especially their wing shapes,

she designed a series of cultural and creative ornaments related to winged animals ((as shown in Figure 1). This design series has won multiple awards, including the 2021 Universities Industrial Design Competition (Sichuan) and the 9<sup>th</sup> National College Digital Art&Design Competition.

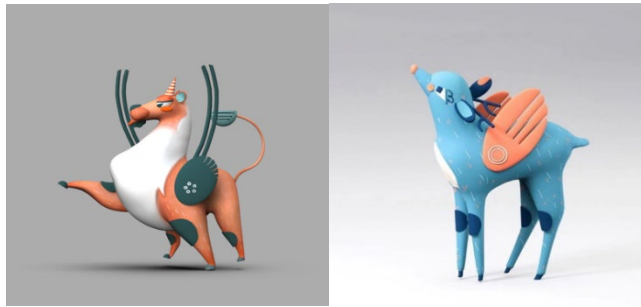


Figure 1: Zijun Tang: "Bashu Winged Mythical Animals" Cultural and Creative Ornaments, Guided by Cheng Li.

#### Module 2: Cultural and Creative Product Design based on Bashu's Intangible Cultural Heritage

The picturesque landscapes of Bashu have nurtured numerous unique and charming intangible cultural heritages. In practical teaching of this section, we guide students to understand the concept of intangible cultural heritage, the types, characteristics, and current status of Bashu's intangible cultural heritage. This practical component requires students to conduct field investigations into the "Five Treasures" of Chengdu's intangible cultural heritage: Shu Brocade, Shu Embroidery, Porcelain Bamboo Weaving, Lacquer Art, and Silver Filigree. Teachers organize student visits to Chengdu Lacquerware Factory, Wenshu Fang "Intangible Cultural Heritage and Handicraft Skills Theme Block," Ancient Shu Brocade Research Institute, Silver Filigree Studio, and other sites for firsthand experiences of traditional craftsmanship. Students have the opportunity to witness and experience the production process of traditional crafts up close, conduct close examinations and collect data on their forms, techniques, materials, and more. We also invite relevant inheritors of intangible cultural heritage to personally showcase and explain their works, as well as answer students' questions.

The cultural heritage of the Bashu region is diverse and encompasses not only traditional craftsmanship but also performing arts (drama, storytelling, singing, and dancing), folk customs (rituals, festivals, and games), sports (acrobatics), and folk literature. Therefore, in teaching, teachers help students broaden their perspectives and incorporate more resources in this field. Under the guidance of the teachers, Ting Xu drew inspiration from the love story of Sima Xiangru and Zhuo Wenjun, which is popular in Bashu folk literature. She selected exquisite molds and used hand-casting and hand-engraving techniques combined with gold embellishments and decal crafts to design the "Feng Qiu Huang (a male phoenix's pursuing a female phoenix)" wedding tea set suitable for wedding occasions (as shown in Figure 2). This work cleverly combines cultural symbolism with the product, receiving praise from the judging panel and winning the first prize at the "Qiong Yao Award" Belt and Road International Product Design Competition (2020). Similarly, Dan Yang based her design on Sichuan opera characters, extracting visual elements and creating a set of wooden infant toys, including hand-held bells, wave drums, and hand clappers, which won the second prize in the competition (as shown in Figure 3).



Figure 2: Ting Xu: "Feng Qiu Huang (a male phoenix's pursuing a female phoenix)" Wedding Tea Set, First Prize at the "Qiong Yao Award" Belt and Road International Product Design Competition(2020), Guided by Li Cheng.



Figure 3: Dan Yang: "Joy of Shu Color", Second Prize at the "Qiong Yao Award" Belt and Road International Product Design Competition(2020), Guided by Sisi Zhang.



Figure 4: Haoyuan Mai: "Bagua Pattern Cong-shaped Bottle Tea Set", Gold Prize in the 2021 Chengdu Fashion Consumer Product Creative Design Competition, Guided by Sisi Zhang.

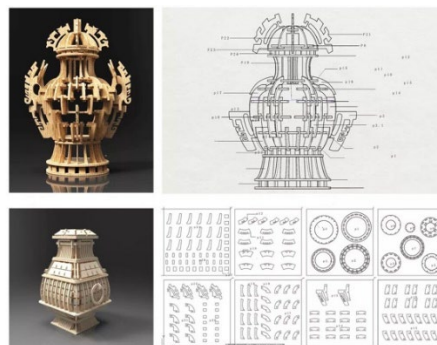


Figure 5: Yahui Chen, Jiaqi Zhu: "Hanqing Fragment" Three-dimensional Puzzle, Silver Prize at the 6th Chuanbo Cup Cultural and Creative Product Design Competition, Guided by Jingjie Wang.

### Module 3: Design of Cultural and Creative Products Based on Museums in the Bashu Region

Cultural and creative products of museums refer to a series of products created by museums that utilize design techniques such as extraction, transformation, recombination, and deformation, based on their own collections (objects, documents, etc.). These products not only showcase the unique cultural characteristics of the museums but also generate profits through sales. "Cultural and creative products of museums are one of the specific ways to address how collections are 'used,' and they are also a necessary form to fulfill the functions of museum communication, exhibition, education, etc." [4] In this module, teachers mainly lead students to visit representative museums in the Bashu region, such as the Sichuan Museum, Chengdu Museum, Sanxingdui Museum, and Chongqing China Three Gorges Museum. Museum staff are invited to introduce students to the cultural background of the exhibition halls, the unique resources in the collections, and other important information. During the course, teachers guide students in selecting materials from the museum collections, deeply exploring and refining the cultural elements and visual symbols of the materials, and searching for design creative points. Through case studies, students gradually master basic design methods or techniques such as deconstruction and recombination, functional transformation, free association, and story enhancement [5]. Combining current trends and aesthetic interests, they strive to achieve a creative integration of traditional and modern elements in terms of form, content, and spiritual aspects. Additionally, teachers help students consider consumer needs and continuously optimize the design to meet both material and spiritual requirements. For example, Haoyuan Mai's set of combination tea sets, the "Bagua Pattern Cong-shaped

Bottle Tea Set" (as shown in Figure 4), effectively combines the collection of the Chengdu Museum with the tea-drinking culture favored by local people in Chengdu. This tea set can be assembled when not in use and displayed on the table like an artifact. The design simulates the Bagua pattern from the original artifact while adding anti-slip and heat insulation functions. Yahui Chen and Jiaqi Zhu's "Hanqing Fragment 3D Puzzle" (as shown in Figure 5) is based on the Western Zhou Dynasty bronze zun with elephant-shaped heads and curled bodies from the collection of the Sichuan Museum. They conducted in-depth analysis and deconstruction of its shape, brainstorming various combinations. Through precise calculations, they ultimately designed an educational and entertaining cultural and creative product that is full of fun.

#### 4. Conclusion

On January 3, 2020, the president of People's Republic of China made important instructions during the sixth meeting of the Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commission, emphasizing the promotion of the Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle and the support for Chongqing and Chengdu in jointly building the Bashu cultural and tourism corridor. On November 15, 2020, the president once again emphasized during the symposium on promoting the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, "We must protect and carry forward the culture of the Yangtze River. The Yangtze River has nurtured the millennium cultural heritage from the Bashu region to the Jiangnan water towns. It is a representative symbol of the Chinese nation and a significant symbol of Chinese civilization. It is also an important source of nourishing socialist core values." It is evident that the protection and inheritance of Bashu culture have significant implications for safeguarding the civilization of the Yangtze River and promoting high-quality development in the Chengdu-Chongqing region.

The teaching work of the product design major in universities in Sichuan should seize this opportunity and intensify research on regional culture to make greater contributions to the inheritance and development of regional culture. The teaching team of the "Cultural and Creative Product Design" course has been continuously reflecting, exploring, and summarizing in the course teaching since 2020, aiming to improve and enhance the content and teaching methods. The three years of teaching practice have achieved certain results, not only greatly enhancing students' enthusiasm for independent learning but also increasing their sense of identification and pride in their majors. Their employment capabilities and competitiveness in the industry have also significantly improved. In the future, the teaching team still needs to further enhance their teaching abilities and explore more effective ways to incorporate Bashu regional culture into the curriculum. This will cultivate innovative and high-quality talents in line with the current needs of creative product design, in order to meet the educational development requirements of the new situation.

#### Acknowledgement

This paper is supported by the General Program of Development Research Center for Cultural Industries "Research on the Stylistic Design of Winged Mythical Animals in Han Dynasty Stone Carvings in the Context of the Silk Road" (Grant No. WHCY2022B01) and Undergraduate Education and Teaching Reform Program of Chengdu University, "Research on Teaching Reform in Cultural and Creative Design Based on Strengthening the Acquisition of Cultural Relics Information Capability" (Grant No. cdjgb2022155). This paper is also the stage research results of the 2022 Sichuan Province First-Class Undergraduate Course Construction Program "Traditional Chinese Utensils."

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