

Adaptation Mechanisms for Enterprise Application of Shaoxing's Local Cultural Visual Assets in Souvenir Design

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Abstract

Amid increasing global competition among cities and the growing emphasis on culture-led development strategies, local cultural visual assets have become important resources for strengthening city identity and enhancing cultural competitiveness. Beyond government-led branding initiatives, enterprises increasingly participate in the reinterpretation and commercialization of local culture through visual communication and souvenir design. However, the adaptation of local cultural assets in commercial contexts often involves tensions between cultural authenticity and market demands, while existing studies mainly focus on government branding and heritage representation, with limited attention given to enterprise adaptation mechanisms. Recent studies highlight the role of cultural assets in urban branding and heritage communication (Ciuculescu & Luca, 2024), while research also suggests that balancing aesthetic innovation and cultural authenticity is critical for effective heritage branding (Taha & Abdelfattah, 2023). Furthermore, the use of traditional cultural symbols can strengthen emotional resonance and consumer attachment (Dinnie, 2015). Using Shaoxing as a case study, this study addresses the research gap concerning enterprise adaptation of local cultural visual assets and proposes a transferable adaptation mechanism model to support culturally rooted branding and souvenir design strategies in heritage-rich cities.

Keywords: Cultural Visual Assets, Adaptation Mechanism, Brand Communication, Visual Translation, Transferable Screening Model, Heritage Cities

Introduction

In the context of a global cultural renaissance and growing competition among cities for distinct brand identities, local cultural visual assets have emerged as vital strategic resources. These assets not only reflect regional identity and historical depth, but also play a critical role in shaping a city's soft power and boosting brand visibility on the international stage (Liu and

Zhao 2024). According to Ciuculescu and Luca (2024), cultural heritage and artistic expression are increasingly used by cities as core tools in brand development, as shown in the analysis of European Capital of Culture (ECoC) bid books from 2020 to 2026 (Ciuculescu and Luca 2024). Their research reveals how cities strategically integrate local arts, heritage, and citizen participation to construct a distinctive and competitive urban image.

However, despite the recognized value of cultural assets, many cities still face significant challenges in effectively identifying, adapting, and applying these resources in modern branding practices. These include outdated perceptions, insufficient design capabilities, and a lack of alignment between visual elements and strategic communication goals (Lyu et al. 2024). In particular, the gap between macro-level city brand strategies and micro-level enterprise implementations remains underexplored.

Taking Shaoxing—one of China’s nationally recognized historical and cultural cities—as a representative heritage city with rich cultural resources and active enterprise participation in cultural industries, this research addresses these issues by analyzing how local cultural visual elements such as literary heritage, rice wine traditions, and water-town imagery are adopted by enterprises across different sectors. Using hierarchical screening and content analysis, the study identifies usage patterns and evaluates their adaptability in business contexts. The aim is to propose a transferable model for integrating local cultural assets into global-facing corporate brand systems.

Explore Importance of the Problem

Local cultural visual assets are not only carriers of a city's historical memory but also serve as strategic resources for enhancing brand differentiation and cultural value in corporate communication. In heritage-rich cities such as Shaoxing, elements like Lu Xun’s literary legacy, traditional rice wine culture, and the distinctive aesthetics of southern Chinese canal towns—marked by whitewashed residences, narrow waterways, and arched stone bridges—enjoy strong public recognition and emotional resonance. These cultural assets offer inherent advantages for storytelling and symbolic communication. However, without effective adaptation and thoughtful visual translation, such symbols often remain superficial or ornamental. They risk becoming tokenistic, lacking alignment with brand strategy and failing to convey cultural depth—ultimately weakening their impact on brand identity and audience engagement.

In recent years, enterprises have gradually shifted from being merely commercial actors to becoming active participants in cultural communication and city branding. Compared with government-led cultural promotion, enterprise applications of local cultural resources directly shape consumers’ everyday interactions with regional culture through products, packaging, and visual systems. As a result, understanding how enterprises select and adapt local cultural assets has become increasingly important in both branding practice and cultural sustainability. Therefore, investigating the current usage and adaptation mechanisms of Shaoxing’s cultural visual resources at the enterprise level is not only critical for revitalizing local culture and enhancing industrial value transformation, but also offers transferable insights for other culturally significant cities aiming to balance heritage preservation with contemporary brand differentiation and sustainable global communication.

Describe Relevant Scholarly Works

In recent years, scholarly interest in local cultural resources for urban branding and cultural tourism has grown steadily. Researchers have highlighted the vital role of local cultural visual elements in enhancing regional brand recognition and cultural soft power, especially amid globalization. Key themes include cultural symbol transmission, local identity construction, and brand competitiveness (Anholt 2007; Govers and Go 2009). Govers and Go (2009) emphasized local culture as a bridge between virtual and physical spaces, supporting the creation of a “glocalized” city image, while Anholt (2007) underscored the irreplaceable role of cultural symbols in national and urban brand governance.

More recent studies have extended these discussions to community branding, urban regeneration, and destination identity. For example, Ozoliņa (2021) analyzed branding cases in Latvia, stressing the importance of cultural symbol visualization and narrative identity in reinforcing community distinctiveness. Francesco et al. (2021), through a case study of Pisticci, Italy, examined how communities co-create cultural heritage during urban renewal, arguing that cross-sector collaboration and multi-stakeholder engagement are vital for cultural sustainability and international brand expansion.

However, recent studies continue to focus primarily on macro-level urban branding, heritage communication, and community identity construction (Liu & Zhao, 2024; Ciuculescu & Luca, 2024). Comparatively little attention has been paid to enterprise-level adaptation of local cultural visual assets, particularly regarding how cultural symbols are selected, translated, and integrated into commercial visual systems. Existing studies tend to emphasize symbolic representation and cultural value rather than the adaptation processes through which local cultural resources become market-oriented visual expressions. This limitation has become increasingly significant as enterprises play a growing role in cultural dissemination and city branding. Moreover, differences in brand positioning, target markets, and design capabilities often lead to fragmented or inconsistent applications of cultural resources in heritage cities. This study contributes to existing research in two ways. First, it extends local cultural branding research from macro-level city narratives to enterprise-level adaptation practices. Second, it proposes a multi-dimensional adaptation mechanism model for understanding how cultural visual assets are translated into commercial applications.

State Hypotheses and Their Correspondence to Research Design

H1: Significant differences exist in how Shaoxing-based enterprises across industries utilize local cultural visual assets.

Research design: This is tested via content analysis and manual coding of visual materials from 50 enterprises across diverse sectors. Classification statistics and distributional comparisons are used to identify usage types, frequencies, and symbolic patterns across industries.

H2: The use of local cultural visual assets is shaped by four key dimensions: expression motivation, reception context, design capability, and strategic intent.

Research design: Based on empirical data, literature, and case analysis, a four-dimensional adaptation model is proposed. Its explanatory power is tested through cross-industry comparison to assess its relevance to observed differences.

H3:The proposed adaptation mechanism provides theoretical and practical guidance for optimizing cultural visual asset application in corporate branding and offers potential for cross-regional transferability.

Research design: Grounded in empirical findings and mechanism analysis, a transferable framework and strategic recommendations are developed to support cultural communication in branding, particularly for other heritage-rich cities.

Methods

This study employs a hybrid research approach, primarily qualitative, supplemented by content analysis and descriptive quantitative indicators, to investigate how Shaoxing's local cultural visual assets are applied and adapted in corporate brand communication. Through the identification and coding of cultural visual genes, the research combines cross-industry comparison with case analysis to examine how enterprises select, transform, and express cultural symbols, and the challenges they encounter.

The research unfolds in four phases. First, a literature review defines the concept of local cultural visual assets and their role in corporate branding. Second, stratified purposeful sampling identifies enterprises closely tied to Shaoxing's cultural heritage. Third, visual branding materials are analyzed and manually coded, leading to the development of a four-dimensional adaptability index—cultural relevance, scene matching, style consistency, and audience acceptance—to assess symbol adaptation. Finally, cross-industry comparison is used to refine and validate a four-dimensional adaptation mechanism—expression motivation, reception context, design capability, and strategic intent—and explore its transferability to other culturally rich cities.

Participant (Subject) Characteristics

To effectively reflect the application of Shaoxing's local cultural visual assets in corporate branding, this study identified 18 representative enterprises. These span industries with strong cultural ties to the region, including rice wine, food, and cultural tourism. The sample covers both time-honored and modern brands in the rice wine sector—such as China Shaoxing Rice Wine Group (Guyue Longshan), Kuaiji Mountain, Nv'erhong, and Shen Yonghe—as well as key players in tourism and catering, including Shaoxing Cultural Tourism Group, Xianheng Hotel, Kong Yiji Restaurant, and Lantingji. Cultural promotion entities like Shaoxing Rice Wine Town and the Rice Wine Industry Association are also included. By integrating enterprises with distinct cultural symbolism and communication functions, the sample captures both core expressions of Shaoxing's heritage and varied patterns of visual asset usage, providing a solid empirical basis for the adaptation mechanism. Detailed sample information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Overview of Sample Enterprises Selected for Analysis

No.	Company Name	Industry	Company Type / Remarks
E1	China Shaoxing Yellow Wine Group (Guyue Longshan)	Rice wine and food	Leading enterprise in rice wine industry; nationally recognized brand
E2	Kuaijishan Shaoxing Wine Co., Ltd.		Key winemaking company; traditional heritage brand
E3	Nv'erhong Brewing Co., Ltd.		Time-honored traditional brewing enterprise
E4	Zhejiang Pagoda Brand Shaoxing Wine Co., Ltd.		Well-known regional rice wine brand
E5	Shaoxing Xianheng Wine Co., Ltd.		Wine brand deeply rooted in Lu Xun cultural themes
E6	Shaoxing Jianhu Brewing Co., Ltd.		Long-established yellow wine enterprise
E7	Zhuangyuan Red Yellow Wine		Local specialty rice wine brand from Shaoxing
E8	Shaoxing Dongpu Yellow Wine Factory		Traditional local winery
E9	Zhouqing (Shaoxing) Yellow Wine Culture Development Co., Ltd.		Key institution for rice wine culture development and promotion
E10	Shaoxing Culture and Tourism Group Co., Ltd.	Cultural tourism	Comprehensive tourism group; manages major scenic attractions
E11	Shaoxing Yuecheng District Culture and Tourism Group Co., Ltd.		Regional tourism development and operation company
E12	Shaoxing Yuecheng District Cultural Tourism Development Co., Ltd.		Regional cultural tourism development agency
E13	Xianheng Hotel	Catering & hospitality	Restaurant themed around Lu Xun's literary legacy
E14	Kong Yiji Restaurant		Culturally themed dining brand
E15	Lanting		Brand for cultural creative products inspired by literati traditions
E16	Shaoxing Rice Wine Association	Cultural promotion	Industry association; platform for heritage promotion
E17	Yellow Wine Town	Rice wine and tourism	Demonstration area integrating culture, tourism, and industry

Sampling Procedures

To ensure that the research samples accurately reflect the application of Shaoxing's local cultural visual assets in corporate branding, this study adopted a stratified purposive sampling strategy with a multi-stage screening process.

First, five key sectors—rice wine and food, cultural tourism, manufacturing, finance and infrastructure, and agriculture—were identified for their strong cultural relevance. Drawing on government records, industry yearbooks, and chamber of commerce recommendations, an initial pool of 50 enterprises was compiled based on brand visibility, cultural significance, or development potential.

Second, the research team reviewed each enterprise's visual materials (e.g., logos, packaging, websites, and promotional content) to evaluate material availability, update frequency, and the presence of Shaoxing cultural elements.

Third, companies were excluded if they (1) lacked identifiable local cultural elements, (2) had outdated or missing visual materials, or (3) had ceased operations. Based on these criteria, 32 companies were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 18 enterprises. These included major rice wine producers, traditional breweries, cultural dining brands, tourism entities, associations, and demonstration towns—ensuring both diversity and representativeness. Finally, expert consultation and iterative verification were conducted to ensure methodological rigor. All selection records were retained to support subsequent content analysis and model development. The full sampling process is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Sampling procedure diagram

Stage	Description	Sample Size
Preliminary Sampling	Fifty representative enterprises were initially selected from five key sectors in Shaoxing: rice wine and food, cultural tourism, manufacturing, finance and infrastructure, and agriculture.	50
Data Verification & Screening	A systematic review assessed brand materials and cultural elements; companies lacking data, cultural symbols, or active operations were excluded.	32 excluded
Final Valid Sample	Eighteen valid enterprises were retained, including rice wine producers, cultural restaurants, tourism firms, and industry associations.	18 retained

Sample Size, Power, and Precision

To analyze the current status and adaptability of Shaoxing's local cultural visual assets in corporate branding, this study integrates prior research on local cultural elements with systematic content analysis for data collection and measurement.

First, data were drawn from a broad range of visual materials from 18 sample companies, including websites, logos, packaging, cultural descriptions, brochures, storefront visuals, and digital promotions. All materials were publicly sourced and verified for authenticity and completeness.

Second, for consistency in symbol identification, the study adopts a classification framework established in a prior visual survey of Shaoxing's cultural resources. That study identified 1,164 representative visual symbols, organized into six categories forming the "Shaoxing Local Cultural Visual Gene Table," which serves as a reference for classification and analysis. Third, corporate visual materials were analyzed across two core dimensions of measurement design:

(1)

(2) Types of cultural symbol use: Based on presentation and innovation levels, symbol usage in corporate visuals was categorized into four types—borrowing (direct use), variation (modified tradition), reshaping (creative recombination), and missing (no use). This classification describes both application modes and innovation levels (see Table 3).

Table 3

Definition of cultural symbol usage types

Type	Definition
Borrow	Direct adoption of traditional cultural symbols or imagery without substantial modification.
Variation	Slight modifications or contemporary reinterpretations of traditional symbols.
Reinvention	Creative recombination of traditional cultural elements to generate new visual expressions.
Missing	No explicit use of Shaoxing's local cultural symbols in the brand's visual system.

(3) Measurement of Adaptability Dimensions: To evaluate the adaptability of local cultural visual assets in corporate branding, four core dimensions were assessed—cultural relevance, scene matching, style consistency, and audience acceptance—using a standardized 0–3 scale. Two independent coders conducted the scoring, with discrepancies resolved through discussion to ensure reliability. Based on symbol usage types, these dimensions were used to construct a comprehensive adaptability index (see Table 4).

Table 4

Cultural visual asset adaptability dimensions and scoring criteria

Dimension	Definition	Rating Range
Cultural Relevance	The extent to which the symbol aligns with the core cultural elements of Shaoxing	0–3
Scene Appropriateness	The suitability of the symbol for its application context (e.g., packaging, website)	0–3
Style Consistency	The degree of visual coherence between the symbol and the brand's overall design style	0–3
Audience Acceptance	The level of recognition and acceptance of the symbol among the target audience	0–3

Through a two-step process—identifying symbol usage types and quantifying four adaptability dimensions—this study builds a systematic and operational framework. Based on a curated library of 1,164 local cultural symbols across six categories, the research proceeds through visual identification, typological classification, and adaptability assessment. This structured approach ensures rigor and enhances result comparability. The full process is shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Schematic diagram of content analysis process

Step	Process Stage	Main Content	Purpose / Outcome
1	Symbol Collection	Collected 1,164 Shaoxing local cultural visual symbols	Establish a comprehensive cultural symbol database
2	Symbol Classification	Categorized symbols into six major types	Ensure clarity and comparability of classification framework
3	Symbol Identification	Identified cultural symbols in visual materials of 18 selected companies	Determine presence and usage status of cultural elements

4	Usage Type Definition	Classified usage into: Borrowing / Variation / Reinvention / Missing	Evaluate the level of innovation or conservatism in symbol use
5	Adaptability Assessment	Applied four-dimensional scoring: relevance, contextual fit, stylistic coherence, and audience acceptance	Compare inter-industry differences and adaptability performance

This study adopts a step-by-step approach—ranging from constructing a comprehensive symbol library, categorizing symbols into six types, identifying symbols within corporate visual materials, classifying usage types, to conducting quantitative adaptability analysis—to ensure methodological rigor in content analysis and enhance the comparability of results.

Coding and Analytical Strategy

To ensure the scientific rigor and reliability in identifying and evaluating the adaptability of local cultural visual symbols, this study employed a systematic coding procedure with multiple consistency controls.

First, a detailed coding manual was developed based on the Shaoxing Local Cultural Visual Gene Table, clearly defining symbol categories, usage types, and scoring criteria for the four adaptability dimensions.

Second, two researchers with expertise in visual communication and local culture independently coded the visual materials from 18 sample enterprises. The coding process consisted of two main stages:

- (1) Determining whether Shaoxing cultural symbols were present and classifying their usage type (borrowing, variation, reshaping, or missing);
- (2) Assessing the adaptability of each symbol along four dimensions—cultural relevance, scene matching, style consistency, and audience acceptance—each rated on a standardized 0–3 scale.

To minimize subjective bias and ensure scoring consistency, a dual-coding approach was adopted. Discrepancies between the two coders were documented and resolved through structured discussion. Upon completion of the coding process, inter-rater reliability was tested using Cohen’s Kappa coefficient, confirming that the consistency level met acceptable thresholds.

Finalized coding results were compiled into an Excel dataset, detailing each enterprise’s usage type and four-dimensional adaptability scores. These data formed the empirical basis for subsequent cross-industry comparison, adaptability index construction, and validation of the proposed four-dimensional adaptation mechanism model.

Research Design

To explore cross-industry differences in the use of Shaoxing’s local cultural visual assets, this study conducts a comparative analysis using descriptive statistics and group comparisons based on symbol usage and adaptability scores.

First, the 18 enterprises were grouped by industry—such as rice wine and food, cultural tourism, and cultural operations—each representing typical contexts of cultural symbol application.

Second, the analysis focused on two indicators: Usage Type Distribution: Examining the proportions of borrowing, variation, reshaping, and missing types across groups to reveal patterns of adoption and innovation.

Adaptability Index: Comparing mean scores and variability across four dimensions—cultural relevance, scene matching, style consistency, and audience acceptance.

Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations were used to ensure objectivity and clarity in visualizing structural differences across sectors. This analysis supports both model construction and a deeper understanding of how industry characteristics shape cultural visual strategies.

Adaptation Mechanism Construction

Building on the cross-industry analysis, this study integrates theories of symbolic communication, brand embedding, and visual design to identify key internal factors influencing the effective integration of Shaoxing’s cultural visual assets into corporate branding. A four-dimensional adaptation mechanism model is proposed, comprising: expression motivation, reception scenario, design capability, and strategic demand.

The model was developed through the following steps:

(1) Summarizing common patterns and constraints observed across industries—such as symbol usage choices, visual translation strategies, and brand alignment;

(2) Categorizing influencing factors into four core dimensions:

- a. Expression Motivation: The enterprise’s intent to preserve or innovate cultural expression;
- b. Reception Scenario: The adaptability and acceptance of cultural symbols in various application contexts;
- c. Design Capability: The technical and creative resources available for symbol transformation;
- d. Strategic Demand: The brand and market-driven need for differentiation via cultural symbols.

(3) Analyzing interactions among these dimensions and validating them through case studies. This framework offers both theoretical insight and practical guidance for enhancing adaptability and serves as a transferable model for other heritage-rich cities.

Validity and Reliability Controls

To ensure scientific rigor and repeatability, this study implemented comprehensive reliability and validity controls across all research stages.

First, in designing the content analysis framework, the team integrated prior literature, expert interviews, and a visual symbol library of 1,164 entries to develop the “Shaoxing Local Cultural Visual Gene Table.” This provided a robust foundation with clearly defined usage types and adaptability dimensions.

Second, two researchers independently coded visual materials from 18 sample enterprises using a standardized manual. Discrepancies in usage type or adaptability scoring were documented and resolved through discussion or, if needed, by a third expert arbitrator.

Inter-coder reliability was confirmed using Cohen's Kappa, demonstrating strong agreement. All materials—manuals, classification tables, coding records, and verification documents—were archived to ensure transparency and enable future validation or replication.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres strictly to academic ethical standards, ensuring lawful data use, informed consent, and protection of participant rights throughout the research process.

All corporate brand visual materials—such as logos, packaging, and website content—were sourced from public domains, involving no proprietary or confidential information. The study does not include personal surveys, experiments, or data from minors or vulnerable groups, nor does it collect personally identifiable information, thus requiring no additional consent.

All data were used solely for academic purposes, with no commercial exploitation or misrepresentation of corporate content. The entire process complies with relevant legal, regulatory, and publishing ethics guidelines.

Usage Status and Adaptation Analysis of Local Cultural Visual Assets

To accurately reflect the application of Shaoxing's local cultural visual assets in corporate branding, this study employed a stratified purposive sampling strategy, initially selecting 50 enterprises based on industry relevance, brand visibility, and data accessibility. These candidates covered key sectors such as rice wine, food, cultural tourism, and cultural promotion.

After assessing material completeness and the presence of identifiable cultural symbols, 18 valid enterprises were retained. Companies were excluded for lacking cultural elements, outdated or missing visuals, or business inactivity. The final sample includes leading rice wine producers, traditional breweries, tourism developers, themed restaurants, and cultural promotion platforms.

This diverse and representative sample provides a solid foundation for cross-industry comparison and validates the proposed cultural adaptation mechanism.

Descriptive Statistics and Content Analysis

Based on systematic coding of visual data from 18 Shaoxing-based corporate brands, this study analyzes the use of local cultural visual assets across three levels: usage frequency, symbol type distribution, and adaptability performance. Drawing on the "Shaoxing Local Cultural Visual Gene Table," cultural symbols were categorized into six types. Folk artifacts emerged as the most frequently used category (20 instances), followed closely by architecture and settings (19), and traditional motifs or patterns (13). In contrast, historical figures (7) and geographical imagery (6) were less commonly applied. Notably, festival or cultural event-related symbols appeared only sporadically and mainly in tourism-focused enterprises.

These results suggest that Shaoxing-based companies tend to favor tangible, decorative, and easily recognizable elements to convey local identity—such as tools, architectural features, and ornamental motifs. In contrast, more narrative-driven or context-dependent cultural elements, such as personages, landscapes, or festivals, are significantly underrepresented. This indicates a broader trend toward visual simplification and aesthetic consistency,

especially in mainstream commercial branding, while more complex cultural storytelling is limited to immersive or heritage-driven sectors (see Table 6).

Table 6

Frequency and Adaptability Performance of Local Cultural Visual Assets

Cultural Symbol Category	Frequency of Use	Proportion (%)
Traditional Motifs/Patterns	13	20.0%
Historical Figures	7	10.8%
Geographical Imagery	6	9.2%
Architecture & Settings	19	29.2%
Folk Artifacts	20	30.8%
Total	65	100%

Secondly, regarding the types of cultural symbol usage—borrowing, variation, reshaping, and missing—most companies still rely primarily on borrowing and variation strategies. Notably, reshaping is more frequently observed among cultural tourism enterprises and creative derivative brands, where visual innovation and contextual storytelling are actively pursued. In contrast, missing usage types are prevalent in small-scale catering, service businesses, and manufacturing companies, revealing sector-specific disparities in both design resources and cultural translation capabilities.

In addition, a quantitative analysis was conducted using the four-dimensional adaptability index, which includes cultural relevance, scene appropriateness, style consistency, and audience acceptance. As shown in Table 7, enterprises in the rice wine and food industry achieved the highest scores in cultural relevance and scene appropriateness (mean \approx 2.83), along with relatively balanced performance in style consistency and audience acceptance (mean \approx 2.59). Cultural tourism and cultural operation entities also performed well, exhibiting strong overall adaptability (means between 2.52 and 2.62), reflecting their creative use of symbols and effective audience engagement. By contrast, small-scale catering, service, and manufacturing enterprises scored significantly lower across all dimensions (mean \approx 1.0–1.4), highlighting persistent challenges in the cultural visual adaptability of these sectors (see Table 7).

Table 7

Mean values of four-dimensional adaptability of local cultural visual assets in different industries

Industry Category	Cultural Relevance	Scene Appropriateness	Style Consistency	Audience Acceptance
Manufacturing & Others	1.06	1.06	1.27	1.27
Small Restaurants & Service Industry	1.40	1.40	1.37	1.37
Cultural Tourism & Operators	2.62	2.62	2.52	2.52
Yellow Wine & Food	2.83	2.83	2.59	2.59

Notes: The mean of each industry dimension is obtained by scoring the enterprise after two people independently code it, and then averaging the mean of all enterprises in the same industry.

Overall, Shaoxing's local cultural visual assets still have the phenomenon of usage level aggregation, uneven type distribution and cross-industry embedding intensity differences in corporate brands, which provides an important basis for the subsequent optimization of adaptation mechanisms and research on transferable paths.

Cross-Industry Comparative Analysis

Based on the descriptive statistics of local cultural visual element usage and adaptability indices from the 18 valid sample enterprises, this study conducted a cross-industry comparative analysis to uncover both the divergences and commonalities in symbol types, usage patterns, and adaptability performance across different sectors.

From the perspective of symbol category usage, the rice wine and food industries exhibit a high reliance on historical figures, folk artifacts, and traditional patterns. These symbols are primarily incorporated through borrowing and moderate variation, particularly in key visual touchpoints such as logos, packaging, and spatial design. In contrast, cultural tourism and operational entities tend to adopt more diverse symbolic combinations. They frequently utilize architectural motifs, cultural scenes, festivals, and ornamental patterns, and demonstrate notable symbol reshaping and cross-contextual applications in sub-brands and cultural-creative products. Meanwhile, small-scale catering and service industries generally feature isolated uses of folk artifacts or simplified geographic imagery. Their symbolic use lacks depth, is often fragmented, and shows a high degree of symbolic absence, indicating an incomplete cultural visual system. Manufacturing and other sectors primarily adopt modern or neutral visual design elements, with very limited use of local cultural symbols—exhibiting an obvious lack of symbolic integration.

In terms of the four-dimensional adaptability index—cultural relevance, scene matching, style consistency, and audience acceptance—significant inter-industry differences are observed (see Table 9). The rice wine and food industries scored highest in cultural relevance and scene matching (with averages approaching 3.0), reflecting strong alignment with Shaoxing's traditional identity. Cultural tourism and operation entities achieved balanced scores across all dimensions, demonstrating both visual innovation and public resonance. In contrast, small-scale service providers and manufacturing firms performed poorly across all dimensions, particularly in style consistency and audience acceptance, highlighting gaps in visual coherence and communicative effectiveness.

Table 8 provides an integrated overview of the main symbolic categories, dominant usage strategies, and adaptability scores for each industry, further illustrating how sectoral attributes critically influence the application patterns of local cultural visual assets. These findings offer valuable empirical support for the refinement and validation of the subsequent adaptation mechanism model (see table 8).

Table 8

Comparison of the use and adaptability of local cultural visual assets in different industries

Industry	Main Symbol Categories Used	Usage Type (Dominant)	Cultural Relevance	Scene Appropriateness	Style Consistency	Audience Acceptance
Yellow Wine & Food	Historical figures, folk artifacts, traditional motifs/patterns	Borrowing + Variation	2.83	2.83	2.59	2.59
Cultural Tourism & Operators	Architecture & settings, festival events, traditional motifs/patterns	Variation + Reconstruction	2.62	2.62	2.52	2.52
Small Restaurants & Service Industry	Folk artifacts, partial geographic imagery	Borrowing + Absence	1.40	1.40	1.37	1.37
Manufacturing & Others	Very few symbols or none	Mostly Absence	1.06	1.06	1.27	1.27

Notes: The adaptability index of each industry is the industry average of the mean of the two-person coding of the enterprise, and the dominant category of the usage type is summarized according to the coding results.

In summary, the results of the cross-industry comparative analysis fully reveal the differences in the use of local cultural visual assets in different industries and the diversity of adaptability levels, verify the close connection between industry attributes, enterprise scale and cultural expression depth, and provide solid empirical support for subsequent mechanism exploration and application optimization. To further ensure the reliability and consistency of the analysis conclusions. In order to improve the reliability of the data, this study adopted a combination of two-person independent coding and divergent discussions. After multiple rounds of verification and consistency discussion, the coding results achieved a high degree of consistency in the discrimination of symbol usage types and four-dimensional adaptability scores, ensuring the credibility and repeatability of the subsequent analysis conclusions.

Discussion and Conclusions

Based on the systematic analysis and cross-industry comparison of the current application of Shaoxing's local cultural visual assets in corporate branding, this study yields the following four key findings:

i. Local cultural visual symbols in Shaoxing exhibit a pattern of "high decoration but low narrative" in corporate branding.

Most enterprises favor the use of decorative visual elements such as traditional patterns, folk artifacts, and architectural or scenic motifs. In contrast, symbols with stronger narrative

potential—such as historical figures, geographic imagery, and festival-related elements—are employed less frequently. Overall, the integration of cultural symbols tends to remain at a superficial level, lacking deeper storytelling and cultural interpretation.

ii. There are significant inter-industry differences in the depth and adaptability of cultural visual asset application.

Benefiting from deep-rooted industrial heritage, the rice wine and food sectors show the highest average scores in both usage frequency and cultural relevance (mean = 2.83), with strong performance in scene matching (2.83) and relatively balanced results in style consistency and audience acceptance (2.59). The cultural tourism and operations sector demonstrates strengths in symbolic diversity and creative adaptation, achieving relatively balanced scores across all four dimensions (mean = 2.62–2.52), indicating strong visual innovation and public engagement. In contrast, small-scale catering and manufacturing enterprises, constrained by limited resources, design capacity, and brand strategy, exhibit low symbolic usage and weak overall adaptability (mean = 1.06–1.40), signaling a need for improvement in cultural integration.

iii. The proposed four-dimensional adaptation mechanism—“expression motivation, reception scenario, design capability, and strategic demand”—effectively explains the application paths of cultural visual symbols in various contexts.

The findings suggest that enterprises’ willingness to engage in cultural expression, the availability of appropriate communication platforms, their design translation capacity, and overarching brand strategies are interrelated and collectively influence the depth of cultural symbol use, the degree of innovation, and overall adaptability. This four-dimensional model provides both a theoretical framework and a practical guide for enterprises in culturally rich regions to optimize their visual branding strategies.

iv. Notable intra-industry variation exists in the use and adaptability of cultural symbols.

Even within the same industry, enterprises differ considerably in how they incorporate and adapt cultural visual elements, shaped by variations in brand legacy, investment in design, and strategic positioning. While some leading brands excel in symbolic innovation and cross-media communication, small and medium-sized enterprises often rely on generic visual borrowing and lack depth in narrative construction and personalized expression.

Theoretical Implications

This study examines the utilization and adaptation of Shaoxing’s local cultural visual assets in corporate branding. By integrating content analysis, cross-industry comparison, and the construction of an adaptation mechanism, it broadens the scope of research on local cultural resources within the field of corporate visual communication. The findings contribute the following insights to related theoretical research:

First, this study enriches the understanding of how local cultural symbols are applied in brand communication contexts. While existing literature predominantly addresses the use of cultural elements in macro-level city branding or regional image construction, it rarely investigates the multilayered embedding strategies of cultural visual symbols within individual corporate brands. This research refines the typologies and expression pathways of symbolic use among representative Shaoxing enterprises, clarifies the transformation

process from “cultural resources” to “brand visual assets,” and offers a novel empirical lens for advancing theories of brand communication and localized cultural storytelling.

Second, the study verifies and expands the applicability of existing theories on cultural embedding and symbolic communication. Through comparative industry analysis and mechanism modeling, the findings reveal that the effective integration of local cultural symbols depends not solely on the availability of cultural resources, but also on a complex interplay of four dimensions: expression motivation, communication scenarios, design capabilities, and strategic objectives. This multidimensional understanding enhances existing theoretical frameworks on cultural symbol adaptability and visual coherence, and deepens scholarly insight into how static cultural symbols evolve into dynamic communication carriers within brand systems.

Finally, the proposed four-dimensional adaptation mechanism—comprising “expression motivation, reception scenario, design capability, and strategic demand”—serves as a transferable theoretical tool for the sustainable application of local cultural visual assets in corporate branding. Beyond its explanatory value in the Shaoxing case, the model provides a practical framework and analytical reference for other culturally rich cities seeking to improve the effectiveness and global reach of cultural symbol communication at the enterprise level.

Practical Implications

Based on the empirical analysis of the current application, industry differences, and adaptation mechanisms of Shaoxing's local cultural visual assets in corporate branding, this study proposes the following targeted practical recommendations, supported by relevant domestic and international cases:

i. Addressing the issue of "strong decorativeness but weak narrative": Encourage enterprises to explore the stories and cultural contexts behind symbols.

The findings indicate that many Shaoxing enterprises tend to use traditional patterns and utensils merely as decorative motifs, lacking deeper narrative integration. To address this, local cultural authorities and industry associations should compile systematic cultural archives, organize training on symbol interpretation and narrative reconstruction, and assist companies in embedding culturally rich and communicable stories within their visual identity systems. For example, Xianheng Hotel, in its recent brand upgrade, moved beyond the simple use of Lu Xun's image by integrating literary contexts from “Kong Yiji” to create immersive dining scenes and cultural tourism experiences—merging narrative and visual symbols. Internationally, Dubai Tourism effectively combines landmarks like the Burj Al Arab and Palm Jumeirah with historical motifs such as Arab maritime culture, the Silk Road, and trade heritage, reinforcing tradition-modernity synergy in global advertising and exhibitions.

ii. In response to significant cross-industry disparities in symbol usage depth: Implement a “key-industry-led, weaker-industry-driven” hierarchical guidance model.

The study reveals that industries such as rice wine and cultural tourism show higher levels of cultural asset integration, while small-scale catering and modern service sectors often lack symbolic representation. It is recommended that government and industry bodies prioritize support for leading rice wine producers and flagship tourism enterprises—those with strong cultural alignment and market influence—to develop “cultural visual demonstration

projects.” These cases can serve as experiential models and resource hubs, gradually elevating weaker industries through diffusion. For instance, Guyue Longshan continues to collaborate with museums and intangible cultural heritage workshops, launching elegant co-branded products that exemplify Shaoxing’s rice wine culture. Its visual strategies have been emulated by smaller boutique wineries and local restaurants, generating a virtuous cycle of demonstration and adoption. Similarly, in France’s Provence region, large lavender farms and tourism bureaus initially standardized lavender-themed visuals, later extending the aesthetic to local accommodations and shops, ensuring regional cultural coherence and tourism appeal.

iii. To overcome disparities in design capability and symbol translation: Establish a regional “Cultural Visual Co-Creation Platform.”

The study finds that while some established brands and tourism companies collaborate with universities and professional design teams for symbol innovation, many SMEs lack access to such resources and remain at a basic borrowing stage. It is proposed that local authorities initiate a “Shaoxing Cultural Visual Co-Creation Center” that brings together scholars, designers, and enterprise stakeholders to co-develop symbol adaptation solutions, harmonize design styles, and promote cross-scenario usage. The center could maintain an open-access symbol database and offer modular templates tailored for SME branding needs. A successful precedent is the West Lake Cultural and Creative Lab in Hangzhou, where universities, design firms, and cultural enterprises jointly incubate cultural IPs and share design resources for emerging brands. Likewise, the Amsterdam Creative Industries Network (ACIN) and the Creative Industries Fund NL provide visual consulting and interdisciplinary design support to small enterprises, significantly enhancing the cultural identity and global communication of Dutch brands.

In summary, by advancing narrative depth, fostering industry demonstration, and establishing collaborative design platforms, Shaoxing and other culturally rich cities can transform local cultural visual assets into strategic brand advantages—facilitating the contemporary revitalization and international dissemination of intangible cultural heritage.

Limitations and Future Research

Based on the empirical analysis of the current application, industry differences, and adaptation mechanisms of Shaoxing's local cultural visual assets in corporate branding, this study proposes the following targeted practical recommendations, supported by relevant domestic and international cases:

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