

From Creative Work to Commercial Product: An Exploration of the Mechanism for Translating Visual Communication Design Outcomes through “Industry-Academia-Research” Collaboration - A Case Study on Rural Revitalization Practice at Huzhou Normal University

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Abstract:

Against the dual backdrop of the deepening Rural Revitalization Strategy and the comprehensive implementation of policies promoting industry-education integration, the translation of research and practice outcomes in the field of visual communication design has emerged as a vital bridge connecting the intellectual resources of higher education institutions with the practical development needs of rural areas. Drawing upon a series of related initiatives undertaken by Huzhou University as a case study, this paper aims to explore the mechanisms governing the transformation of creative works into marketable products. Research indicates that effective outcomes translation relies on a process encompassing three critical stages—“idea incubation”, “technology adaptation”, and “market validation”—while also depending on the establishment of a collaborative and highly efficient operational mechanism among four key stakeholders: universities, enterprises, government bodies, and rural communities. Practical case studies demonstrate that visual communication design effectively enhances rural brand value, cultural vitality, and communication efficacy through three distinct pathways: product integration, the creation of rural spatial environments, and digital dissemination and promotion. However, the current mechanism still faces challenges regarding sustainable development, as well as practical dilemmas such as insufficient resource integration. Finally, this paper proposes optimization recommendations across three key areas—establishing collaborative platforms, strengthening process management, and fostering joint capacity building—with the aim of providing a practical paradigmatic reference for design education in higher institutions to support rural revitalization.

Keywords:

Visual Communication Design, Industry-Academia-Research Collaboration, Commercialization of Research Outcomes, Rural Revitalization; Design Empowerment

1. Introduction

The Rural Revitalization Strategy serves as the overarching framework for China's work concerning "agriculture, rural areas, and farmers in the new era"; its core objective is to drive the comprehensive revitalization of rural industries, talent, culture, ecology, and organizations [1]. In this grand process, design is moving from the periphery to the center, becoming a key empowering means to activate rural resources, enhance rural values, and tell rural stories. Through its systematic creation of symbols and capacity for visual storytelling, visual communication design transforms the unique natural landscapes, historical heritage, and local resources of rural areas into brand identities and cultural products that are recognizable, disseminable, and consumable—thereby directly serving the development of rural industries and the cultivation of cultural confidence. The integration of industry, academia, and research constitutes the indispensable path for enhancing the capacity for technological innovation in local universities, as well as a beneficial measure for fostering regional economic and social development. [2] Concurrently, the higher education sector is actively advancing the integration of industry with education, and of scientific research with pedagogy—emphasizing the close alignment of industrial demands, scientific innovation, and educational instruction. The integrated model of industry, academia, and research has emerged as a pivotal pathway for applied disciplines—including design—to simultaneously achieve the dual objectives of talent cultivation and social service. Specifically within the field of Visual Communication Design, traditional educational outputs typically manifest as course assignments, graduation projects, and similar creative works; however, these often remain confined to the conceptual stage or project presentation, exhibiting a disconnect from actual industrial applications and market demands. Consequently, establishing effective mechanisms to transform these academic works into tangible products capable of genuinely driving socio-economic development is not only an imperative for the evolution of design education but also a pressing challenge for the design discipline as it seeks to respond to national strategies and demonstrate its societal value.

Huzhou Normal University is situated in Huzhou, Zhejiang Province—the birthplace of the "Two Mountains" philosophy. This region is characterized by vibrant rural revitalization initiatives and faces a tangible and urgent need for design empowerment. In recent years, the university's Visual Communication Design program has actively dedicated itself to serving the local community, undertaking a series of industry-academia-research collaborative projects focused on brand upgrading, cultural preservation, and tourism promotion within Huzhou and its surrounding rural areas. Through these endeavors, the program has accumulated preliminary experience in the process of transforming creative works into marketable products. Conducting in-depth research based on these experiences offers a case study of significant representative value and practical relevance.

2. The Significance of Exploring Mechanisms for the Commercialization of "Industry-Academia-Research" Achievement

Currently, academic discussions on "industry-academia-research" are mostly focused on fields such as industrial design and architectural design, and there is relatively insufficient systematic research on how visual communication design, a discipline that emphasizes cultural information transmission, can achieve results

transformation. This study focuses on the transformation of visual communication design results from creative schemes to market products, attempting to construct a mechanism analysis framework that includes core links and subject collaboration. At the same time, examining the mechanism of transforming design results in the specific context of rural revitalization can help deepen the systematic and mechanistic understanding of design intervention in rural areas, go beyond case descriptions, and extract theoretical models with certain universality. Using project-based teaching mode for industry university research cooperation teaching, enterprises provide project support, teachers lead student teams to carry out teaching and research work, and teachers are both project managers and collaborators participating in peer work of the project team. [3]

Drawing upon the practical case study of rural revitalization at Huzhou Normal University as a blueprint, this study offers a practical roadmap for visual communication design programs at other applied universities seeking to establish effective industry-academia-research collaborations and contribute to rural revitalization. The findings assist design educators in higher education in optimizing their curricula and innovating pedagogical approaches, thereby driving reforms toward project-based and practice-oriented instruction. Ultimately, this facilitates the more efficient and targeted deployment of design resources into rural development initiatives.

3. Key Stages of Mechanism Construction and the Collaboration Framework

The transformation of visual communication design results from works within the college to products serving rural revitalization is not simply a direct application, but more like a systematic project, a complex system involving creative deepening, technological adaptation, market acceptance, and multi-party collaboration.

3.1. Key Stages in the Transformation from Creative Work to Product

3.1.1. Idea Incubation: From Classroom Assignment to Project Prototype

As the initial stage of the transformation process, the core of creative incubation lies in precisely identifying the authentic needs of rural communities. Unlike the curriculum creation that focuses on aesthetic expression in university classrooms, rural industry university research design needs to rely on methods such as field surveys and user interviews, deeply connect with villagers and grassroots cadres, and focus on practical issues such as difficulties in agricultural product sales, vague rural cultural tourism images, and weak local cultural dissemination, to ensure that creative directions are in line with rural development demands. Under the joint guidance of academic faculty and industry mentors, student teams integrate local cultural elements with modern design aesthetics to formulate comprehensive project proposals that encompass core visual identities, practical application scenarios, and projections regarding costs and anticipated impact.

3.1.2. Technical Integration: Integrating Design Deliverables with Production Processes

This stage is the key to crossing technical barriers and achieving practical production in the design scheme, with the core of balancing design feasibility and cost controllability. The packaging design of agricultural products needs to be adapted to

printing materials, special processes, and food safety standards, while the digital design of rural cultural IP needs to take into account multi platform applications and operational performance. University design teams lack practical experience in production and need to cooperate with printing companies, digital technology companies, handicraft workshops, etc. Through joint sampling, technical consultation, and parameter optimization, the design drafts can be transformed into standardized technical documents that can be scaled up and economically produced, avoiding problems such as excessive costs and inability to implement due to idealized designs.

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3.1.4. Market Validation: User Testing and Feedback-Based Adjustments

This stage is pivotal to realizing the market value of the design outcomes. Through small-scale pilot runs, trials, or surveys, the team gathers authentic feedback from consumers, villagers, and tourists, thereby comprehensively evaluating the product across dimensions such as visual appeal, information transmission efficiency, ease of use, and cultural resonance. Based on this feedback, the design team undertakes fine-tuning of visuals, restructuring of information architecture, and functional optimization. This process shifts the criteria for design evaluation from the subjective judgment of the creators to the objective validation of the market and users, ultimately achieving the social realization of the design's value.

3.2. Collaboration Among Multiple Stakeholders

The translation of outcomes from industry-academia-research collaboration in visual communication design cannot be achieved independently by any single party; rather, it necessitates the formation of a collaborative network among universities, enterprises, local governments, and rural communities. Drawing upon their respective resources, these four parties establish clear divisions of labor and leverage their complementary strengths, thereby generating a collective synergy for the translation process.

3.2.1. Universities: Hubs for the Integration of Teaching, Research, and Social Service

As central entities for creative resources, talent supply, and knowledge dissemination, higher education institutions provide cutting-edge design concepts, specialized talent, and R&D capabilities. They achieve this by advancing project-based pedagogical reforms and organizing faculty and students to conduct on-site

research and design practice. Rural revitalization necessitates the guidance and leadership of pioneering talent. Consequently, universities should dedicate themselves to cultivating versatile professionals—individuals endowed with an innovative spirit, specialized skills, a global perspective, and managerial competence—thereby emerging as a leading force in the cause of rural revitalization [4]. Furthermore, these institutions undertake the preliminary management of design-related intellectual property and generate tangible outcomes in the realms of scientific research and social service. Their core objectives center on enhancing the quality of talent cultivation, enriching practical teaching resources, producing high-caliber research findings, and expanding the institutions' societal influence.

3.2.2. Enterprises: Demand-Oriented and Resource-Supporting Parties

Enterprises primarily serve as the bridge connecting creative design concepts with market realization, fulfilling functions related to conveying market demands, providing production technologies, and executing commercial operations. By leveraging the talent pool and relevant research outcomes from university-level art and design programs, enterprises can foster their own internal reform and development. Professionals in the field of art and design possess unique aesthetic sensibilities and creative capabilities; they can infuse enterprises with renewed vitality, help establish a strong brand image, and thereby facilitate the healthy growth of the business.[5] Enterprises must clearly define market demands and commercial objectives, provide the necessary production processes, supply chain infrastructure, and technical support, and oversee product mass production, promotion, and sales, while also participating in the feasibility assessment of design proposals. Their core objectives include securing market-competitive design outcomes, reducing the costs associated with in-house R&D, expanding into rural markets, and enhancing overall brand value.

3.2.3. Local Government: Policy Guidance and Platform Builder

Within a collaborative network, local governments primarily serve a guiding and supportive role. They achieve this by enacting targeted support policies, such as providing financial subsidies and tax incentives, and by establishing platforms to facilitate linkages between industry, academia, and research institutions, thereby organizing the dissemination of needs and the matching of projects. Furthermore, they coordinate cross-departmental issues, such as those involving land use and infrastructure to clear away any obstacles hindering project implementation. The overarching objective is to drive the development of rural industries and culture, enhance the rural landscape, fulfill key performance indicators for rural revitalization, and generate practical experiences that are both replicable and scalable.

3.2.4. Rural Communities: Proponents of Needs and Bearers of Culture

Rural communities serve simultaneously as custodians of indigenous knowledge and as the ultimate end-users and beneficiaries of project outcomes. They are responsible for articulating authentic aspirations regarding development and cultural heritage preservation, as well as for providing local resources, venues, and human capital support. Furthermore, they participate in the deliberation and decision-making processes for design proposals, provide feedback on product usage, and undertake a portion of the localized production and operational tasks. Their core priorities center

on enhancing residents' economic income, improving living environments, revitalizing local culture, and strengthening community cohesion and cultural pride.

4. Huzhou Normal University's Explorations in Rural Revitalization Practice

4.1. In-depth Research

To explore practical pathways for leveraging visual communication design to empower rural revitalization, a research team utilized Shuikou Township in Huzhou City as an empirical case study. Centering on three core dimensions: cultural heritage, regional distinctiveness, and industrial development, the team conducted field research to systematically inventory local resources and development aspirations, thereby providing foundational materials and a basis in reality for subsequent design practices. By focusing on the cultural roots of Shuikou Township, and through a combination of literature reviews and on-site visits, the team accomplished two core tasks: First, they mapped out the historical evolution of the region, authenticating key historical events, figures, and tangible cultural heritage assets to define their local historical significance and value; second, they unearthed intangible cultural heritage, such as traditional folklore and handicrafts, investigated the contemporary custodians, modes of transmission, and challenges associated with these traditions, thereby laying the groundwork for their creative transformation into cultural design applications.

4.2. Practical Action

At the beginning of the design practice, the team conducted face-to-face interviews with villagers in the fields of Shuikou Township, accurately capturing their actual needs and development demands. They also conducted a detailed survey of the natural ecology and site layout of the project site, laying a solid foundation and data support for the design work. With the support of previous research results, the team brainstormed and collided ideas, deeply integrating local cultural, ecological, and industrial resources of Shuikou Township, and constructing a design scheme system that combines rural practicality and artistic expression. After the preliminary determination of the plan, the team continued to iterate and optimize based on customer feedback, repeatedly polishing design details to ensure that each design result is truly adapted to the actual rural scene, bringing concrete revitalization benefits and development value to Shuikou Township.

4.3. Exhibition Site of Practical Achievements and Works



Figure 1. Design Team Design Empowering Rural Revitalization Practice Achievement Exhibition Site



Figure 2. “Good Life in the Countryside” Logo Design — Designer: Xie Jin; Instructor: Wang Na.



Figure 3. Showcase of Practical Implementation Outcomes—The “My Village Knows How to Live Things Up” Live TV Broadcast Team on Site.

5. Discussion and Optimization

The practice of Huzhou Normal University has shown that the successful transformation of visual communication design into industry university research cannot be achieved without the support of real topics in project-based teaching, deep cooperation between the school and the local authorities, and value consensus among all participating parties. To break through the current bottleneck and promote the mechanism from effective operation to efficient and sustainable, the key is to shift the cooperation mode from decentralized project cooperation to platform based ecological co construction. It is suggested that local governments take the lead in integrating leading universities, leading enterprises, financial institutions, rural cooperatives, and other forces to jointly build a physically operated rural creative innovation center. This platform undertakes functions such as demand integration, resource docking, intellectual property management, and achievement promotion, providing comprehensive support services from creativity to market. At the same time, it is necessary to establish a comprehensive management system that covers project initiation, mid-term evaluation, final acceptance, and post tracking. Introducing a third-party evaluation mechanism not only evaluates the design output, but also pays attention to the economic value-added benefits, cultural dissemination impact, and social benefits it brings. The ultimate goal of the transformation mechanism is to establish a virtuous cycle of survival of the fittest by directly linking the evaluation results with resource allocation, in order to stimulate endogenous motivation in rural areas. In the specific project implementation process, through workshops and joint training between schools, enterprises, and villages, empower rural cadres, young entrepreneurs, and craftsmen, and cultivate their basic design aesthetic literacy and management application ability. Support the establishment of local positions such as

rural brand officers, build a platform for local talent growth, ensure that rural areas can independently maintain and update design assets even after external teams withdraw, and guarantee the long-term effectiveness of results transformation.

6. Conclusions

This study combines multiple empirical cases from Huzhou Normal University to demonstrate the inherent logic and operational mechanism of visual communication design in achieving results transformation in rural revitalization scenarios. The core conclusion of this study is that the transformation of design results is a systematic and complex practice that relies on precise positioning of the creative process, as well as multi-faceted collaboration at the technical level, iterative optimization under market feedback, and value co creation process involving multiple stakeholders in collaborative governance.

Looking ahead to the future, the rural practice empowerment of visual communication design should keep up with technological development trends and actively explore cutting-edge directions such as AIGC assisted creation and metaverse scene construction. The fundamental path also needs to shift from short-term project services to long-term ecological co construction, so that universities can deeply integrate into the rural innovation system and continue to play an empowering and connecting role. Only in this way can design practice truly take root in the fertile soil of rural areas, truly realize the transformation from a good work to a good product, form long-term development momentum, and provide practical and feasible design solutions and practical wisdom for rural revitalization.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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