

The Application and Exploration of Inner Mongolia Intangible Cultural Heritage in Hotel Design: A Case Study of Horinger Paper-cutting

Zhaochen Li*

Inner Mongolia Normal University, Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, China

**Corresponding author: zc.arcobaleno@qq.com*

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Abstract: Under the impact of globalization and modernization, intangible cultural heritage faces severe challenges in preservation and transmission. Moreover, homogenized competition within the hotel industry has intensified, making cultural differentiation crucial to breaking this pattern. This paper selects Horinger Paper-cutting—a nationally recognized intangible cultural heritage from Inner Mongolia—as a case study to explore its integration pathways into hotel design and the value it brings. The paper first analyzes the urgency of integrating intangible heritage into hotel design in the contemporary era. It then employs a specific design case study to provide an in-depth analysis of the incorporation of Horinger Paper-cutting into hotel design from the designers perspective. Finally, it focuses on exploring the role and intervention models that intangible heritage inheritors should play in this process, thereby offering theoretical references and practical paradigms for the living transmission of Inner Mongolia's intangible cultural heritage and the innovative upgrading of the hotel industry.

1. The Urgency of Integrating Intangible Cultural Heritage into Hotel Design

In contemporary society, the survival and development of intangible cultural heritage stand at a historically significant crossroads. Systematically and innovatively integrating intangible cultural heritage into hotel design is not merely a passing trend but stems from an urgent necessity across multiple dimensions—cultural, economic, and social.

1.1 Cultural Urgency: Addressing the Crisis of Living Transmission

Horinger Paper-cutting represents a vital component of Chinese intangible cultural heritage. It is a precious artistic achievement created by the regions laboring people and remains one of the most cherished forms of folk art among local communities. Some Chinese scholars note that Horinger Paper-cutting was primarily created by generations of rural women who lived in the Horinger region. Developed through continuous transmission across generations, it is deeply rooted in the indigenous northern ethnic culture of the grasslands while also incorporating elements of the agricultural culture that has steadily influenced the area^[1]. It enjoys enthusiastic support among local working people.

However, like most intangible cultural heritage projects, it currently faces the severe challenge of skills disappearing with the passing of practitioners. As the older generation of paper-cutting artisans gradually age, the younger generation generally lacks interest in learning traditional skills and motivation for inheritance, leading to a break in the chain of transmission.

Integrating intangible cultural heritage into hotel design represents a highly meaningful practice, falling under the categories of productive preservation and living transmission. Hotels operate continuously, engaging in frequent interactions with guests from all corners of the world. This creates a modern living space that provides a relatively stable platform for showcasing intangible cultural heritage. As a result, intangible cultural heritage is no longer confined to the passive, static display of museum showcases. Instead, it can truly integrate into the specific contexts of contemporary consumption and experience. Take paper-cutting as an example: when it transitions from rural window frames to the walls of urban hotels, it ceases to be an unapproachable heritage. Instead, it transforms into a tangible, interactive, and consumable living art that people can genuinely experience. This method of integration undoubtedly serves as an effective rescue measure against the loss of cultural memory, allowing traditional crafts to revitalize and thrive within a modern context.

1.2 Economic and Market Imperatives: Breaking Down Homogeneous Competition Barriers

Today, Inner Mongolia's hotel industry has entered an era of saturated competition. At this stage, whether high-end luxury hotels or uniquely designed boutique hotels, all find themselves trapped in a red ocean characterized by strikingly similar styles and largely indistinguishable customer experiences. Standardized international models, ubiquitous light luxury or neo-Chinese styles, and hotels failing to sufficiently highlight local cultural characteristics have blurred brand recognition. Maintaining customer loyalty has thus become exceptionally challenging.

Against this backdrop, regional culture has emerged as a crucial core element for building brand uniqueness. As an art form, Horinger Paper-cutting draws its strength from its regional environment. Rooted in cultural fusion, it carries the cultural characteristics of rural China. It is a product of multi-ethnic integration and a unique artistic phenomenon born from different groups adapting to their living environments. Its practitioners primarily consist of immigrants from inland provinces like Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Hebei, along with their descendants^[2]. This tradition has also absorbed elements of nomadic culture and grassland-themed paper-cutting forms, creating an irreplicable cultural IP rich in narrative depth. Incorporating such intangible cultural heritage elements into hotel design in Inner Mongolia could rapidly establish a powerful visual identity system while forging meaningful emotional connections. This would elevate the hotel from a mere lodging space to a cultural destination. This approach not only satisfies the deep-seated demand of new-generation consumers for personalized and immersive experiences but also builds a robust cultural barrier in the fiercely competitive market. It represents an urgent path to escape the price war dilemma and achieve value innovation.

1.3 The Urgency of Brand and Social Dimensions: Responding to the Call for Cultural Confidence and Sustainable Development

This discussion unfolds against the backdrop of national strategies promoting cultural confidence and intangible cultural heritage preservation. A company's sense of cultural responsibility has become a key benchmark for measuring its social value. If a hotel project successfully integrates local intangible cultural heritage, its significance extends far beyond the commercial realm. It not only represents an active response to national cultural policies but also serves as a vivid case study of corporate social responsibility in action.

Such hotels garner widespread acclaim from governments, media, and the public, significantly

boosting brand reputation and enhancing positive image. From a broader perspective, this fosters a sustainable model where tourism promotes culture, and culture shapes tourism. As a core component of the cultural tourism industry chain, hotels can drive the development of related cultural and creative products by integrating intangible cultural heritage into their design. This approach attracts inheritors to reside and perform at the hotel, while also guiding guests toward the origins of these traditions. Consequently, a virtuous cultural tourism ecosystem emerges, with the hotel serving as a hub that radiates influence to surrounding communities and artisans, continuously injecting momentum into local economic and cultural development.

In essence, integrating intangible cultural heritage like Horiger Paper-cutting into hotel design is not only a response to the crisis facing cultural preservation but also a necessary choice to break free from market homogenization. It is an imperative step toward sustainable development and an urgent demand of our time. This is no longer merely an optional question of whether to do it, but has become a strategic imperative at the level of how to do it better.

2. Design Translation: Specific Integration Cases of Horiger Paper-cutting in Hotel Spaces

Integrating Horiger Paper-cutting into hotel design is not merely about pasting patterns or randomly assembling symbols. It is a profound process of design translation. In this process, designers must deeply understand the cultural essence embedded in paper-cutting while leveraging modern design language and material techniques to liberate the art form from its two-dimensional paper surface and seamlessly integrate it into three-dimensional spaces. Using artwork and hotel public area decorations as examples, we will detail the specific pathways for their integration.

2.1 Art Works: From Folk Window Decoration to Focal Point of Spatial Narrative

Within traditional contexts, paper-cutting typically manifests as window or wall decorations, primarily serving ornamental purposes. Within hotel spaces, however, it can be elevated to become core artworks that carry cultural narratives. The key to innovation lies in breaking free from the physical constraints of paper by employing novel materials in the material translation process—an undeniably innovative approach. Carefully observe the forms paper assumes through folding, bending, and crumpling—such as crisply defined corners or fluid curves. Simultaneously, note the visual language characteristics of paper: the geometric precision of origami, the distinctive openwork of paper-cutting, and so forth. By employing materials like metal, acrylic, and glass to mimic papers forms, the essence of paper solidifies into durable, permanent physical entities.

Acrylic, for instance, offers excellent workability—suitable for large-scale sheet processing as well as diverse techniques like casting, injection molding, thermoforming, and cutting/joining^[3]. Classic patterns from Horiger Paper-cutting can be recreated through engraving. Thermforming technology effectively mimics the fluid, dynamic poses of paper billowing and flipping freely in the wind, capturing these fleeting moments to imbue static spaces with a silent rhythm. Acrylic possesses high light transmittance, projecting richly layered and subtly shifting light and shadow effects as natural or artificial light angles shift.

Artworks crafted from paper-cutting elements are exceptionally well-suited for placement in hotel atrium spaces. A series of staggered paper-cut pieces, varying in height, gracefully descend from the ceiling. Intertwining and gradually extending toward the floor, they create a visually striking focal point that instantly elevates the artistic ambiance of the space. If this installation utilizes recyclable acrylic materials, it aligns perfectly with the current trend toward eco-friendly hotels. Its relatively long lifespan fundamentally reduces resource consumption associated with frequent replacement of art installations. The installations translucent and ethereal form psychologically lightens spatial density, effectively countering the oppressive feel of high-ceilinged atriums. This creates an

atmosphere where the space seems to breathe freely. This piece uses rigid material to interpret the softness and ethereal quality of paper, creating a striking contrast between the materials inherent properties and its visual perception. This contrast invites viewers to contemplate philosophical questions about reality and illusion. It perfectly preserves the original spirit of paper-cutting while imparting a solemn and timeless artistic charm, making it the visual focal point of the entire hotel.

2.2 Guest Room Corridors: From Transitional Spaces to Cultural Timelines

Successful hotel design goes beyond fulfilling functional requirements; it must also embody distinct regional and cultural characteristics. Guest room corridors are often overlooked transitional spaces, yet through the integration of Horinger Paper-cutting, they can be transformed into an immersive Cultural Timeline Corridor^[4].

In conventional hotel design, guest rooms and corridor walls rarely interact visually. Establishing a connection between doorways and corridor wall decorations—or treating them as a unified design element—can elevate these often-underwhelming spaces into culturally rich artistic expressions. For instance, the walls flanking guest room doors could feature frosted red glass or long-rain glass installations. The red glass would mimic the effect of red paper-cutting, while etching techniques would render the paper-cutting patterns characteristic of Horinger. Combined with concealed LED strips, this creates a soft, culturally evocative play of light and shadow. Abandoning fragmented decoration, the entire corridor is treated as a cohesive narrative sequence.

Themes such as Ode to Life, Cycle of Seasons, or Path of Migration can be selected, with corresponding paper-cut patterns arranged in a logical sequence. As night falls, light penetrates the etched glass, projecting the paper-cut motifs onto the floor and ceiling, creating a dynamic narrative of light and shadow. Passersby moving through this space feel as though they've stepped into a slowly unfolding folk painting. Their gentle footsteps seem to carry them through shifting time and space. These patterns progress sequentially from spring plowing to winter storage, from birth ceremonies to wedding rites, amplifying the spatial rhythm and cultural depth. When materials, lighting, and themes harmonize, the corridor transcends mere transit space, becoming a cultural medium that silently conveys the beliefs and life philosophies embedded in Horinger Paper-cutting.

2.3 Public Art Staircase: From Transport Hub to Vertical Art Sanctuary

Artistic staircases represent highly expressive three-dimensional spaces within hotels, serving as ideal vessels for integrating Horinger Paper-cutting. For luxury hotels, the lobby transcends mere passageway functionality, it functions as a stage where guests form both their first impression and final impression. Within this context, the spiral staircase assumes a crucial and artistic role. With its fluid curves and dynamic ascent, the spiral staircase transforms into a monumental, three-dimensional indoor sculpture. It successfully disrupts the monotony of linear spaces, becoming the visual focal point of the entire lobby while serving as an artistic statement. Instantly, it establishes the hotels luxurious tone and exceptional artistic taste.

Artistic staircases in hotels directly and clearly convey the establishments positioning and stylistic identity. While the hotels name may fade from memory, its breathtaking spiral staircase often remains indelibly etched in the mind. The spiral staircase deftly guides the eye upward from the ground level to the upper spaces, enhancing the vertical sense of openness. This makes the soaring lobby appear even more majestic and expansive, effectively avoiding any sense of oppression or discomfort.

The artistic staircase and Horinger Paper-cutting art can be connected through three key aspects:

Direct Association of Color and Symbolism. Chinese Red: Deep crimson is the most iconic color in Chinese Horinger Paper-cutting, symbolizing celebration, good fortune, vitality, and passion. Selecting a rich, pure paper-cutting red as the staircases primary hue creates the most direct and potent

visual and psychological association, instantly evoking traditional Chinese folk art. Red inherently possesses impact. In contemporary hotel design, public lobby areas often employ relatively low-saturation color palettes—neutral tones like off-white, golden yellow, or marble gray. Against this backdrop, a vivid red spiral staircase becomes an unparalleled visual focal point, delivering an unmatched dramatic effect.

The application of patterns and motifs is a crucial design element. The side of the spiral staircase facing the lobby retains a solid red panel, resembling an uncut sheet of giant red paper. The inner handrail incorporates classic patterns from Horiger Paper-cutting through laser cutting or metal engraving techniques, forming an intricate, tactile silhouette wall. Light strips are discreetly embedded within the space between the handrail and the outer guardrail. These light strips illuminate the openwork paper-cut patterns, casting their light and shadow onto the stair treads. As daylight shifts throughout the day or artificial lighting adjusts at night, these light patterns continuously move and transform, creating an immersive, dreamlike artistic experience. This process embodies the evolution of paper-cutting art from static paper to dynamic light and space art.

Modern Interpretation of Materials and Craftsmanship. Digital Art: A circular LED screen is installed at the base of the staircases central section. This screen displays dynamic digital paper-cut animations, featuring content that can showcase local customs and traditions of Horiger or the specific process of paper-cutting creation. This creates an interactive effect with the static staircase structure, thereby telling a more complete story.

From the above examples, it is evident that the integration of Horiger Paper-cutting with hotel design hinges on achieving a creative transformation. This transformation involves multiple dimensions: first, elevating it from a mere symbol to a communicative language; second, shifting its role from mere decoration to a narrative capable of storytelling; Third, it requires expanding from a flat, two-dimensional form to a three-dimensional, spatial presentation. This demands that designers not only execute aesthetic concepts but also become interpreters of culture and agents of translation.

3. Core Driving Force: Models of Heritage Bearers Role Intervention in Hotel Design

The success of integrating intangible cultural heritage into hotel design hinges on ensuring the authenticity and depth of its cultural essence. Intangible cultural heritage bearers are living carriers of culture. Their deep involvement becomes a crucial factor in ensuring the projects success. Throughout the process, their role should not be confined to that of mere pattern providers. Instead, they should participate in the entire design ecosystem using their diverse identities.

3.1 As Cultural Advisors: Ensuring Cultural Accuracy and Spiritual Core

As practitioners of local knowledge, inheritors construct diverse cultural forms based on intrinsic cultural logic and maintain the meaningful connection between intangible heritage and daily life. [5] Their active participation in cultural creation is vital for preserving the living nature of intangible heritage. Designers often possess boundless creativity, yet may fall short due to cultural misunderstandings. Therefore, deep collaboration between inheritors and designers is essential.

During the projects initial stages—concept planning and schematic design—heritage bearers must systematically interpret the intangible cultural heritage. They should meticulously explain to the design team the origins, symbolism, appropriate contexts, and taboos associated with each paper-cutting motif. Furthermore, they must evaluate the design teams proposals for cultural accuracy. For instance, they must identify potential taboos associated with certain patterns or suggest how traditional motifs can be deconstructed according to modern aesthetics. This ensures designs not only resemble the originals but also convey the spirit of Horiger paper-cutting—its rustic simplicity, boldness, and harmony with nature—while avoiding craftiness, kitschiness, or excessive refinement

that would diminish its inherent charm.

3.2 As Co-creative Artists: Achieving Contemporary Transformation and Customized Creation of Intangible Cultural Heritage

When the role of the inheritor evolves from a passive advisor to an active co-creator, the project can generate distinctive and unique artistic value. During the phases of further design development and construction drawing preparation, dedicated artistic creation activities should be undertaken. For instance, inheritors might create one or a series of original paper-cut works specifically tailored to the hotels spatial layout, thematic concept, and overall ambiance. These creations transcend mere replication of traditional patterns, representing reinterpretations rooted in traditional techniques yet featuring contemporary themes.

When selecting decorative materials, the inheritor collaborates with designers and suppliers to explore innovative combinations of paper-cutting with modern materials. For instance, when instructing artisans, they must learn how to apply paper-cutting knife techniques to thicker materials like leather or thin metal sheets, and how to etch large glass surfaces while preserving the distinctive knife-cut texture and paper feel inherent to paper-cut lines. These bespoke paper-cut artworks for the hotel should clearly display the artisans name and be promoted as core artistic assets of the property. This approach demonstrates respect for the artisans creative labor while significantly elevating the hotels artistic sophistication.

3.3 Serving as Training Mentors and Experience Officers: Revitalizing Hotel Operations and Cultural Dissemination

Design completion marks not the end but the beginning of cultural engagement. The knowledge and practical activities mastered by inheritors constitute the most vital aspect of intangible cultural heritage^[6]. Therefore, inheritors must play a crucial role in the hotels back-end operations. During pre-opening training and ongoing operations, they should train staff—particularly front desk, housekeeping, and guest relations personnel—to become not just service providers but cultural interpreters. This enables them to clearly and vividly explain the background stories behind each paper-cutting artwork displayed throughout the hotel.

Regularly host Horiger Paper-cutting Experience Workshops at the hotel, led by master artisans themselves. Hotel staffs guide guests through the entire process—from folding paper and sketching designs to cutting—to complete a simple piece. This serves not only as a value-added service but also as the most immersive cultural interaction, allowing guests to take home a tangible memory. Additionally, stage live demonstrations of paper-cutting techniques during specific events (e.g., weekend dinners, cultural festivals). Customers just need a pair of scissors and a piece of red paper to participate in the activity, instantly conjure a myriad worlds. This dynamic, ritualistic creative process itself becomes a captivating cultural performance.

3.4 Safeguarding Collaborative Models

To effectively implement the aforementioned roles, a modern collaborative framework must be established. Formal advisory contracts should clearly define the rights, responsibilities, intellectual property ownership, and compensation structures for inheritors. Both inheritors and commercial experts must be accorded equal respect and professional treatment. The hotel management needs to establish a translation mechanism: Position a project manager with design expertise and cultural sensitivity between the inheritor and the designer to serve as a communication bridge, ensuring effective alignment between creative vision and cultural authenticity.

4. Conclusion

Integrating Inner Mongolia's Horinger Paper-cutting art into hotel design represents a comprehensive endeavor that simultaneously addresses cultural urgency and commercial foresight. From the outset, it is crucial to fully recognize the contemporary value of intangible cultural heritage in hotel design. Through skillful design translation techniques, the ancient art of paper-cutting is revitalized within the hotels spatial dimensions. Finally, it is imperative to actively involve intangible cultural heritage inheritors in diverse roles—such as cultural advisors, co-creative artists, and training mentors—to ensure the project possesses sufficient cultural depth and vibrant vitality.

This study not only charts a differentiated competitive path for the hospitality industry but also identifies a practical approach to preserving intangible cultural heritage like Horinger Paper-cutting, thereby achieving a win-win scenario where commercial value and cultural value are both realized.

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