

The Symbolic Activation of Cultural Memory: A Study on the Path of Value Reconstruction of Yunjin Intangible Cultural Heritage in Contemporary Society

Xiaowen Fu, Yan Wu

School of Liberal Arts, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China
Email: 2074360137@qq.com

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Abstract

As one of the Masterpieces of Human Intangible Cultural Heritage, Nanjing Yunjin brocade holds significant meaning and value, making its living inheritance in the contemporary era particularly important. Originating in the Eastern Jin dynasty, Yunjin gradually rose to prominence and flourished during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, becoming a royal tribute item. Renowned as “an inch of brocade worth an inch of gold”, it served as the primary attire for royalty and nobility across successive dynasties, symbolizing supreme glory. As an emblem of status and prestige, Yunjin embodies over two thousand years of Chinese cultural memory. However, in the present day, the inheritance and dissemination of Yunjin face considerable challenges. Modern lifestyles and aesthetic sensibilities have undergone profound transformations, leading to a diminished sense of identification with Yunjin and a general unfamiliarity with its cultural and aesthetic value. Therefore, it is essential to symbolically activate the cultural memory of Yunjin. Drawing on Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann’s theories of cultural memory as well as Jean Baudrillard’s semiotic theory, this paper explores how Nanjing Yunjin can be reactivated in contemporary society by transforming its traditional cultural symbols into modern ones. Based on a review of existing literature, it examines Yunjin’s symbolic system, the challenges to its inheritance, and the reconstruction of its value. The central argument of this paper is that the living inheritance of Yunjin can be realized through three pathways of creative transformation: high-end consumption, historical-preservation as cultural vessels, and youth-oriented “national chic” dissemination.

Keywords

Nanjing Yunjin Intangible Cultural Heritage, Cultural Memory, Semiotics,

Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance

1. Introduction

Nanjing Yunjin brocade is a traditional technique within the textile brocade category and is recognized as an intangible cultural heritage (ICH), officially known as the Nanjing Yunjin Wooden Loom Weaving Technique with Ornamental Weft. In 2006, Nanjing Yunjin was inscribed on the first batch of the National Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage; in 2009, it was successfully added to UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Originating in the Six Dynasties period, Nanjing Yunjin boasts a history of over 1500 years and is counted among China's three renowned brocades, alongside Sichuan's Shu brocade and Jiangsu's Song brocade, receiving its name from its resplendent colors reminiscent of the clouds in the sky. The dissemination of ICH constitutes a vital approach to its living inheritance. As an ICH item, Nanjing Yunjin stands out as a brilliant gem within the broader ICH landscape, owing to its exquisite craftsmanship, rich historical and cultural connotations, and distinctive style. However, the transmission and dissemination of Nanjing Yunjin as an ICH face crises and challenges in the present era. Central to this issue is the growing disconnect between Yunjin's cultural connotations and its symbolic value as a consumer commodity, on the one hand, and the context of modern consumer society and the general public, on the other. Consequently, it is imperative to achieve the reconstruction and symbolic translation of Nanjing Yunjin in contemporary society. This process serves as the core link in the living inheritance of Nanjing Yunjin and entails an inherent internal logic. Investigating this mechanism of symbolic translation is therefore of great significance for establishing new avenues for the dissemination of Nanjing Yunjin.

This paper focuses on the symbolic activation and reconstruction of Nanjing Yunjin in the present era, exploring how the cultural memory embedded in Yunjin can be translated into contemporary symbols, transforming traditional cultural symbols into ones that align with modern aesthetics and values. The central argument of this paper posits that the living inheritance and symbolic activation of Nanjing Yunjin as an ICH are primarily realized through three pathways: the high-end consumption pathway, the historical carrier preservation pathway, and the youth-oriented "Guochao" (national trend) and "rejuvenation" dissemination pathway.

1.1. Definition of Core Concepts

To clarify the research boundaries and avoid the confusion of concepts, this study specifically defines the following key concepts.

First, cultural memory. This concept originates from Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory. Assmann, employing technical terminology, explains "cultural

memory” as follows: cultural memory is an external domain that emerges outside the system of social communication when the latter becomes excessively expanded, serving as a receptacle into which culturally significant information and materials requiring transmission are transferred (Assmann, 2015). Assmann distinguishes collective memory into communicative memory and cultural memory: communicative memory is the short-term memory formed in the daily interactions of collective members, related to daily life, carried by individuals within the collective and sustained through oral communication, with a duration not exceeding three or four generations; cultural memory, on the other hand, is the long-term memory of society, a highly structured form of social interaction in the form of ceremonies, as an “objectified externalization”, encoded and performed through media such as text and images, with a large time span and the characteristic of transcending political power, carried by dedicated members or institutions, and distant from daily life (Assmann, 2015). Aleida Assmann further divides cultural memory into storage memory and functional memory: the former is the large-scale extraction and permanent preservation of cultural heritage, the material and spiritual basis for the continuation of cultural memory; the latter is the innovative production and emotional resonance of cultural memory in the contemporary era, the core of its living transmission. The coordinated development of the two is the key to the symbolic activation of cultural memory (Assmann, 2016). This study adopts this dual-dimensional perspective in its analysis.

Second, “symbol”. The “symbol” concept in this study is derived from Baudrillard’s semiotic theory, and focuses on his theory of symbolic value. This theory emphasizes the consumption value and social significance of cultural symbols, arguing that the value of symbols not only stems from their material attributes but also lies in the social connotations, cultural implications, and identity symbols behind them. The essence of symbolic consumption is the recognition and pursuit of the symbolic meaning system. “To become an object of consumption, the item must become a sign” (Baudrillard, 2019). Based on this theory, this study will define the traditional and modern cultural symbols of Yunjin, discuss the contemporary translation paths of its traditional cultural symbols, and the contemporary value reconstruction of Yunjin intangible cultural heritage is essentially the modern meaning reconstruction of traditional symbols in the context of symbolic consumption, to adapt to the consumption and aesthetic needs of contemporary people and explore the possibility of reconstructing its cultural and aesthetic value.

The theoretical contribution of Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann lies in their collaborative development of the theory of “cultural memory”, through which they distinguished “collective memory” into communicative memory and cultural memory. They posited that cultural memory, by virtue of its normative and narrative functions operating through a connective structure, contributes to shaping the prevailing social order and identity. Their theory provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the revitalization and creative transformation of tradi-

tional culture in the contemporary era. Aleida Assmann further analyzed the internal structure of cultural memory, subdividing it into storage memory and functional memory, and examined the interplay between the two, thereby revealing the dynamic mechanisms within cultural memory.

Baudrillard creatively advanced the “theory of symbolic value”, transcending the traditional framework of political economy that focused solely on “use value” and “exchange value”, and introduced a “third value” namely “symbolic value”. Baudrillard’s theory reveals that in contemporary society, the essence of “consumption” lies in the manipulation and differentiation of “signs” rather than in the functional demand for “objects”, thereby contributing significantly to the development of semiotic theory.

This study applies the Assmanns’ theory of cultural memory and Baudrillard’s semiotic theory as dual theoretical frameworks for its analysis. The theory of cultural memory is employed in the main body of the paper to elucidate the specific cultural memory embedded in Nanjing Yunjin brocade, as well as the mechanisms of memory construction and the functions they perform. It provides a core theoretical framework for the inheritance of Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage, clarifying the dual logic of memory preservation and activation. Baudrillard’s theory of symbolic value lays the groundwork for this study’s examination of Yunjin’s traditional cultural symbols and modern symbols, offering a specific analytical perspective for the modern translation and value reconstruction of Yunjin’s traditional cultural symbols. Together, these two theories support the investigation of Yunjin’s transformation from a carrier of traditional cultural memory to a contemporary cultural symbol.

1.2. Research Significance

Nanjing Yunjin brocade represents traditional Chinese silk weaving craftsmanship and stands as a symbol of the highest achievement in traditional Chinese handloom weaving, embodying the wisdom and dedication of generations of artisans. It carries the collective memory and cultural memory of the nation, representing multidimensional traditional cultural symbols, and serves as an important vehicle for fostering national identity and cultural consensus.

Cultural memory functions as an index of identity; the historical formation of identity in relation to Nanjing Yunjin has contributed to the gradual development of collective (national) unity. The activation and transmission of Yunjin’s cultural memory thus constitute an important pathway for consolidating contemporary national cultural identity.

However, with the passage of time and the transformation of society, the cultural memory embedded in Nanjing Yunjin has gradually eroded and been forgotten by the public. This is largely attributable to the fact that the traditional cultural symbols embodied in Nanjing Yunjin have increasingly lagged behind contemporary social trends and fashions. Consequently, the living inheritance of Nanjing Yunjin is confronted with significant difficulties and challenges. There-

fore, to achieve the reconstruction of Yunjin's value in contemporary society, it is first necessary to reorganize and translate its traditional cultural symbols. Only by doing so can the core traditional cultural connotations of Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage be sustained, allowing Yunjin to achieve renewal in the present era.

1.3. Research Methods

Searches were conducted on platforms such as CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) and Wanfang Data Knowledge Service Platform, using keywords such as "Nanjing Yunjin", "intangible cultural heritage", and "living inheritance". Authoritative journals and dissertations, including those indexed in Peking University Core Journals and Nanjing University Core Journals, were referenced, along with relevant articles and works authored by Nanjing Yunjin inheritors such as Jin Wen and Chen Lin. This approach ensured that the literature review remained tightly focused on Nanjing Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage. The collected literature was screened for relevance, duplicates were removed, and the number of sources was streamlined, enabling a scientific synthesis of the core connotations of Nanjing Yunjin and the extraction of its traditional cultural symbols.

Drawing on the Assmann's theory of cultural memory and Baudrillard's theory of symbolic value, this study employs methodologies from literary and artistic studies to analyze the construction mechanisms of the cultural memory embedded in Yunjin. It further explores how the core cultural symbols of Yunjin can be transmitted, reconstructed, and innovated within the context of the new era.

This study also employs methods of horizontal comparison and historical vertical comparative analysis. Horizontal comparison, grounded in the principle of "comparison among similar categories", examines the similarities and differences between Nanjing Yunjin and other intangible cultural heritage items within the brocade category. By situating Yunjin within the framework of "China's Three Renowned Brocades", the study compares Yunjin with Suzhou Song brocade and Sichuan Shu brocade across dimensions such as craftsmanship, historical status, and cultural connotations, thereby capturing the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage. Additionally, Yunjin is compared with other craft-based intangible cultural heritage items within Jiangsu Province, including Nanjing velvet flowers and Nantong blue calico. Through horizontal comparison, the study articulates the unique value and core connotations of Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage. Historical vertical analysis, based on the developmental trajectory of Yunjin since its origin and its transmission and evolution across different historical periods, clarifies the historical fact that, after reaching its zenith during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, Yunjin gradually declined from the Republic of China period to the present. By contrasting the past with the present, the study draws lessons and insights from the history of Yunjin's transmission.

2. Traditional Cultural Symbols of Nanjing Yunjin Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Cultural Memory It Carries

2.1. Traditional Cultural Symbols of Nanjing Yunjin Intangible Cultural Heritage

The traditional cultural symbol system of Nanjing Yunjin Intangible Cultural Heritage is constructed from multiple dimensions, mainly covering the weaving techniques, pattern themes, and pattern structures of Nanjing Yunjin, forming a rich and colorful multi-dimensional traditional cultural symbol system.

2.1.1. Weaving Technique Symbols

Nanjing Yunjin is the culmination of Chinese brocade art. Its exquisite and complex weaving techniques carry the historical and cultural development of China's silk weaving industry over thousands of years. The weaving techniques of Nanjing Yunjin are mainly based on "Pattern Drafting and Thread Binding" and "Continuous Warp, Interrupted Weft", integrating the essence of ancient jacquard weaving technology.

Pattern Drafting and Thread Binding is the craft for pattern design of Nanjing Yunjin Brocade, which consists of three technical processes: pattern drafting, pattern assembling and pattern reversing. "Artisans first draw the pattern on paper and then use silk threads as the memory carrier. Through the picking process, the pattern is decomposed into binary codes of warp and weft interlacing. The lifting and lowering rules of each warp thread are recorded by tying knots with silk threads, forming a 'pattern draft' similar to a modern computer program" (Ju, 2025). This method of materially encoding pattern information demonstrates the ingenuity and superb skills of ancient artisans and laborers.

"Continuous Warp, Interrupted Weft" is the weaving process of Yunjin, mainly achieving the diversity of colors through fixed warps and intermittent wefts. Weavers use different color wefts according to the color changes of the pattern, interweaving more than twenty kinds of color threads in every centimeter of weaving. This makes the patterns of Yunjin change freely and delicately, achieving a "Flower-by-Flower Color Variation" effect, making Yunjin weaving the peak of manual weaving, more aesthetically pleasing visually and having a speciality that modern machines cannot replace in terms of craftsmanship.

2.1.2. Pattern Symbolism

The patterns of Nanjing Yunjin mainly include two themes: imperial power symbols and natural imagery. Specifically, they are divided into symbols showing imperial dignity, symbols symbolizing good fortune and happiness, and symbols depicting natural scenes. Patterns symbolizing imperial authority include dragon patterns, python patterns, and the twelve chapter patterns exclusively used by the emperor, which have political symbolic significance. For example, a pattern with a dragon as the core symbol and surrounded by waves and rocks symbolizes "the stability of the country", thereby demonstrating the "legitimacy" and supreme authority of the emperor, which is conducive to political stability and the stability of

the people's hearts. "These patterns, through strict craftsmanship and color regulations, become visual symbols of the legitimacy of power, transforming silk from a soft fabric into 'the armor of power'" (Ju, 2025).

In addition, there are many symbols of good fortune and happiness in Yunjin patterns. Craftsmen use the method of "homophonic" to draw pattern designs, such as using "bats" to symbolize "good fortune", "longevity peaches" to symbolize "longevity", and "magpies" to symbolize "happiness", expressing the ancient people's expectations and pursuit of good fortune and happiness, thereby collectively constructing a shared cultural memory.

2.1.3. Pattern Structure Symbols

After the weaving of Yunjin gradually matured, a large number of "formed materials" were produced according to the styles of clothes, such as dragon robes. The pattern structures and layouts are strictly symmetrical, and the combinations of patterns are balanced and orderly. "The deep logic of the aesthetics of Nanjing Yunjin patterns reflects the philosophical view of 'Utensils embody the Dao' in traditional Chinese creation thought, achieving a balance and contrast between primary and secondary, solid and void, dense and sparse, unifying the complex patterns into an overall rhythm" (Ju, 2025). The symmetrical and balanced composition reflects the dialectical thinking of yin and yang complementarity and is also a philosophical concept of the Chinese people's understanding of the universe and nature. "Nanjing Yunjin brocade did not exist in history as an isolated cultural or artistic phenomenon; rather, it represents a unity of aesthetics and utility, as well as matter and spirit. Its artistic value lies in its expression of specific religious and ethical sentiments through its patterns and color schemes" (Feng & Wei, 2025).

2.2. The Construction of Traditional Cultural Symbols of Nanjing Yunjin Intangible Cultural Heritage

Traditional cultural symbols are the concrete manifestation of cultural memory. Assmann believes that memory is constructive. From its origin to its prosperity and gradual decline, Yunjin has undergone a long process of symbol formation and fixation, which is also the process of cultural memory formation. Culture forms a "cohesive structure" that builds a sense of belonging and identity through two functions: normative and narrative (Assmann, 2015).

The normative function connects people to those around them by constructing a "symbolic meaning system" of shared experiences, expectations, and behaviors, thereby creating trust, norms, and behavioral guidelines among people. The norms of Yunjin were established through a series of measures by the imperial court of the feudal society. Since the maturation of its production techniques, Yunjin has always been at the core of the official handicraft industry. During the Qing Dynasty, the "Three Imperial Workshops" in Nanjing, Suzhou, and Hangzhou made Yunjin a royal tribute, symbolizing power and nobility. Its patterns, colors, and weaving techniques were strictly regulated, continuously reinforcing

the traditional cultural symbol of Yunjin as “official and imperial” and “supremely noble”. The pattern system of Yunjin strictly defined the identity and status of the wearer corresponding to the patterns. For instance, dragon and phoenix patterns, and the twelve symbols of the imperial costume could only be used for the emperor’s garments, using different pattern symbols to highlight the emperor’s identity and status. For example, the patterns of “sun”, “moon”, and “stars” in Yunjin symbolized the emperor’s “three lights shining”, bestowed by heaven; the pattern of “mountain” represented the emperor’s stability and composure, capable of governing the four directions. These pattern symbols gradually became a consensus among people, symbolizing the emperor’s authority and unshakable power system.

The construction of cultural symbols also relies on the narrative function. Through narrative, yesterday and today are connected, and experiences and memories are fixed. First, the narrative of Yunjin patterns, “divine patterns into brocade”. The patterns of Yunjin contain a large number of ancient mythological elements, such as primitive totems. These patterns have been passed down through the development of the nation’s history and have become an important medium for people to recall the origin of the nation and narrate the nation’s history. The mythological prototypes in the patterns of Yunjin (such as dragons and phoenixes, sun and moon, stars) are the “primitive images” of the Chinese nation. Yunjin and these national symbols are interdependent, connecting the past and the present, and ultimately making Yunjin a “symbolic carrier” of the national spirit.

In addition, the inheritance of Yunjin craftsmanship also has a narrative quality. In the long agricultural society, the transmission of Yunjin techniques highly relied on the oral and practical teaching among artisans. Through “mottos”, apprentices learned the skills of their predecessors and mastered their profound insights into materials, force, and beauty. These mottos are not only “technical narratives” but also “cultural narratives”. In the dialogue between master and apprentice, the history of Yunjin and its unique value were passed down from generation to generation. The mottos of each process, the meanings of each pattern, and the tricks of each weaving were all passed on in the dialogue between master and apprentice.

3. The Dilemmas and Challenges in the Semiotic Activation of Nanjing Yunjin Intangible Cultural Heritage

The traditional cultural symbols of Nanjing Yunjin brocade urgently require reconstruction and activation in the contemporary era. However, the differences between tradition and modernity present numerous difficulties and challenges for the symbolic activation of Nanjing Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage. At present, Nanjing Yunjin faces challenges such as high prices, garment colors that do not align with contemporary aesthetics, intergenerational difficulties in the transmission of craftsmanship, and limited youth participation. The core issue underlying these various difficulties and challenges is the crisis of cultural memory

erosion that Nanjing Yunjin confronts in contemporary society, along with the corresponding task of reconstruction. The challenges confronting the symbolic activation of Nanjing Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage are primarily manifested in the following three aspects.

3.1. The Craftsmanship Faces a Crisis of Intergenerational Rupture

With the passage of time and the advancement of modernization, the transmission of traditional craftsmanship is to a large extent confronted with a crisis of generational discontinuity. The intricate nature of Yunjin brocade weaving techniques, coupled with the extended duration required for mastery, restricts its influence among younger generations. “Zhu Feng, the first inheritor of Nanjing Yunjin, has passed away, leaving the cohort of younger inheritors nearly vacant. This significantly increases the risk of the craft perishing with its master, potentially resulting in the irreversible loss of tacit knowledge and haptic expertise that cannot be documented in textual form” (Li et al., 2026). Nowadays, the inheritance team for Nanjing Yunjin is to a certain extent facing an aging trend, with intergenerational transmission in crisis. “According to relevant statistical data from Nanjing, the average age of the city’s intangible cultural heritage inheritors is nearly 60, indicating that the community of ICH inheritors is confronting the challenge of aging, while the proportion of young participants remains extremely low” (Li, 2026). The low level of participation among young people in the transmission of Nanjing Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage is primarily attributable to the unique characteristics of Yunjin craftsmanship. As Feng & Wei (2025) note, the weaving process is exceptionally demanding, with artisans producing only five centimeters in ten hours, and a large-scale piece requiring two to five years—a level of commitment that discourages many young people from pursuing the craft. Yunjin weaving differs from other intangible cultural heritage crafts such as Nanjing velvet flower making. Each step in Yunjin weaving demands a high degree of concentration and meticulous precision, and the skilled operation of the large-scale Dahualou loom, which entails certain risks, requires weavers to possess considerable physical stamina. At present, young people generally exhibit little interest in Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage and find it difficult to persist through the demanding and often monotonous process of learning the craft. Consequently, the transmission of Yunjin weaving techniques faces a crisis of generational discontinuity.

3.2. Aesthetic Patterns Are Out of Step with the Contemporary Context

The traditional cultural symbols embedded in Yunjin patterns are closely tied to ancient agrarian civilization and the era of autocratic monarchy. This symbolic system is largely out of step with the contemporary context. Yunjin’s design elements predominantly feature traditional patterns like dragons, phoenixes, flowers, and birds, lacking integration with modern aesthetic trends. “The patterns

and color designs of Yunjin mostly adhere to traditional totemic symbols, which have become monotonous and rigidified within the contemporary aesthetic context” (Li, 2026). Moreover, the most mature and widely applied symbols within the Yunjin pattern system—those signifying imperial majesty and hierarchy—have lost their rational basis for existence in modern society, which values freedom and equality, and have become relics of history. The sense of “authority and power” conveyed by these Yunjin patterns fails to resonate with the public, and an aesthetic gap exists between them and the masses. “Yunjin, detached from the lifeworld and its cultural-ecological context, struggles to be understood by contemporary audiences. Its traditional patterns and colors fail to align with the aesthetic preferences and tastes of the younger generation, while the audience for its opulent motifs—such as dragons, phoenixes, and peonies—continues to diminish” (Meng & Kang, 2021). To modern consumers, auspicious symbols like “peaches of immortality”, “cranes”, “dragons and phoenixes”, and “peonies” can be perceived as overly ostentatious or even gaudy by contemporary standards, running counter to the modern public’s pursuit of individuality, fashion, and minimalist aesthetics.

3.3. Limited Scope of Dissemination and Outdated Dissemination Methods

“At present, the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage in Nanjing remains predominantly offline, primarily through museum exhibitions, craft workshops, and traditional festival events. Although such forms of dissemination can attract certain audiences, they continue to face challenges such as a lack of diversity in format and limited reach” (Li, 2026). The dissemination of Nanjing Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage is largely confined to museum exhibitions and public lectures delivered by inheritors. “The materials used in Yunjin are often gold, silver, or peacock feathers, rendering it exceptionally costly both in the past and at present” (Meng & Kang, 2021). Consequently, organizing large-scale experiential activities for Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage encounters significant obstacles. Currently, the dissemination of Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage remains confined to static forms due to the complexity of its weaving techniques and the high cost of its raw materials, primarily relying on displays and verbal explanations. Such dissemination methods lack innovation, making it difficult for audiences to achieve an immersive perception and experience of the intangible cultural heritage.

In addition to the issue of outdated dissemination formats, the limited effectiveness of dissemination is largely attributable to the difficulty in establishing resonance and connection between the cultural memory and aesthetic value embodied in Nanjing Yunjin and contemporary audiences. While dissemination formats require innovation and dissemination reach needs expansion, the more critical priority lies in innovating the content of dissemination. This necessitates that disseminators activate the traditional cultural symbols carried by Yunjin, reconstruct

its value, and thereby establish a connection with contemporary society, fostering an interactive relationship with the public—particularly with younger generations.

4. A Three-Dimensional Path for the Value Reconstruction of Nanjing Yunjin ICH

Jan Assmann emphasizes that cultural memory does not exist independently of media (Assmann, 2015). Achieving the value reconstruction of Nanjing Yunjin in contemporary society requires preserving the core cultural memory of Nanjing Yunjin, as well as properly conserving and restoring the extensive collection of documentary materials and authentic garments related to Yunjin. These constitute essential steps in the large-scale extraction and permanent preservation of Yunjin’s “storage memory”. Simultaneously, realizing the symbolic activation of Yunjin’s cultural memory necessitates the innovative production of and emotional resonance with Yunjin’s “functional memory”, along with the creative reorganization of traditional symbols to align with contemporary aesthetics and logic of dissemination. The symbolic activation of Nanjing Yunjin’s cultural memory in the present era is not a matter of “mechanical reproduction” but rather a process of creative translation. This demands that the value reconstruction of Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage not merely extract Yunjin from its original context and “transplant” it into the contemporary context; instead, it should pursue innovation within transmission and transmission within innovation, thereby achieving the value reconstruction of Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage.

Therefore, realizing the “creative translation” of Yunjin’s traditional symbols should adhere to three criteria: preserving Yunjin’s history and culture as completely as possible; achieving the contemporary translation of Yunjin; and avoiding the loss of core connotations during the process of Yunjin’s “decontextualization”. This study posits that the following three pathways, corresponding respectively to “high, middle, and low” levels of consumption, can be pursued: first, reconstructing the symbolic values of “magnificence” and “luxury” associated with Nanjing Yunjin—through avenues such as high-end custom Yunjin, private collections, and collaborations with luxury brands—thereby enabling Yunjin to perpetuate its opulent “courtly” symbolic system and integrate with high-end consumption; second, preserving the historical elements of Nanjing Yunjin as completely as possible to render it a vehicle of history—for instance, by transforming Yunjin handicrafts into everyday art objects and collectible items, thereby emphasizing Yunjin’s historical and collectible value; third, pursuing a “youth-oriented” pathway for Nanjing Yunjin, facilitating the translation of Yunjin’s inaccessible “royal symbol” into the widely popular “Guochao Oriental” symbol.

4.1. Splendor—A Symbol of High-End Consumption

Nanjing Yunjin brocade is “resplendent as the clouds at sunset” and valued as “an

inch of brocade worth an inch of gold”, rendering it exceptionally costly. The traditional symbols of Nanjing Yunjin are intimately associated with the grandeur and opulence of the imperial court. Its magnificent colors, exquisite and intricate craftsmanship, and luxurious materials constitute the distinctive status and value of Nanjing Yunjin. Therefore, it is imperative to preserve this core cultural memory of Yunjin.

Government bodies and cultural institutions should encourage collaborations with high-end brands to creatively reorganize the traditional cultural symbol of Yunjin as a sumptuous and precious “royal tribute item”, thereby establishing Yunjin as a representation of high-end consumption. Cultural authorities and relevant organizations should attract a significant number of luxury brands, encouraging brand designers to incorporate Yunjin elements into their designs. Such efforts would facilitate the creative transformation of Yunjin’s cultural symbol as a “royal tribute”, helping Yunjin sustain its vitality by leveraging the high-end consumer market.

4.2. Profound Heritage—A Symbol as a Historical Vessel

As one of China’s four renowned brocades, Yunjin boasts a long historical legacy. Originating in the Eastern Jin dynasty and reaching maturity during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, Yunjin represents the highest achievement of the ancient silk weaving industry. It serves as a historical carrier of ancient China’s economy, politics, and culture, possessing exceptional historical and cultural value. The patterns of Yunjin reflect the labor wisdom and philosophical thought of the Chinese people since antiquity, making it an important heritage for the preservation of history and culture. Therefore, it is essential to preserve the original historical elements of Nanjing Yunjin as completely as possible. To transmit and preserve the historical elements contained in Yunjin, developers of collectible items can, under the guidance of intangible cultural heritage inheritors, extract highly representative authentic samples of Nanjing Yunjin and select portions to be crafted into everyday art objects and collectible items. This approach reconstructs the value of Yunjin, transforming it into a tangible embodiment of national consciousness and profound historical heritage.

The profound historical and cultural significance of Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage is not only embodied in the garments themselves but also vividly preserved among inheritors, master artisans, and related communities, who serve as vital carriers of Yunjin’s cultural memory. Therefore, scholars of intangible cultural heritage can employ oral history methods to conduct a living “memory storage” of Yunjin inheritors. Researchers may carry out in-depth interviews focusing on dimensions such as the inheritors’ personal artistic careers, the origins and integration of craft transmission, and the spirit of craftsmanship inherent in the tradition. These interviews can be documented through various media forms, including text, audio, and video. Extracting core content from these materials as entry points for dissemination contributes to the systematic construction and transmis-

sion of Yunjin's history and culture, further reinforcing Yunjin's symbolic role as a historical carrier.

4.3. National Chic (Guochao)—A “Youth-Oriented” Symbol for Dissemination

In addition to the two approaches outlined above, realizing the value reconstruction of Nanjing Yunjin in contemporary society also requires the development of a “youth-oriented” dissemination pathway. Digital content creators and cultural communication institutions should attach importance to the youth-oriented pathway in the living inheritance of Yunjin as an intangible cultural heritage, thereby enabling Yunjin to achieve broader influence. Communicators can creatively transform the “Guochao” (national trend) and “Guofeng” (national style) symbols represented by Nanjing Yunjin, connecting them with communication platforms that currently occupy significant roles in people's social interactions and daily lives, thus achieving a “youth-oriented” approach in the process of reconstructing the value of Nanjing Yunjin.

Assmann emphasizes that functional memory is always intertwined with communicative memory. In an era where dissemination platforms dominate daily interaction and life, traditional cultural symbols must connect closely with individuals' communicative memories to engage audiences in a collective “work of memory” (Wang, 2025).

The empowerment of dissemination platforms and the internet allows traditional art forms to transcend their previous realms of existence. Yunjin no longer needs to be a heritage textile confined to research institutes and museums, merely an object of reverence. Yunjin elements can thrive on dissemination platforms, constructing new cultural value and meaning in different forms, becoming reconstructed cultural symbols. This will significantly expand the audience reach for Yunjin ICH. Furthermore, connections can be drawn between Nanjing Yunjin and literary figures or historical personas, such as the link between Yunjin and the “Twelve Beauties of Jinling” in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. By integrating Yunjin ICH elements with the aesthetics and trendy culture of the current younger generation, it is possible to create Yunjin IP images, visual cartoon characters, etc. Combining these elements with cultural and creative products, blind boxes, figurines, and New Chinese-style clothing can attract more young people's attention. Utilizing internet platforms like Douyin (TikTok) and Bilibili for further dissemination facilitates the translation of Yunjin ICH from tradition to modernity. This involves extracting Yunjin from its original context of gaudiness, luxury, and imperial associations, capturing its core, typical elements, and “implanting” them into the familiar living environments and consumption patterns of today's youth.

The three-dimensional pathway of “magnificence—profound heritage—Guochao” not only preserves the core cultural connotations of Nanjing Yunjin but also establishes, to a significant extent, a connection between Yunjin and the contemporary context, thereby realizing the value reconstruction of Nanjing Yun-

jin as an intangible cultural heritage in the present era. It should be noted that the three pathways proposed in this study remain within a conceptual framework and have yet to be implemented or tested across different institutions, markets, or audience groups.

5. Conclusion

As a crucial vessel for the cultural memory of the Chinese nation, Nanjing Yunjin, with its brilliant weaving techniques and profound symbolic connotations, carries thousands of years of Chinese imagination and expression concerning power, aesthetics, and cosmic order. Starting from Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory and Baudrillard's semiotic perspective, this research systematically examines the construction process and multi-dimensional connotations of Yunjin ICH's traditional cultural symbols. It deeply analyzes the crisis of memory dissipation and transmission dilemmas it faces in contemporary society, and based on this, proposes a three-dimensional path for the value reconstruction of Yunjin ICH.

The research posits that the key to achieving the living transmission of Yunjin in the contemporary era lies in the creative "translation" of its traditional cultural symbols. This requires retaining its core memory genes of "splendor" and "profound heritage", sustaining its cultural dignity through high-end consumption and historical collection. More importantly, it necessitates promoting the construction of "youth-oriented" symbols. By leveraging new media and the national chic trend, Yunjin can be transformed from an imperial "symbol of power" exclusive to royalty into an "Oriental aesthetic symbol" shared by the contemporary public. Only by innovating within inheritance and inheriting through innovation can the cultural memory carried by Yunjin ICH radiate new vitality in the context of globalization, becoming a vibrant force that consolidates national identity and enhances cultural confidence.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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