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Industrial Heritage Brand Revitalization Design from the Perspective of Cultural Memory: A Case Study of Huangchuan Cotton Mill Site

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The use of ideas, results, and texts of other authors is properly referenced.

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis is devoted to the study of the old Huangchuan Cotton Mill in Huangchuan County (ancient Guangzhou) Henan Province China as the study subject, to investigate how brand visual identity design can rejuvenate abandoned industrial heritage from a cultural memory perspective. The cotton mill was among the first state-owned textile companies in southern Henan starting from the 1950s, which served thousands of workers and was the economic foundation in the region for many decades, being a vehicle of collective memories of multiple generations of locals. However, the site has been out of operation since the early 2000s; physical deterioration has occurred with a lack of cultural memory, and no established connection with the new generations.

The literature review reviews the works in the areas of theory of cultural memory, adaptive reuse of industrial heritage, and brand visual identity design. The research included field work, questionnaire surveys, and comparative case studies resulting in the development of four main principles: authenticity, emotional resonance, systematic approach, and

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adaptability to modern realities. The twelve elements of the brand identity system were developed based on these principles including brand logo, specifications, and eight types of applications including printed and stationery materials and creative products.

The findings confirm that brand design can translate abstract industrial cultural memory into concrete visual language that will connect older workers with younger people. The proposed brand design may serve as an example for revitalization projects for smaller industrial heritage sites in developing regions, which reveals a gap in the textile industrial heritage branding studies worldwide [11].

Keywords: industrial heritage, cultural memory, brand identity design, visual communication, adaptive reuse

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of research: Urbanization in China has led to the abandonment of numerous old industrial sites built in the middle of the last century. The TICCIH provision states that industrial heritage represents the remains of industrial culture including historical, technological, social or scientific value [10,12]. However, most small and medium cultural heritage sites especially in inland textile sites have numerous issues, such as fading cultural memory, ineffective dissemination of information, and not well-coordinated branding.The research object of this study is the abandoned Huangchuan Cotton Mill in Huangchuan County, Henan Province (historically known as Guangzhou). Founded in the 1950s, the mill reached its peak in the 1980s and 1990s as one of the largest state-owned textile enterprises in southern Henan. After restructuring and production cessation in the early 2000s, the site has remained idle for over two decades, with buildings aging and industrial equipment scattered. However, the site retains profound cultural value, representing the collective experience of planned-economy era industrial life in central China.

The purpose of this research is to construct a complete brand identity of a visual nature for the Huangchuan Cotton Mill industrial heritage site under the name of "Guangzhou Weaving". The concept of cultural memory serves as the theoretical underpinning of the study. Through the holistic principle of brand designing, the study intends to create a visual concept that mediates between older and younger generations through the emotions of elderly laborers, specifying viable solutions to revive industrial heritage sites in

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small towns [11,17]. The study seeks to address four research questions: 1) Which elements of cultural memory are associated with the Huangchuan Cotton Mill? 2) Which design concepts should guide the design of the brand identity of the site of industrial heritage? 3) How can the heritage of industry be translated into a modern recognizable visual identity? 4) What extended applications can help successfully deliver the brand? The significance of the project is that it results in a practical design solution concerning the Huangchuan Cotton Mill as well as provides the knowledge to the under-researched field of place branding for the industrial heritage sites of small textile mills in the developing countries.

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CHAPTER 1.
LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH METHODS

1.1 Review of Domestic and International Literature

1. International Research Status

Cultural memory has the theoretical groundwork established by the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who first introduced the idea of collective memory in the 1920s. He theorized that individual memory is always formed by social contexts and bonds to certain groups [2]. Following this, Jan Assmann, an Egyptologist, developed Halbwachs' concept into the theory of cultural memory, which enables creating a distinction between two types of memory, namely communicative memory and cultural memory; the former being informal memory that lasts for no more than three generations and exists only through daily interactions and the latter being institutional memory that is fixed in culture and can be passed through generations [1]. Paul Connerton emphasized the idea of social memory being preserved through rituals and embodied practices, maintaining in the same space physically, yet remaining emotionally separated from it across generations [10].

Industrial heritage reconstruction was realized for the first time on the international level in the 1960s. Thus, Ironbridge Gorge in Great Britain was the first industrial heritage site converted into a cultural tourism site. The TICCIH industrial heritage conservation guide specifies that industrial heritage can be considered as the physical evidence of human skill in industry and social life and stresses the importance of modernization without

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neglecting the physical and intangible aspects of memory [12]. The Ruhr area in Germany should be considered an excellent example of international practice in industrial region renovation; the former coal and steel industry was turned into a plethora of cultural sights, exhibitions, and creative parks, with branding being the key element of changing the region's image [13,14]. The research on industrial heritage tourism in the Ruhr area shows that branding is not just about establishing a logo, but instead, a coordinated system of interaction with locals and tourists [14]. The research of the Ruhr's Zollverein Coal Mine World Heritage site of Sharon Macdonald specifically focuses on the issue of how the image of an industrial place is formed via design and public stories; the researcher argues that successful brands are those that do not stop at relying on the past, but on constructing new emotional stories for the future [4].

Recent years have seen a growing emphasis on community-centered methods in the context of heritage branding practices by internationally renowned institutions. In her "authorized heritage discourse" theory, Laurajane Smith criticizes conservation practices guided by experts and suggests that the value of industrial heritage comes from memories of local community members and workers, not just the value of the building or technical characteristics; that is, the concept of heritage in the case of industrial sites has a wide range of interpretations [3]. Kavaratzis and Ashworth develop a theory of place branding, according to which successful branding of cities and heritage should be more than just using a logo, and includes various aspects such as branding stories from all sources, informing people about their roles, and establishing emotional connection with the object of branding [15]. Moreover, Urde and colleagues in their theory of

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heritage brands note that genuine brands create loyalty through being authentic and not creating nostalgic stories about their products [16]. Another theory supporting the idea that successful heritage spaces involve two essential components of clarity and emotional attachment is Christian Norberg-Schulz' genius loci [10]. The concept of genius loci was taken into consideration while creating the "Guangzhou Weaving" brand that emerged from the memories of local people rather than being created from aesthetic point of view.

Another recent study that is worth mentioning is the research by Dehghan Pour Farashah et al. (2025) devoted to abandoned textile industrial heritage in Yazd—another area in a developing country where textile industry suffered collapse in the 90s and where a number of mills are abandoned [11]. One of the conclusions made by researchers is that the major threat for small textile industrial heritage sites is their "invisibility" due to the fact that the branding is weak. Furthermore, they offer a suggestion of how to use branding of heritage sites for improving social cohesion, which means that in some regions these strategies cannot be successfully applied due to their generic nature [11].

Various countries focus their research on issues connected to textile industrial heritage. Research conducted within the framework of the redevelopment of the Manchester Quarry Bank Mill, and in the case of the textile mill heritage districts in northern Italy shows the possibility of transforming such images as weave patterns, loom constructions, and other fibers into something modern in modern branding methods when developing fashion goods and other items. The research conducted by Mo et al. proves

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that inland countries should use different methods for branding their areas than large, coastal ones [17].

2. Domestic Research Status in China

Within China, research work related to industrial heritage protection is relatively new, especially after the 2006 Wuxi Proposal that laid down the rules for both economic development and industrial heritage conservation [10]. Since 2017, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology has issued four lists of national industrial heritage including more and more inland and third-front industrial sites. Initially, when the revitalization programs started, factories were turned into creative industry parks but many programs were criticized for their homogenous approach, possible commercialization of the process and lack of real cultural meaning since often only physical sites were preserved without any actual industrial memory left [10].

Dai Jun (2023) reports that urban memory can be successfully identified only if material remnant, social interpretation, and contemporary identity construction are associated, as visual imagery is an important tool for communicating abstract concepts to the public [5]. Wang Cailian and Chen Rui (2022) provide specific solutions for adaptive reuse of industrial heritage based on memory theories arguing that visual design systems should take emotional experiences of former industrial workers into consideration [6].

According to Lü Jianchang (2021), inland industrial sites are suffering more than coastal sites, as it is impossible to just copy successful tourism models from cities like Shanghai, as there is no established tourism market

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[7]. Ding Xiaoshan (2021) furthers her theory stating that the key to successful rejuvenation is to get the gist of a location which can be seen in her description of 816 nuclear project in Chongqing. The author emphasizes that it is important to develop interesting tourist routes, use cultural symbols and connect the environment and industrial site [10]. According to Wang Hua et al. (2017), there are certain principles which should be considered with reference to industrial heritage adaptive reuse and these principles include minimal impact on the space, maintaining authenticity of the industry and integration of the object into modern daily life which makes it possible to avoid "fake antique" revivals that destroy the true industrial character of the site [8].

Liang Hao (2024) provides an excellent example of visual identity design connected to the Nanchong silk heritage site which is another industrial heritage site associated with textile industry in the inland part of Sichuan province. The study illustrates how various symbols related to textile industry such as weaving patterns can be transformed into modern brand signs while keeping emotional links to textile history [9]. The study is going to follow the same pattern of analysis but focusing on the county state cotton factory with its local dimension of memory.

Three gaps can be identified that the current research attempts to address in regard to literature: firstly, most of the studies existing in the literature provide more attention to large-scale industrial heritage sites located in big cities while leaving small textile sites located at the level of counties like Huangchuan Cotton Mill unexplored which was also noted in the Yazd textile heritage study pubished recently [11,17]; second, there are numerous works that explore industrial heritage activation conceptually but not many

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studies focus on developing complete brand visual identity systems for inland sites; thirdly, most design studies perceive industrial heritage as an aesthetic object and do not pay enough attention to the memory of former employees and local population leading to unsatisfactory regeneration results in both China and other countries [10,11,15].

1.2 Research Methods

The study utilizes a mixed-method approach that combines academic research and design practice:

1. Literature Review Method: Conduct an in-depth literature review that examines the relevant international and national theoretical literature related to cultural memory, industrial heritage preservation, and brand identity development, providing the theoretical foundation for the design process.

2. Field Research Method: Perform a field investigation at the Huangchuan Cotton Mill location, photographing the existing buildings, industrial machinery, and spatial layout of the site.

3. Survey Method: Acquire surveys from local people of different ages to map their perceptions of the cotton mill and their preferences for brands.

4. Case Study Method: Investigate successful cases of industrial heritage brand revitalization in the world (UK Ironbridge Gorge, German Ruhr, Yazd textile case in Iran) and in China (816 Nuclear Project, Hanxi Textile Park, Nanchong silk heritage) to derive relevant design principles.

5. Design Method: Create the entire brand identity system using the graphics design programs (Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator).

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Conclusions to Chapter 1

The theoretical basis for the research was set in Chapter 1, which examined the theory of international cultural memory and the scholarship of industrial heritage in China. It traced the conceptual line beginning from the collective memory of Halbwachs to the theory of cultural memory of Assmann, surveyed the practice of industrial heritage across the globe from TICCIH standards and Ironbridge to the Ruhr Area, integrated place branding and heritage branding theories, including findings from new international research of textile heritage branding in Yazd, Iran, conducted in 2025 and related to the case of the Huangchuan Cotton Mill. The chapter also summarized the key findings of the domestic study of the issue of progress of industrial heritage of inland districts, including criticism of trivial, hollow renovation and the case of the 816 Nuclear Project. The chapter outlined the research gap: in small inland textile mill sites, no community-centered identity design models can be developed while stable architectural preservation has been a common problem of the preserved buildings presence. The five-method matrix of research was also outlined.

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CHAPTER 2.
RESEARCH BACKGROUND, ANALYSIS AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES

2.1 Historical Background of Huangchuan Cotton Mill

Huangchuan City, which is situated in the southern region of Henan province, was formerly known as Guangzhou and is an important transit site and a historically industrial area too. The Huangchuan Cotton Mill was founded in the 1950s under the national industrialization program that was rolled out in early China. The mill developed into one of the big state-owned textile companies in the region, with thousands of workers employed during the peak period of its operations, which lasted until the 1980s and 1990s. For a long time, the mill has been not only a major agent facilitating economy of the region but also a part and parcel of social life, providing housing, medical clinics, schools, and a large number of social facilities for the workers.

The history of the mill follows a standard course for state-owned companies in China, establishing itself during the national construction that took place in the 1950s, going through operations in the reform time, restructuring and privatizing itself in the 2000s when the Chinese economy was changing place, and eventually stopping its operations and becoming outdated. At the moment when the mill has stopped working, there can be seen a great number of workshops, warehouses, worker dormitories, and other facilities, but they are deteriorating and distanced from being used in any commercial activity.

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From the cultural point of view, the mill serves as the important object carrying memory of the planned economy era in Henan. In the words of Ding Xiaoshan applying to the third-front mills, these companies are not just economic entities but also carriers of the collective memory and spirit of the people experiencing hard life and work together [10,20]. According to the international studies conducted in textile industry, the very nature of textile facilities is more than just a workplace; it is the place carrying memories formed over several decades by the people living in mill neighborhoods [11]. For those middle-aged and older locals, the mill spans across their lives, while for younger people it is simply the place with no values in general, thus illustrating the issue of memory generations discussed by Connerton [10].

2.2 Survey Results and Problem Analysis

The opinion survey conducted among the community indicated three crucial conclusions: firstly, local middle-aged and senior respondents have emotional memories based on detailed information, thus recalling specific workshops, previously worked with colleagues, and realities of everyday production; secondly, young local residents (younger than 30) do not have enough information about the mill's past and process which leads them to consider it only as abandoned site rather than a culturally significant place; thirdly, most of people are in favor of contemporary-enabled reuse rather than the demolition of the building or preserving it without using it.

From the results of the study, there are three fundamental problems which can be seen in the most of the Chinese and world literature materials about industrial heritage: 1) a problem of physical destruction of the factory

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building; 2) a problem of fading memories since old generations fade away without passing on the knowledge about the mill and its processes to youth; 3) a problem of absence of the common identity of the site today and in the past. It is important to emphasize that this third problem is related to the conclusion made in the Yazd textile heritage study which states that small mill sites could easily remain unknown and invisible because of the disintegrated identity of branding [10].

2.3 Derivation of Core Design Principles

The literature review, fieldwork, and survey results generated four critical design principles to inform the development of a brand identity:

1. Authenticity Principle: Respect the authenticity of local cultural knowledge while still using historical indicators and industrial elements of the cotton mill. There should be no romanticized or distorted presentation of the industrial past, taking Smith's critique of the inauthenticity of heritage fabrication, Urde's heritage authenticity principles, and Ding Xiaoshan's desire to emphasize the importance of extracting the real lived spiritual core instead of using generic retro aesthetics [3][10][16].

2. Emotional Resonance Principle: The design should trigger the memories of veteran mill workers while at the same time helping to build the identity of the culture among the younger generations. It is essential to realize that according to both the genius loci concept and a number of place branding theories, and the analysis that shows that emotional attachment of previous residents to ex-factories is an important factor for successful branding, the brand must evoke old memories rather than be seen as imposed on the local population from the outside [10,11,15].

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3. Systematicity Principle: Creation of a comprehensive brand identity visual system that guarantees coherence on all platforms, starting from the logo and ending with many other applications of brand. This refers to the problem of poor branding and credibility of the small textile heritage objects due to their fragmented and disunited branding practices [11,15].

4. Contemporary Adaptation Principle: The design must be connected to the historic aspect while meeting modern standards as well as communication needs, combining tradition and contemporary aesthetics without creating a nostalgic pastiche.

2.4 Comparative Case Studies

The investigation involved three different sets of similar cases in terms of the design process. The first set of relevant heritage textile cases was about domestic cases: the Hanxi Textile series and its logo design, the visual identity system book, and the various applications that emerged from their use demonstrated how industrail textile symbols can be converted into modern, stylish brands without losing their identity and being the code of the industry. The project Nanchong Silk Heritage represents a similar case of how the textile heritage turned into heritage products [9].

The second group of crucially relevant cases comes from Yazd, Iran, where the work of Dehghan Pour Farashah et al. (2025) showed that it is possible to develop the region through textile heritage if branding focuses on local identity. The whole area of textile mills that were abandoned has shown the best regenerative potential in case branding is conducted by activation of the emotional connection of the people with their memory rather than large scale refurbishment of the area. The case shows that unified

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visual identity can become the first and most affordable step of generating awareness about invisible industrial heritage for both local people and visitors [11].

Finally, the case of the Ruhr area, known for the full rebranding of the industrial areas all over the World. Researching the Ruhr tourism marketing sector, one can see that the region was successful in branding in the cases of unified recognized visual identity for several hundreds of different industrial heritage sites [14]. Speaking of the 816 Nuclear Project heritage case by Ding Xiaoshan, one can conclude that the understanding of cultural symbols, methods of narrative spatial design and emotional engagement could convert an obscure industrial place into a recognized cultural site. Important to note that the project was implemented not because of bright architecture but by centering the stories of common people who worked there [10]. Other cultural institutions like the National Marine Museum and South Korean museum identity systems proved how complex cultural narratives can be turned into simple visual identity systems that can be used in many applications [4].

The main conclusions from the provided cases are that industrial heritage stories can combine rough industriality with modernistic simplicity, have mutual designs for different applications, put emphasis on human narratives rather than just buildings, and create flexible systems that can be used from printed materials to casual cultural products. For the sites located in the regions with limited resources like Huangchuan, strong and consistent branding as an inexpensive option would be much better than large scale construction work as the first step towards industrial heritage revitalization [11, 14].

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Conclusions to Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, an empirical basis for the design is introduced and the historical evolution of Huangchuan Cotton Mill from the time it was founded in the 1950s to when it was abandoned in the early 2000s is illustrated. It brings findings of previous local surveys showing disparities in remembering by the elderly and young (new) residents, as well as three main problems of the site: its decay, fading memory, and risk of 'hollowed heritage' identity. Then, Chapter 2 develops four fundamental principles for the design: authenticity, emotional impact, systematic approach, and adaptation to contemporary needs, in addition, it provides some lessons extracted from the analysis of relevant texts. Thus, Chapter 2 creates a bridge between Chapter 1 focused on theory and Chapter 3 concentrated on practice.

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CHAPTER 3.
DESIGN PROPOSAL FOR GUANGZHOU WEAVING BRAND

3.1 Design Concept and Inspiration Derivation

From the name "Guangzhou Weaving," it is possible to make the connection between the ancient name of and the modern city of Guangzhou (Huangchuan) and its cotton-weaving industry, which serves as the core of the project. As to the source of the design, the latter is based on four interconnected foundations:

1. Textile industry – it extracts from the textile industry the main visual symbols commonly used for representing woven threads and textile machinery design from ancient history and thus creates the key lines through which it embodies the notion of "weaving."

2. Industrial heritage – it makes use of the heavy industry nature instead of the well-known concept of cotton mill and obtains its building composition and loom equipment features.

3. Cultural legacy – this source consists of elements that refer to the regional culture of the ancient city and general memories of the workers; this is where the composition of the word "Guangzhou" derives.

4. Rebirth and revamping – it consists of collecting together three previously discussed elements, thus eliminating the roughness of old industries and producing a clear-cut modern brand design that serves as a proof of visual convergence from former factories to a brand.

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The logic behind the process of design creation is quite simple: from detaching industries with the help of textile industry to creating a design. Thus, there is a clear and logical link between this process and the best practices in international place branding of textile heritage sites because brands which succeed in their design processes are those that involve real industrial elements, local culture, and emotional component rather than just plain industrial design [11,15].

3.2 Logo Development Process

In logo creation, there were two stages; in the first phase, many ideas were examined to create various ways of integrating textile warp/weft lines in the “Guangzhou” letters along with experimenting with color palette options (industrial blue, cotton off-white, and brick red) and creating straightforward graphic designs for testing the visibility of graphic elements. Although this stage produced a clear conceptual path, the visual designs turned out to be too intricate without any strong identifiable elements.

During the last sketching iteration, the issue with complex designs was resolved through simplifying the graphic elements down to two being used in the new logo—the warp/weft lines and letters of “Guangzhou.” The adjustments were made in the visual balance of lines bringing along an appropriate feeling of solidity as well as modernity. Besides, the basic design form was developed, which opens readiness for the practical implementation of visual identity.

3.3 VI System Specifications

The logo, "Guangzhou Weaving", is based on the imagery of cotton mill textiles, representing how the industry and region of Guangzhou spinn and

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weave. The implementation of the visual identity system includes four components:

• Graphic elements: the logo utilizes outlines of threads, looms, and cotton bolls, which build the required connections with the industrial history of the mill.

• Color scheme: the primary color is dark blue (#2D4856), while the accent color is warm orange (#B24F2E), symbolizing historical warmth but keeping some modern professionalism.

• Typography: the logo combines traditional and modern characteristics in a balanced manner.

• Implementation principles: the logo has enough free space for safety and clear recognition regardless of the situation, starting from tiny icons and finishing with large signs. The required consistency is meant to avoid the confusion connected with the use of many types of branding at underfunded textile heritage sites and meet the requirements for place branding – unified communication at all levels [11,15].

3.4 Extended Design Applications

The extended design system has been implemented into 8 types of brand interaction organized into 3 categories.

Group 1 (Printed Communication) - It includes Poster Templates, Brochure Covers, Notebooks Covers, and Invitation Cards. The applications mentioned above use the core color of the brand and its typography in creating printed products needed for exhibitions and community events.

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Group 2 (Stationery) - This group includes business card templates and envelope decorations applying the VI system in official correspondence and providing the ongoing brand presence in day-to-day operations.

Group 3 (Culture and Creative Merchandise) - It contains two categories of cultural products, extending the brand into tangible objects that visitors can take home and make it a memory carrier used every day.

In the applications outlined above, the design shows systematic consistency in changing only the logo and elements of visual saturation according to specific requirements and purposes of each touchpoint, thus following the principle of systematicity described in Chapter 2. This system of using the different touchpoints is the key to reaching both old employees through formal printed products and young inhabitants of the area through cultural products, thus bridging the gap of intergenerational memory which often happens in locations of abandoned textile factories. [11]

Conclusions to Chapter 3

In chapter three, the full design proposal of the "Guangzhou Weaving" brand is discussed, from defining the starting point of inspiration to logo design, VI specification instructions, and an outline of 8 areas of implementation. The proposed design has followed the four principles discussed in chapter two: use of original mill elements reflects authenticity by drawing on mill heritage, local emotional connectivity serves resonance purposes, identical visual system implies both touchpoint consistency, and minimalistic modern aesthetics helps to reconcile the old with the contemporary, thus avoiding anything vacuous or uniform. It demonstrates the process of translating something as abstract as cultural memory into a

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real-brand vision that can be implemented into reality, thus forming a link between people belonging to different generations.

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CONCLUSIONS

This study has successfully established a holistic brand visual identity system for Huangchuan Cotton Mill's industrial and architectural heritage site on the basis of cultural memory. Specifically, the study produced the following outcomes:

First, a comprehensive VI visual identity system has been created for “Guangzhou Weaving” and, therefore, the concept of mere industrial memory of the abandoned textile mill was re-established as a real brand identity. The constructed design highlights the double core of textile industry elements and local "Guangzhou" culture, combining historic significance and modern visual aesthetics.

Second, there are four core design principles that can be derived from the conducted research: authenticity, emotional effect, systematicity, and modern adaptability. These principles provide an applicable design format not only for this specific city but also other inland provinces of China and developing regions with even less resources for the development of a landmark, and at risk of using abnormal, unstructured regeneration models described in the literature [10,11,14,15].

Third, eight types of broad applications have been identified covering such issues as printed materials, stationery, and cultural creative industry products.

It should be noted that the research has its limitations. First, the research has mainly focused only on the existing factories and communities have

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been largely used together with oral history of retired workers; some information is based on other published resources. Second, the obtained results present the visual identity system only and do not include renovation measures and further action plan on operating the mill; the real impact of the brand still needs to be proven in practice. Third, while the research is implemented in the specific cultural context of Huangchuan, it means that in the case of implementation of this brand in other less developed sites, the meaning and perception of cultural signs will need to be re-defined.

There are several areas of improvement for the future research: in-depth interviewing of retirees in addition to the creation of a digital archive of cultural memory.

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APPENDIX A (analogues)

Ключовий еталонний проєкт / Key Reference Projects

Visual outcome(s):

1.Logo design for Guangzhou Weaving

2.Gwangju Weaving VI Design

3.Derived design of Gwangju textile

The design is created using Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, and other design tools.

Інші китайські бренди або дизайн логотипів/Other Chinese brands/logo design









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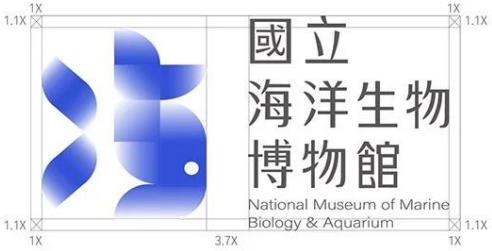
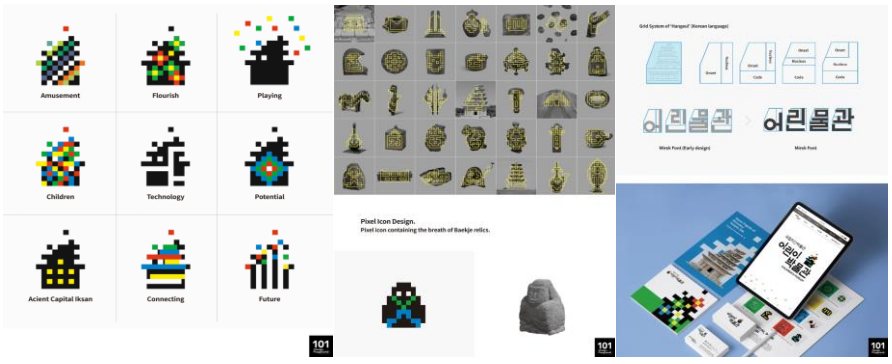
安全範圍與最小使用尺寸





限等比例縮小，logo 高度不得小於15mm。



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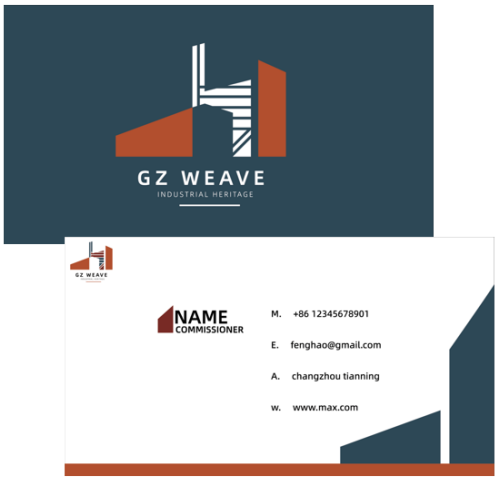
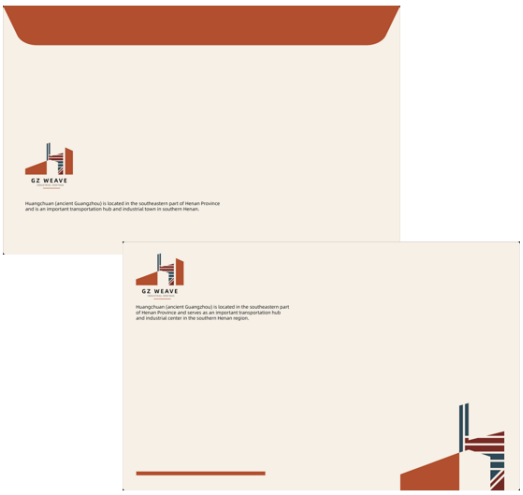
Derivative Product Design



Business card template



Envelope Design

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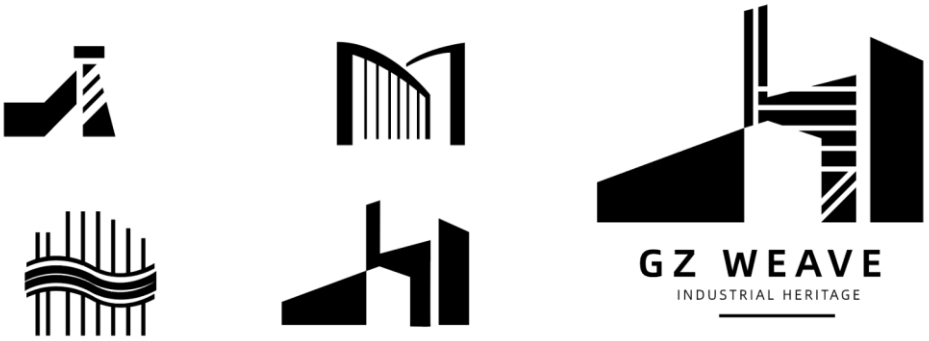
APPENDIX Б (sketch and project proposal)



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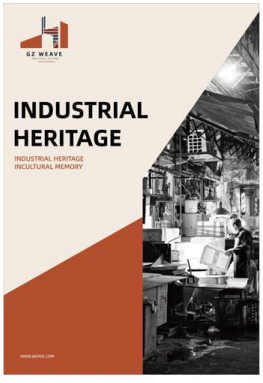
Visuals design





Poster template



Album Cover



Notebook cover



Invitation