Fusion of Tradition and Modernity: A case study of"Only Dream of Red Mansions"

Zhang Hui

performing arts Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University
Email: chutima.ma@ssru.ac.th

Abstract:

This study investigates the innovative integration of traditional culture and modern art from Dream of Red Mansions,Focusing on the modern art project Only Dream of Red Mansions, the research examines how traditional cultural elements can be creatively transformed and developed in contemporary artistic practices. This paper takes "There Is and There Is Not", "The Impermanence" and "Reader's Theater" as examples,as a case study, The multi-dimensional approach of the project is analyzed, including thematic interpretation, spatial design, technology application and immersive experience. The findings reveal that the fusion of traditional culture and modern art not only generates significant artistic vitality but also provides a model for fostering creative communities. By bridging historical heritage and modern expression, this research highlights the potential of artistic research to enrich community life, promote cultural sustainability, and inspire social innovation. The study contributes to the broader discourse on the role of artistic research in (re)generating thriving and sustainable communities, particularly within the Asia Pacific context.

Keywords: Fusion of Tradition and Modernity, Creative Communities,Dream of Red Mansions

Introduction

The integration of classical literature with contemporary immersive technology has become a significant trend in the dynamic inheritance of cultural heritage.As a typical case, Only Dream of the Red Chamber, which was opened in 2023, uses multimodal narrative strategies to reconstruct the famous Chinese literature of the 18th century, Dream of the Red Chamber. It is the first immersive drama theme park in China based on the literary classic Dream of the Red Chamber as IP, which embodies this trend. This study is dedicated to exploring how to construct a dynamic dialogue between the symbolic system of classical literary texts and the sensory experience of modern audiences. Although the current academic circles have made some achievements in the field of digital heritage protection (such as "Digital Dun huang" project) and immersive drama aesthetics (represented by "See Pingyao again" drama fantasy city cultural tourism project), there is no systematic theoretical framework for the interpretation and reconstruction of classical literary texts through modern means.Through the case analysis in this paper, three innovation paths are explained(1) The spatial translation of traditional cultural symbols or literary poems to dynamic architecture; (2) The dissolution and reconstruction of the interpretation of classic character relations by digital empowerment; (3) Taking the "reader" who reads Red Mansion as the starting point of creation, the vision is reversed to the "reader" level.These findings provide new insights into performance studies, showing how immersive technology can inspire new models of literary engagement that go beyond passive reception.

"Only a Dream of Red Mansions", located in Langfang City, Hebei Province, was officially opened to the public on July 23,2023, invested and constructed by Xin yi Holding, covering an area of 228 mu. It is a new "only" series of works launched by Wang Chao ge

after the "Impression" and "See again" series. The project is a set of drama, garden, art, science and technology in the integration of cultural tourism, with Chinese classical literature classics "a dream of red mansions", through immersive drama, landscape, art exhibition, and other forms, built a dreamlike drama city, bring the audience an immersive cultural feast of a dream of red mansions.The representative performances in Only Dream of the Red Chamber are "There Is and There Is Not" and "Reader's Theater".Inspired by the Illusory Realm, The Theater of "There is and There is not" combines light and shadow, dance and drama to show the fate of the Twelve Flowers of Jinling, creating a dreamlike atmosphere and highlighting the philosophical theme of "When the false is true, the true is also false".Reader Theater is the largest indoor theater in Drama Fantasy City, featuring seven venues of varying sizes where different plays are staged. These plays are told from a reader's perspective, breaking the traditional audience-performer dynamic and offering an immersive experience of the characters' emotions. The concept of 'everyone has a *Dream of the Red Chamber* in their heart' is emphasized throughout,Tell their life stories with "Dream of the Red Chamber". The audience watches as they move along, and finally gather together to enjoy the classic scenes of "Dream of the Red Chamber".

This paper takes"There Is and There Is Not", "The Impermanence" and "Reader's Theater" from "Only Dream of the Red Chamber" as examples,from the traditional and modern dimensions analysis, help to promote immersion, the artist's ideas and works, make it in a wider range of known, is conducive to more clearly grasp the project art innovation value, to improve the artistic creation of new ideas, provide inspiration and reference for literary and artistic creation practice.

Research Objective

This study examines the"There Is and There Is Not", "The Impermanence" and " Reader's Theater " case study from the Only a Dream of Red Mansions production through dual traditional-modern analytical lenses to:

1.Systematically evaluate its artistic innovation merits

2.Identify best practices for traditional cultural heritage preservation and contemporary reinterpretation

3.Establish a framework for cross-era artistic dialogue and creative transformation

Personnel Scope： the creators, the actors

Contents Scope： On the one hand, the artistic presentation of traditional culture is mainly analyzed from three aspects: the inheritance of its literary genes, the reproduction of garden aesthetics and the use of symbols in poetry.

On the one hand: the innovation and breakthrough of modern art dimension are mainly analyzed from the application of scientific and technological means and immersive design experience.

Time Scope： February 19- -May 30,2025

Arear Scope： In Langfang, Hebei province, there is only a Dream of Red Mansions drama Fantasy City。

Research Methodology

This study adopts qualitative research to investigate the modern expression mechanism of traditional cultural elements in the project "Only Dream of Red Mansions".

Literature research: By sorting out the literary value, cultural connotation and contemporary dissemination status of "Dream of the Red Chamber", this paper defines the research status of modern expression of traditional culture in "Only Dream of the Red Chamber"

Field research: Through field investigation of "Only Dream of Red Mansions", I personally watched and felt it, communicated with the creative team, and learned about its

creative background, space design, the concept and practical application of the combination with modern technology, and the artistic expression form.

Case analysis: Representative scenes and buildings in the selected projects, such as "There Is and There Is Not" "The Impermanence", "Reader's Theater" , Based on the viewing experience, the case analysis is carried out on the modern display of characters, plots, buildings and poems, and the combination of traditional cultural elements and modern art forms is deeply discussed.

Semiotic analysis: The "Only Dream of Red Mansions" Theater Illusion City creates an intertextual system bridging literary classics with contemporary cultural tourism through symbolic interpretation. By transforming abstract concepts from the original work (such as "the Illusory Realm of Supreme Void") into immersive experiences, it seamlessly integrates literary IPs with tourism consumption. This symbolic translation is further manifested in the narrative space design of architectural gardens, where garden architecture enables visitors to perceive traditional Chinese aesthetic symbols. This approach not only expands the content boundaries of the cultural tourism industry but also provides participatory modern rituals that foster cultural identity.

Research Result

1. The artistic presentation of the traditional cultural dimension

Inheritance of literary genes: The work is based on the original novel "Dream of the Red Chamber" and retains the core plot and character relationship of the original novel. For example, the name of the theater "There Is and There Is Not" is directly taken from the couplet of the Illusory Realm in "Dream of the Red Chamber" —— "When the false is true, the true is also false; when the nonexistent is real, the real is also nonexistent." It is based on the "Illusory Realm" in the original novel "Dream of the Red Chamber" and the twelve most important female characters in the book "The Twelve Beauties of Jinling",On the one hand, on the stage and the poems and judgments of the twelve sisters projected by light and shadow are not only the concrete presentation of the text of "Dream of the Red Chamber", but also the presentation of the classic elements of "Dream of the Red Chamber", so that the audience can feel the literary charm of the original work.On the other hand, in the portrayal of the Twelve Beauties, the male gaze in the original novel is weakened, so that the Twelve Beauties of Jinling can conduct a cross-temporal dialogue with Cao Xueqin, discussing fate, destiny and the freedom of literary creation, so as to re-activate the classic proposition of "Dream of the Red Chamber" in the context of contemporary drama.(The prototype characters are shown in Table 1).

Reproduction of garden architectural aesthetics: In the cross-temporal dialogue between Chinese classical garden architecture aesthetics and contemporary stage design, "Only Dream of Red Mansions" drama fantasy city has completed a creative cultural translation.This stage design is like bringing the Grand View Garden from 'Dream of the Red Chamber' to life. It draws on the Chinese garden design philosophy of 'natural and spontaneous,' using a clever spatial layout that allows the audience to walk and observe, as if they were truly stepping into the Grand View Garden described in the book. It retains the elegance of artificial design while giving the impression of being naturally formed, making visitors feel as if they are in a real classical garden.For example, in the theater of "True and False", the audience area is designed as a grand View Garden building. The actors in the audience area and the audience on the stage are mutual spectators, and the audience area is also a stage in the building, transforming the aesthetic beauty of the Grand View Garden into a perceptible stage space.For instance, in terms of cultural connotation transmission, the stage design of "The Impermanence" draws inspiration from the art of Chinese classical garden design. It transcends the limitations of traditional scenery by integrating garden elements with literary ambiance. Through a technique that blends reality and imagination, it constructs a multi-layered meaning. This

design not only sets the stage for the story but also serves as a vital medium for conveying cultural connotations.(See Figure 1 and Figure 2).

The use of the symbol of poetry: In the "Only Dream of Red Mansions" drama fantasy city in Langfang, the poems and verses penned by Cao Xueqin are no longer just words on paper; they have transformed into a tangible, immersive narrative space that visitors can explore and experience firsthand. The designers, with a meticulous approach akin to "symbolic archaeology," have transformed classic texts such as the inscriptions of the Grand View Garden, the judgment poems of the Twelve Beauties of Jin ling, and Dai yu's Flower Burial Lament into an immersive environment through contemporary architectural techniques,For instance, "Fu rong lei" originally a memorial essay by Jia Bao yu in mourning Qing wen, not only conveys his deep affection for her but also foreshadows the tragic fate of the other daughters in the Grand View Garden. In the Dramatic Illusion City, this memorial essay could be designed as an immersive scene —— perhaps a hall draped in white gauze and swayed by candlelight, or a courtyard where petals fall gently, allowing visitors to vividly experience the sorrow of Qing wen's death and the melancholic atmosphere described in the book as' a thousand reds weeping.'This design is not a direct copy of the description in the book, but a reinterpretation of the meaning of Dream of the Red Chamber in modern architectural language. Visitors do not need to read the original book in advance, as long as they walk into these Spaces, they can naturally experience the emotions and philosophy behind the poems through vision, hearing and even touch.In "Only Dream of the Red Mansion," the drama fantasy city transforms the classic poetry and prose from the original work into various themed venues, making classical literature and poetry more accessible and tangible. This spatial narrative not only preserves the spiritual essence of traditional cultural elements such as classic poetry but also transforms the laments of the feudal era into universal humanistic reflections. In summary, poetry is not only the text in books but also the emotional symbols of the entire Red Mansion world. These poems carry the characters' destinies, emotions, and philosophies in the original work. In the fantasy city, they are ingeniously transformed into perceptible architectural language, presenting traditional culture to the audience in the most direct way.(see Figure 3、 Figure 4).

figure	character features	Original character image
Lin Dai yu	The talented and sensitive Crimson Pearl fairy grass reincarnated.	
Xue Bao chai	A "cold beauty" who is dignified, steady and well versed in the world.	

Jia Yuan chun	The eldest daughter of the Jia family, the imperial consort, symbolizes the glory of the family	
Jia Tan chun	Shrewd and capable, but of low birth and lofty ambitions.	
Shi Xiang yun	A generous and open-minded daughter of a wealthy family with quick wit.	
Miao yu	A noble nun who was born into an official family and practiced her faith with her hair unshorn.	
Jia Ying chun	Weak and gentle, he was eventually abused to death ("Two Woodpeckers")	
Jia Xi chun	Lonely and isolated, she eventually became a nun.	

Wang Xi feng	Shrewd and fierce, she managed the household affairs of the Jia family.	
Jie Qiao	The daughter of Wang Xi feng was saved by Grand ma Liu	
Li Wan	A chaste widow, the wife of Jia Zhu.	
Qin Ke qing	His mysterious early death implies the ethical tragedy of the Jia family.	

Table 1 List of the Twelve Beauties of Jinling

The original novel Dream of the Red Chamber reveals the devastation of feudal rites and customs on women through their individual fate.The Twelve Beauties of Jinling are twelve tragic female characters in Dream of the Red Chamber, recorded in the "The Department of Mortal Fortune" within the Illusory Realm of Great Void. Born into noble families of Jinling (Nanjing), They were born into the aristocracy of Jinling, talented and beautiful, but they could not escape the tragic fate of feudal society. They are the epitome of "a thousand reds weep and ten thousand beauties mourn" in Cao Xueqin's writing., serving as a microcosm of the oppression faced by women under feudal ethics. Through their individual destinies.The Theater of "There Is and There Is Not" in the Theater of Drama City is a modern presentation and reinterpretation of the fate of these twelve women.

Table maker: Zhang Hui Gai Date: May 20,2025



Figure 1 "It's true and false" Theater

The design of the audience area is the architecture of the Grand View Garden,The actors and the audience on the stage are spectators of each other, and the audience area is also a stage in the building, transforming the aesthetic beauty of the Grand View Garden into a perceptible stage space.

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15,2025

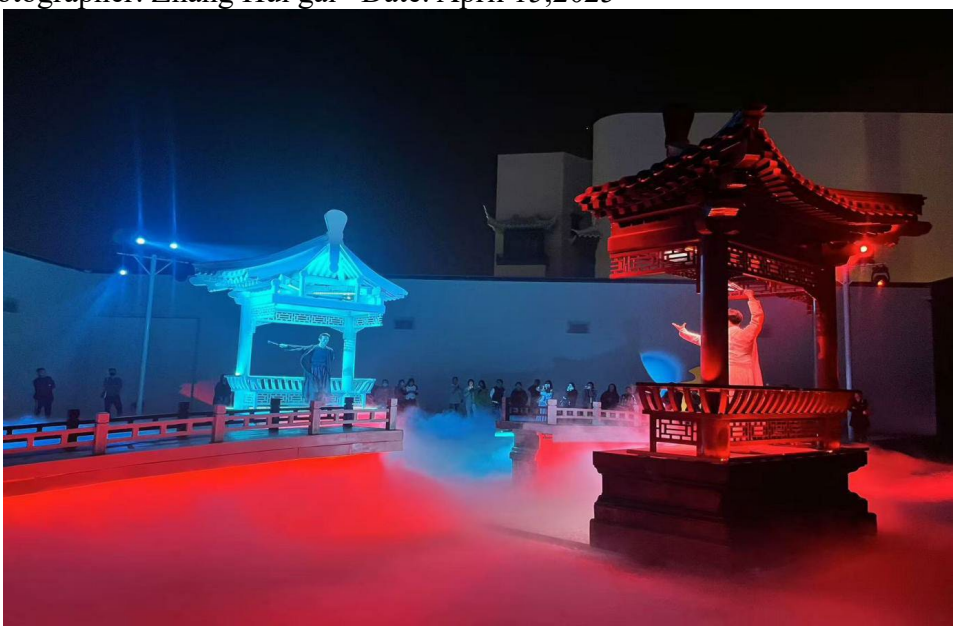

Figure 2 Impermanent (It is both a building and a stage）

The traditional Chinese classical pavilion is not only an appreciable building, but also has the function of a stage. The pavilion is half black and half white, and it becomes a separable and combined stage from the middle. The black and white pavilion and the dancers' costumes complement each other.

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15,2025



Figure 3 Only a Dream of Red Mansions- - "Fu rong lei"

In the only Dream of the Red Chamber Drama Fantasy City, the classic poetry and text in the original work are arranged in the buildings, presenting the traditional poetry culture to the audience in an intuitive way, realizing that poetry is not only the words in the book, but also the perceptible and touchable emotional symbols."Fu rong lei" transcends being merely Bao Yu's poignant tribute to Qing Wen ,it crystallizes the novel's tragic essence, embodying the fate, emotions, and philosophical undertones of ordinary people. Through the symbolic death of this minor character, it mirrors the inevitable withering of all blossoms in Grand View Garden. This unique design in "Dream of the Red Chamber" represents Cao Xueqin's artistic reinterpretation of traditional sacrificial rituals through the lens of poetic culture, achieving a spatial transformation of literary imagery.

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15,2025



Figure 4 Only a Dream of Red Mansions- - "Fu rong lei" night scene

The night environment design of the "Fu rong lei" themed space is rich in dramatic tension, creating an immersive literary ambiance through a variety of artistic techniques. The night mode particularly enhances the original work's "Cold Moon Burial of the Soul," complemented by lighting in a light and white tone, forming a tragic aesthetic space with a strong sensory impact.

2.The innovation and breakthrough of the modern art dimension

The use of science and technology：Using modern technologies such as sound, light，water and electricity linkage and virtual reality, the original poetic aesthetics are reconstructed in contemporary times through cross-media stage technology. The classic scenes of "Dream of the Red Chamber" (such as the Illusory Realm, the rise and fall of the Grand View Garden, and the fate of characters) are presented in dynamic images to strengthen the dramatic tension.In the Theater of "There is and There is not", the tragic fate of the Twelve Beauties of Jinling is presented concretely through exquisite stage technology.On the one hand, the whole stage is built into a full water theater, and the fluid mirror effect is used to construct an immersive field of reality and illusion. The shimmering water surface acts as a dynamic projection medium to reflect the figures of the twelve sisters, forming a double narrative layer with the performance space of actors, and creating an illusory and mysterious atmosphere((see Figure5).On one hand, the stage features a modular mobile platform system and CNC track movement devices, allowing twelve actors to swiftly move across the specially designed platforms. They stand or lie down, using their body language to portray their individual life trajectories. As the stage equipment continues to operate, the figures of the Twelve Beauties draw graceful arcs on the water, depicting the joys and sorrows of their lives, symbolizing their unpredictable fates in the tumultuous currents of destiny. Each actor delivers inner monologues of their characters as they move, their questions and sighs about fate breaking

down the traditional boundaries between characters and the author, allowing the audience to see the characters' reflections and explorations of their own destinies.On the other hand, in this theater, the judgment lines of 'The Twelve Beauties of Jinling' are transformed into dynamic calligraphy floating in the air. Through digital means, these lines are reinterpreted and reconstructed to enhance the audience's perception of the poetry, turning literary imagery into a dynamic art installation that engages the audience, thus creating visual effects that transcend traditional stage settings. These technological methods not only enhance the dramatic performance but also break the time and space constraints of traditional theater, allowing for the free expression of artistic imagination.All technological means are strictly devoted to the literature itself, which not only retains the classical flavor, but also unlocks hidden clues through collective interaction, so that the audience can change from the observer of the text to the co-conspirator of fate.This innovative practice of deeply integrating science and technology with literature not only breaks through the boundary between watching and performing traditional drama, but also reconstructs the modern dimension of literary interpretation, providing a new paradigm for the contemporary translation of classic texts (see Figure 6).

Immersive experience design:"Reader Theater", one of the four theaters, mainly introduces the classic scenes in the original novel "Dream of the Red Chamber", such as "Bao and Dai's love", "searching the Grand View Garden", and "Wang Xifeng's poisoning of You Er jie", from the perspective of readers, and gathers the grand scenes of readers' reading over the past two hundred years in the form of musical drama.In the "Only Dream of Red Mansions: Theater of Illusion" media "reader" theater performance, a 360-degree surround stage design is adopted, and the audience will watch the performance from different directions in the form of walking + sitting as the plot progresses.For instance, when portraying the scene of "Jia Baoyu's life," readers can follow Jia Baoyu's story through dialogues in chapters from “Dream of the Red Chamber”. The story unfolds on a circular stage, with scenes such as Baoyu's wedding and his departure from home, presented at different angles along the timeline. This innovative design breaks the limitations of the traditional theater's 'fixed viewpoint,' placing the audience at the heart of the events and providing a 'panoramic' sense of involvement.The "walking" view allows the audience to get up and move around in the scene, rather than standing or sitting in the usual mode.For example, following the guidance of recitation, the audience moves from 'Baoyu's Life 'to' The Search of the Grand View Garden 'and then to' Wang Xifeng's Poisoning of You Er jie.' This approach breaks the limitations of the traditional proscenium stage, transforming the audience from passive spectators into active participants in the dramatic space. This interactive experience significantly enhances the drama's appeal and the audience's immersive experience.In "Reader Theater", the traditional theater is transformed into an "illusion" that can be explored. The audience can freely travel in the narrative space, creating a differentiated experience that can give play to the subjective initiative of the audience, so that the audience can experience the text content and different artistic beauty in different scenes and positions and in different forms of viewing.(see figure 7, figure 8).



Figure5 Whole water theater

The entire stage is designed as a completely water-covered theater, creating a novel and captivating atmosphere that sparks curiosity. The shimmering water surface reflects the images of the Twelve Beauties of Jinling, evoking an ethereal and dreamlike ambiance. This design does not rely on traditional textual representations of "water," but instead visually presents the imagery of "water" from the original work. It demonstrates how modern language can reawaken the literary philosophy embedded in classic texts.

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15, 2025



Figure 6 Dynamic calligraphy floating in the air

The floating dynamic calligraphy installation in the "Only Dream of Red Mansions" Theater Fantasy City reimagines traditional Chinese calligraphy through groundbreaking technology, transforming its sensory dimensions and visual presentation. The twelve panels of "Judgment Verses of the Twelve Jin ling Beauties" transcend mere holographic projections

by innovatively presenting "living ink traces". The digital system dynamically generates calligraphic pages that synchronize with actors' performances, significantly enhancing audience comprehension of the characters.

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15,2025

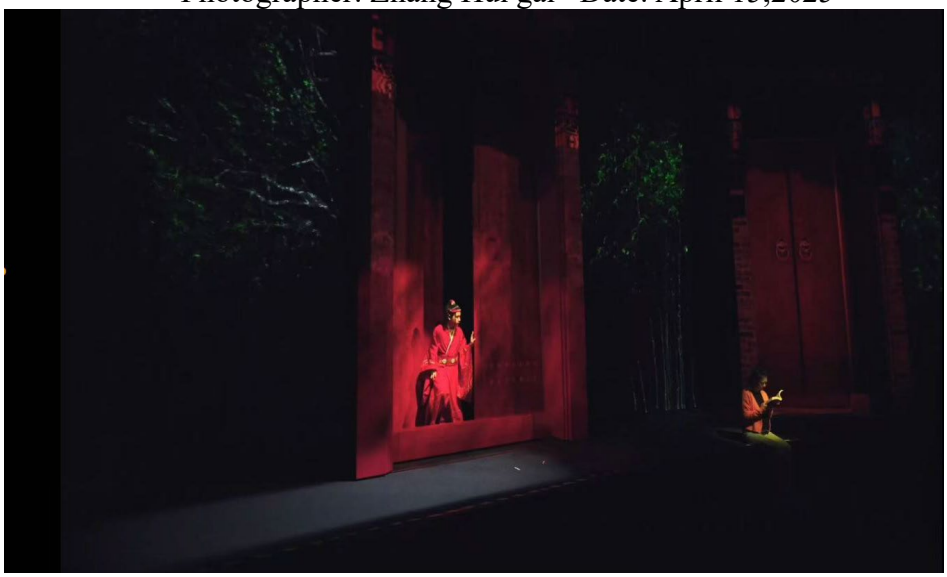

Figure 7 The Reader's Theater

The circular design of "Reader Theater" is not a simple innovation in stage design, but a story about Jia Baoyu through his reading of chapters in Dream of the Red Chamber and his inner dialogue with him.Through the circular stage, Jia Baoyu's evolving stories unfold across different angles along the timeline, revealing his psychological transformations. Audiences become immersed in the narrative progression and emotional shifts of the characters, experiencing a "panoramic" sense of participation that breaks free from traditional theater's "fixed perspective" limitations. This innovative approach seamlessly blends immersive performance design with classical aesthetics, creating a groundbreaking "immersive storytelling paradigm".

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15,2025



Figure 8 The Reader's Theater

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15,2025

This work from "Reader Theater" disassembles the classic play "Wang Xifeng Poisoning Her Second Sister Yu" into an immersive experience of ethical dilemma, and through the dialogue between readers and Wang Xifeng, it seems that the audience is a character in the

book, and the audience seems to be a witness around Wang Xifeng.It stimulates the subjective consciousness of the audience, causes the audience to have a new understanding and new thinking about the character of Wang Xifeng in the original literature, and realizes the modern interpretation of the traditional story.

Conclusion

The drama fantasy city "Only Dream of the Red Chamber" has pioneered a new paradigm for reinterpreting literary classics. By integrating innovative artistic language with cutting-edge technology, it has transformed traditional culture from static texts into dynamic experiences. The project's production, through the innovative integration of immersive space design, digital media interaction, and multi-sensory narrative techniques, has transcended the boundaries of traditional theater, reshaping the new paradigm of cultural engagement.Using technology as their brush and the human body as their medium, creators have reinterpreted the aesthetic essence of "truth and illusion" in “Dream of the Red Chamber”—— transforming passive audiences into active co-creators of meaning while revitalizing classical literature's vitality for modern viewers. This artistic practice sets a new benchmark for modernizing traditional cultural IPs, demonstrating how to reconstruct classic narratives while preserving historical essence.This innovative model shows the transformative power of art research through three dimensions: first, by reinvigorating classic texts with immersive technology, transforming traditional culture from static heritage into dynamic participatory experiences;Secondly, through multi-sensory interaction design, the process of literary reception is transformed into a field for generating collective memory of the community; finally, with the help of the extensibility of digital media, it provides a replicable technical path for the sustainable development of culture. This transformation practice demonstrates that true cultural sustainability does not lie in mechanically preserving historical forms or blindly following modern technology, but in the creative tension between the two —— Just as the philosophical depth of 'the false is also true' in 'Dream of the Red Chamber' is preserved through 'reader theater,' this case offers key insights for the living inheritance of cultural heritage in the Asia-Pacific region: First, digital media can transcend time and space limitations, reconstructing the physical carriers of cultural identity in urban public spaces; Second, participatory creation can foster a sense of cultural ownership among community members, transforming tradition from 'someone else's heritage 'into' our story'; Third, technology empowers classic IPs to continuously generate new meanings, forming a virtuous cycle of cultural innovation. These findings redefine the role of art research in social development —— not only as an exploration of aesthetic expression, but also as a creative engine for sustainable community building.

This article explores the creative transformation of the classic IP 'Dream of the Red Chamber' through artistic innovation from both traditional and modern perspectives. This transformation is not a departure from tradition but a modern interpretation grounded in a deep understanding of traditional culture. This modern transformation and innovative expression not only infuse dance art with a contemporary feel but also breathe new life into traditional culture in today's society (*Liu Hang.2023(12) Research on the Integration and Innovation of Traditional Culture and Dance Art [J]. Dance, 153-155.*).

Future research can further explore: how to apply this 'technology-humanity' dual-wheel drive model to a broader range of cultural contexts? How can quantitative assessments verify the impact of artistic innovation on community cohesion? These explorations will help us understand how, in the digital economy era, traditional culture can be creatively transformed into a catalyst for social innovation, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, where cultural diversity is especially rich.

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