

## Article

# Research on the Inheritance Path and the Branding Inheritance Model of Traditional Crafts

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**Abstract:** The inheritance of traditional crafts has contemporary value in the economy and socio-culture and, hence, the development of human civilization. China is well known for its traditional crafts and is the main subject of international traditional craft research; the Chinese government is the first leading force in traditional craft inheritance. This paper employs the grounded theory to analyze the content of 79 national policies on traditional crafts in China from 1960 to February 2022, and induces, compares, refines, and formulates an inheritance path for traditional crafts under the guidance of current public cultural policies in China. The path clarifies the Chinese government's overall structure for traditional craft inheritance and can also serve as a reference for the international community in revitalizing traditional crafts and maintaining cultural continuity. The path contains five models, among which, the branding inheritance model is key to the revitalization of traditional crafts, yet in both theory and practice, there is a lack of implementation plans. This paper reviews branding theories, sorts out the four attributes of brand "Identification, Communication, Value, and Culture", and then analyses the advantages of the branding inheritance model for traditional craft inheritance in four dimensions—recognition, identification, acquisition, and survival. Subsequently, this study selects the classical brand model focusing on each of the four attributes, explores the path to constructing the four attributes of traditional craft brands with a distinct operational logic, integrates the results of constructing the four attributes, forms a three-stage model of traditional craft branding inheritance, and analyzes the logical relationships of the components in the model. The model is a concrete implementation plan of the traditional craft branding inheritance, which aims to help public institutions formulate policies and guide practices in traditional craft inheritance, by providing a scientific strategic framework with a high degree of universality.

**Keywords:** traditional craft inheritance; branding; policy analysis; grounded theory; brand model



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## 1. Introduction

Traditional crafts are important elements of intangible cultural heritage (hereinafter referred to as 'ICH'), as the behaviors, technical crafts, and related products formed and are passed on by people of all ethnic groups after long-term social life practice. The inheritance and development of traditional crafts activates their practicality in serving social life, their cultural nature in carrying the historical and humanistic way of existence, and their nationality as the unique wealth of all ethnic groups. It then shows their contemporary value in constructing an economy and people's livelihood, shaping people's collective spirit, developing civilization in terms of the cultivation of national creativity and people's craftsmanship spirit, the promotion of ethnic equality, autonomy, and unity, the promotion

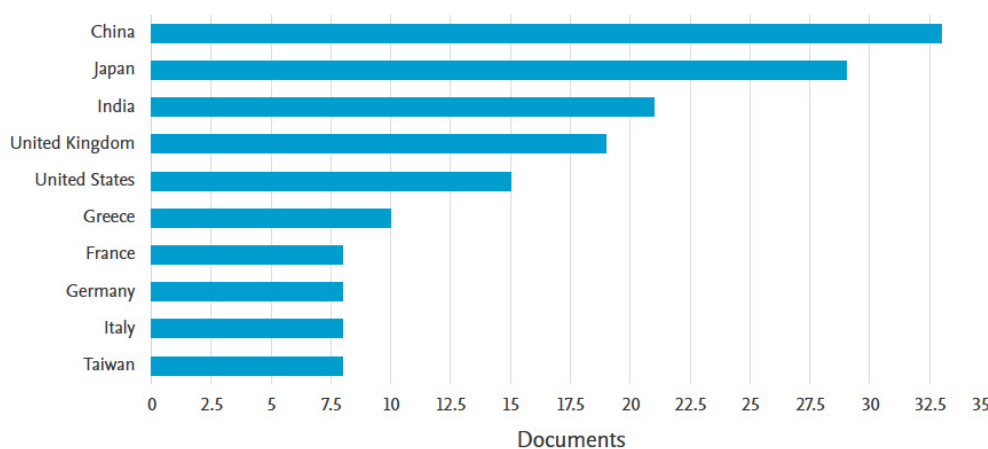
of cultural consciousness and national rejuvenation, and the common development of human civilization. However, as the trend of globalization and the modernization process continues to accelerate, the ecology of human existence and consumption has undergone great changes. Traditional crafts have encountered many new problems in their survival, protection, and development because their original practicality has been replaced; therefore, they are facing a serious inheritance situation. Some crafts that rely on oral and behavioral transmission are on the verge of extinction, while over-exploiting crafts for the sake of protection, inheritance, and revitalization occasionally occurs. Hence, scientific and effective models are urgently needed to promote the contemporary transmission of traditional crafts.

## 2. Public Culture: Branding Inheritance Mode of Traditional Crafts Led by Policy

China is a nation with a large stock of traditional crafts and has a three-level classification system of department-category-type, and there are 15 subdivisions of the department level alone, such as tool and instrument making, processing of agricultural, livestock and mineral products, and construction. There are tens of thousands of traditional crafts in China [1]. As of December 2022, the total number of items from China inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List has exceeded all other countries, 43% of which are traditional crafts [2]. In terms of international academic research on traditional crafts, China is a primary contributor (Figure 1). Therefore, the research on traditional crafts inheritance in China is representative and serves as a positive reference for the international community.

### Documents by country or territory

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.



**Figure 1.** Countries and Regions with research on traditional crafts. (Source: SCOPUS. Retrieved with “traditional craft” as a keyword on 12 March 2023).

In China, the government initiates and, hence, the public policies lead, in terms of direction and practical support, the traditional craft inheritance. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the State Council of the People's Republic of China (SCPRC), ministries and commissions, provincial administrative regions, and local cities and counties are the five main bodies issuing policies on Chinese traditional crafts. Through sorting, from 1960 to February 2022, 18 prevailing policies and regulations were issued by UNESCO, 24 by SCPRC, and 37 by ministries and commissions.

This paper employs the grounded theory to analyze the content of 79 policies. Grounded theory methodology was explored by American sociologists Glaser and Strauss in their research on the inpatient death experience in the 1960s, which is a nonvalidating theoretical research path developed from the bottom up, based on substantive domain data and the relevance of research subjects [3,4]. Eriksson and Kovalainen concluded that “The original evaluation criteria by Glaser and Strauss (1967) [3] and later by Glaser (1978) [5] for assessing grounded theory studies included fit, workability, relevance and modifiability.

They meant, by and large, that theory must be suitable and fit to the empirical world it analyses” [6].

Therefore, in practice, based on different research perspectives and theoretical foundations, grounded theory has gradually created new logical structures, improved methodological techniques, and diversified development directions, providing researchers with different research ideas and diverse analytical strategies [7]. Strauss and Corbin emphasized the theoretical perspective in the application process of grounded theory, and preset a set of causality to expedite the research [8]. Dye used an ideal prototype to classify and introduced fuzzy logic while requiring a clear idea and means to prove the theory [9]. Charmaz absorbed the methods of induction, comparison, emergence, and openness in Glaser and Strauss’s grounded theory, and used the causality hypothesis logic of Strauss and Corbin, forming the constructivist approach to grounded theory. Meanwhile, Charmaz offered explicit criteria for grounded theory research, namely, credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness [10].

Chinese scholars Jia and Heng followed the ideas of Charmaz for constructing a theory, and introduced the cognitive map as a tool to explore a Chinese management grounded research paradigm, using the data analysis procedures of grounded theory proposed by Glaser and Strauss as the main structure, and the causality of proceduralist grounded theory put forward by Strauss and Corbin as the auxiliary structure [11].

Although not a specialized qualitative research method at its inception, the grounded theory has solved key problems that have long existed in qualitative research, such as the lack of systematicity, the blurred relationship between theory and methodology, and the disconnect between methodology and research techniques [12]. This resulted in breaking the dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research [13], which is hailed by the Western social sciences as the most widely used explanatory framework for qualitative research in the late 20th century [14]. Grounded theory is used to collect, induce, and continuously compare research data from an open perspective, to distill core concepts and categories, to construct intercategory links, and to create the conditions for the natural emergence of different knowledge in the research data [15], thereby developing a theory that solves the tricky issues of the research subject and explains its behavioral patterns. Its process is clear, step-by-step, and highly operational, and is a normative and scientific research methodology. This paper used this methodology to analyze the content of 79 policies, and a total of 273 initial concepts related to traditional crafts inheritance methods were identified (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Examples of concept codes for policies related to traditional crafts (excerpts).

Concepts		Statements (Excerpts)
Government guidance	65-1	Upholding the Party’s position as the core of leadership in directing the overall situation and coordinating the efforts of all quarters, and strengthening the all-out effort to enforce strict Party discipline to ensure its leading role.
Inheritance experience facility	65-2	Constructing the system of inheritance experience facilities that integrates functions such as inheritance, experience, education, training, and tourism.
Holistic regional protection	65-3	Perfecting the holistic regional protection system and promoting the construction of cultural reserves.
Productive protection	65-4	Building national demonstration bases for productive protection of ICH.
Protection by category	65-5	Strengthening the protection by category, implementing the plan on revitalizing China’s traditional crafts and the plan on inheritance and development of Chinese folk art forms, and developing a plan for inheritance and development of ICH in the category of traditional medicine.
Protection by type of region	65-6	Protection of ICH in border regions: sorting out the list of ICH projects shared with neighboring countries, strengthening the protection of key projects, supporting the establishment of culture reserves at all levels in border regions, building ICH experience facilities, and strengthening the display and exchange of ICH projects.

Table 1. Cont.

Concepts		Statements (Excerpts)
Communication	65-7	Increasing the communication and popularization of ICH by carrying out activities such as publicity, display, and exchanges.
Sino–foreign exchange	65-8	Strengthening cultural exchanges and multilevel civilizational dialogues between China and foreign countries, and continuously enhancing the international recognition of Chinese culture, Chinese spirit, and Chinese values.
Integration into major national strategies	65-9	Strengthening the protection and inheritance of ICH in combination with major national strategies, and establishing a regional protection coordination mechanism.
Rural revitalization	63-1	ICH serving social governance at the grass-roots level in the process of implementing a rural revitalization strategy and new urbanization construction.
Integration into major national strategies	63-2	Dovetailing services with major national strategies, and strengthening special surveys of key regions and projects.
Digitalization	63-3	Adopting electronic means to investigate and record, promoting the application of big data in the survey, and improving the efficiency of collecting and processing survey data.
Culture and tourism integration	63-4	Properly handling the relation between ICH protection and tourism exploitation, and promoting the integration of ICH and tourism development under the premise of effective protection.
	63-5	Supporting the organic fusion of ICH, scenic spots, resorts, tourism and leisure blocks, and signature towns, and encouraging the development of ICH characteristic scenic spots.

The initial concepts are classified and organized into 25 categories, such as governmental actions, educational display, compiling and storing dossiers, constructing a team of inheritors, protecting and salvaging, and holistic cultural and ecological inheritance, and they are incorporated into six main categories: inheritance management, inheritance mode, essential inheritance method, progressive inheritance method, technical path, and inheritance goal (Table 2).

Table 2. Coding of traditional craft-related policies.

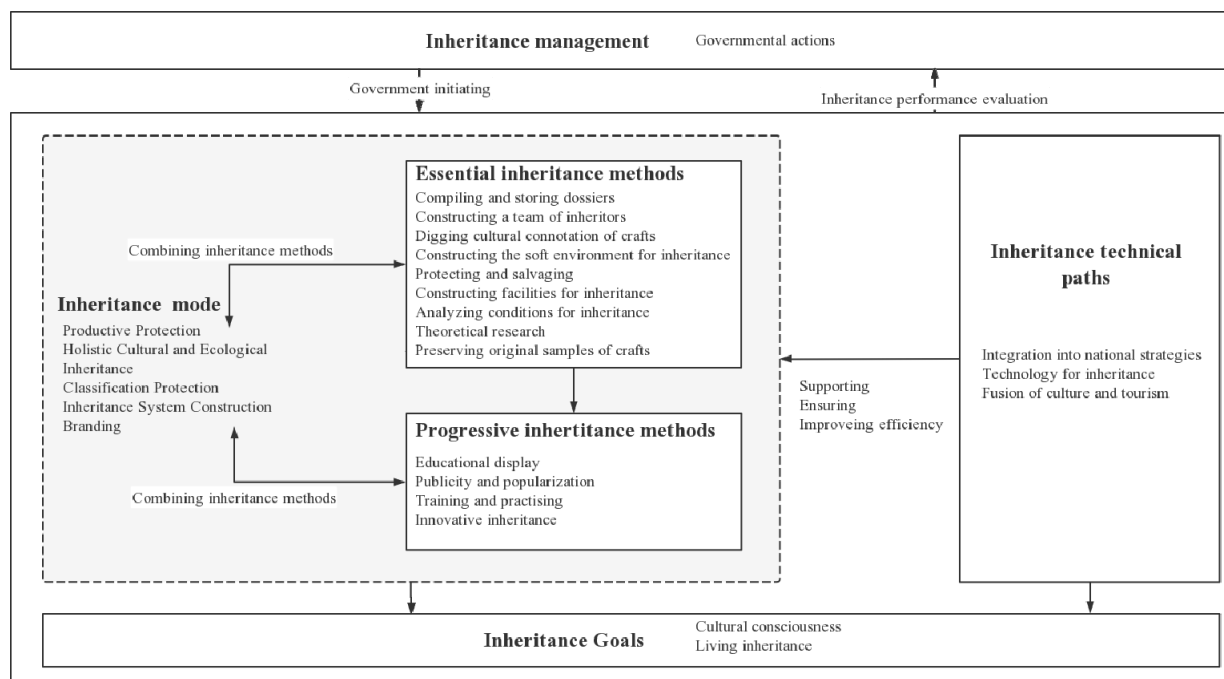
Main Categories	Categories	Initial Concepts
Inheritance management	Governmental actions	Government initiating, deciding, planning protection, funding, supporting, and managing finance
	Inheritance performance evaluation	Inheritance effect evaluation, appraising and inspiring, audience response, social impact, and survival state evaluation
Inheritance mode	Productive protection	Productive protection, industrial development, integrating into production and life, entering modern life, and demonstration bases for productive protection
	Holistic cultural and ecological inheritance	Integrity, radiating function, holistic regional protection, systematic protection, and holistic protection of reserves
	Branding	Cultivation of well-known brands, branding, mark protection, and traditional craft brands
	Classification protection	Classification by heritage, industry, and region
	Inheritance system construction	Inheritance system

Table 2. Cont.

Main Categories	Categories	Initial Concepts
Essential inheritance method	Compiling and storing dossiers	The general survey, lists, compiling, and storing dossiers
	Constructing a team of inheritors	Sustainability of inheritors, protection of inheritors, teams of inheritors, and cultivation of craftsmen
	Digging cultural connotations of crafts	Spiritual value, digging cultural connotations, core ideological concepts, and Chinese humanistic spirit
	Constructing the soft environment for inheritance	Social atmosphere, public scientific literacy, cultural literacy, and public cultural service level
	Protecting and salvaging	Protection and salvation procedures, restoration, confidentiality, and intellectual property protection
	Constructing facilities for inheritance	Transmission place, heritage site, inheritance experience facilities, and sales platforms
	Analyzing conditions for inheritance	Inheritance dilemma, environmental impact, inheritance goals, and inheritance advantages
	Theoretical research	Protective research, scientific research, and theoretical research of policies
	Preserving original samples of crafts	Protection of raw materials, the authenticity of core crafts, and the integrity of traditional craft processes
Progressive inheritance method	Educational display	Education and information intelligence, formal and informal education, youth education, national education, exhibitions, displays in the museum, and the construction of discipline and specialty
	Publicity and popularization	Communication, publication, Sino–foreign exchanges, precise publicity, new media communication plan, and omnimedia precise communication
	Training and practicing	Transmission and practice, workshops, training, inheritors learning and practicing, lectures, cultivation of inheritors, employment workshops, upgrading techniques of inheritors, and traditional craft workstations
	Innovative inheritance	Cultural creativity, science and technology, expanding use, innovative transformation, literature and art creation, reform and innovation, innovating and transforming, product design, industrial innovation, enriching craft variety, and improving the level of design and production
Technical path	Technology for inheritance	Omnimedia, display platform, multimedia, digitalization, informatization, and media
	Fusion of culture and tourism	Cultural tourism products, and the integration of culture and tourism
	Integrating into national strategies	Rural revitalization, and integration into major national strategies
Inheritance goal	Cultural consciousness	Cultural consciousness, cultivating craftsmen, and fostering craftsmanship spirit
	Living inheritance	Living inheritance

The core category is thus the inheritance path of traditional crafts led by public cultural policies (Figure 2). This is a government-initiated inheritance path that coordinates inheritance mode, regulates inheritance methods, promotes cultural consciousness and different forms of living inheritance, and controls the process and goals through performance evaluation and feedback. Among them, inheritance control is the core, leading the direction of inheritance; the choice of mode is key, determining the implementation framework of inheritance and leading the selection and portfolio strategy of inheritance methods. Inheritance methods are the guarantee, and essential methods not only achieve the goal of protection and inheritance, but also provide the implementation of progressing methods with craft culture, human environment, facilities, human resources, and theoretical meth-

ods. Performance evaluation and feedback make heritage goals and heritage control form a closed loop eventually, continuing to lead the direction for traditional craft inheritance.



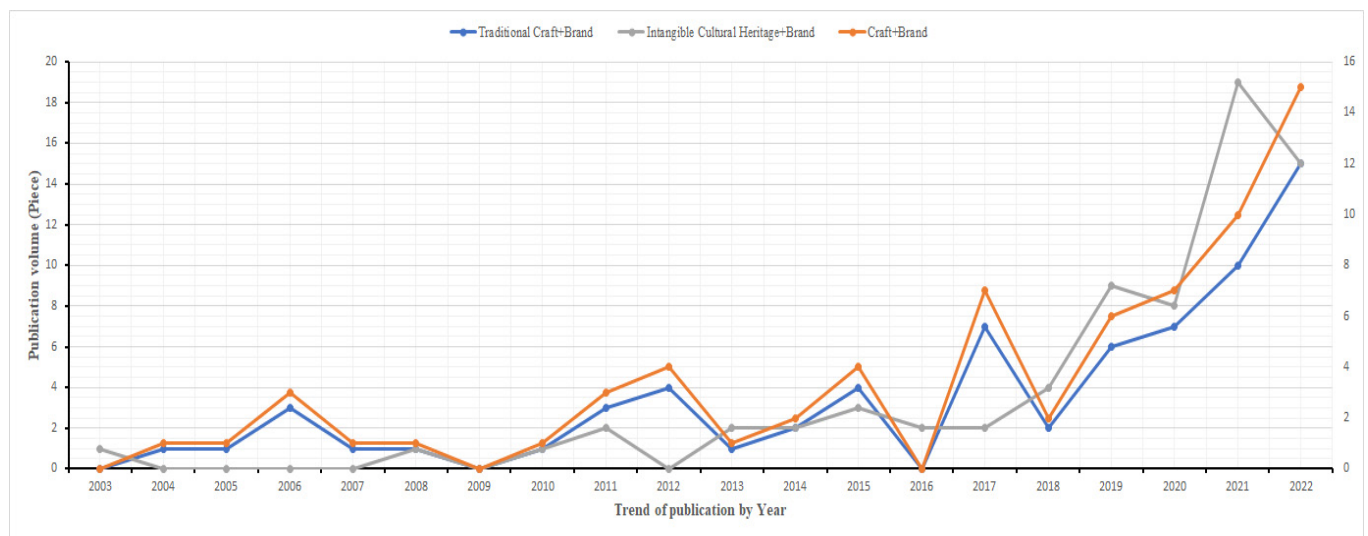
**Figure 2.** The inheritance path of traditional crafts led by public cultural policies.

From the perspective of policy content analysis, inheritance modes of traditional crafts are concentrated in five categories: productive protection, holistic protection of cultural ecology, classification protection, inheritance system construction, and branding. Among those, the branding inheritance mode stood out in the traditional crafts policies after 2017, with the administrative power to explicitly identify branding as an effective mode for promoting traditional crafts inheritance as a stage goal, a principle to adhere to, and a task object for inheriting traditional crafts. For instance, The Plan on Revitalizing China's Traditional Crafts called for strengthening brand construction, enhancing brand awareness, and cultivating well-known brands in its overall objectives, basic principles, and major tasks [16]. The Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Plan during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021–2025) emphasized the cultivation of well-known traditional crafts brands and encourages localities to establish traditional crafts branding activities and form brand communication projects [17]. In the Chinese Crafts Ecology Survey Report released in 2018, practitioners believed that branding inheritance mode might be one of the most effective ways forward [18]. Li et al. argued that implementing the traditional crafts branding strategy, a national cultural identity strategy, is imperative and key to revitalizing Chinese traditional crafts, as it releases the rich national culture embedded in the crafts [19]. However, the branding inheritance mode is currently at a conceptual level in Chinese policy, and there are no clear guidelines for its implementation.

### 3. Literature on Branding Inheritance Modes of Traditional Crafts

There is also a lack of academic research on the branding inheritance of traditional crafts. A SCOPUS search of article titles, abstracts and keywords for traditional crafts and brand, crafts and brand, and intangible cultural heritage and brand found a total of just over 200 relevant articles from 2003 to 2022. Encouragingly, however, studies showed a linear increase (Figure 3).

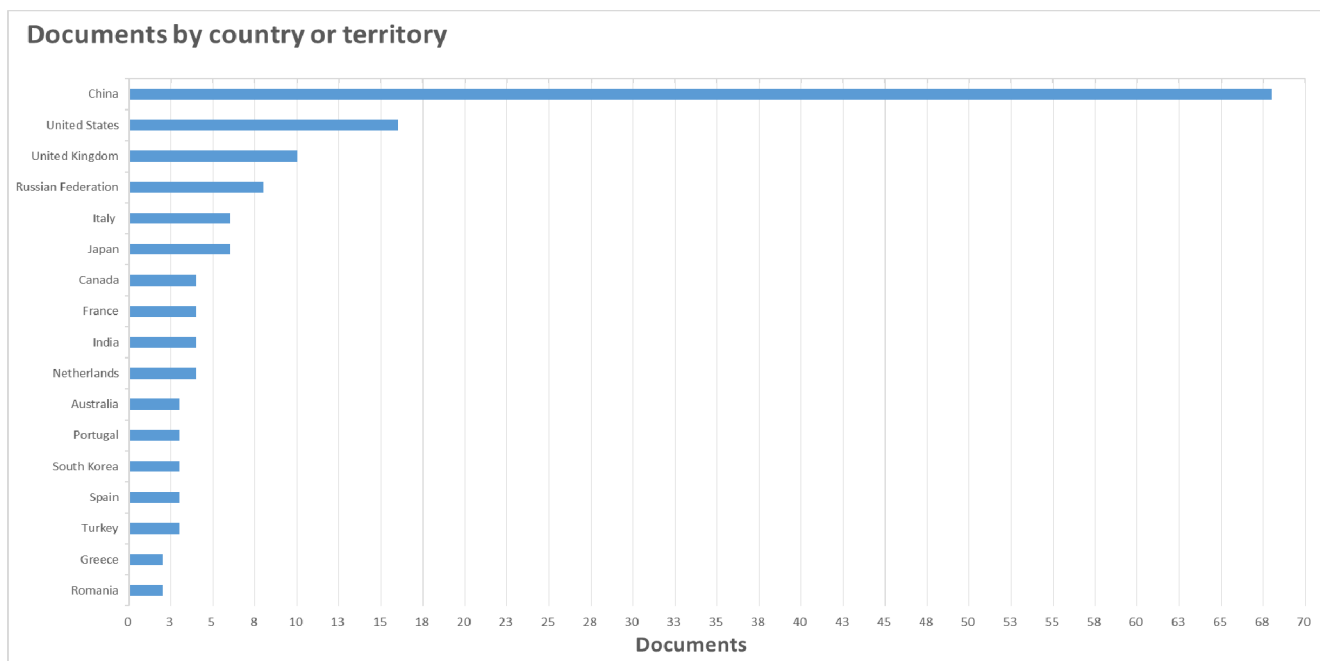




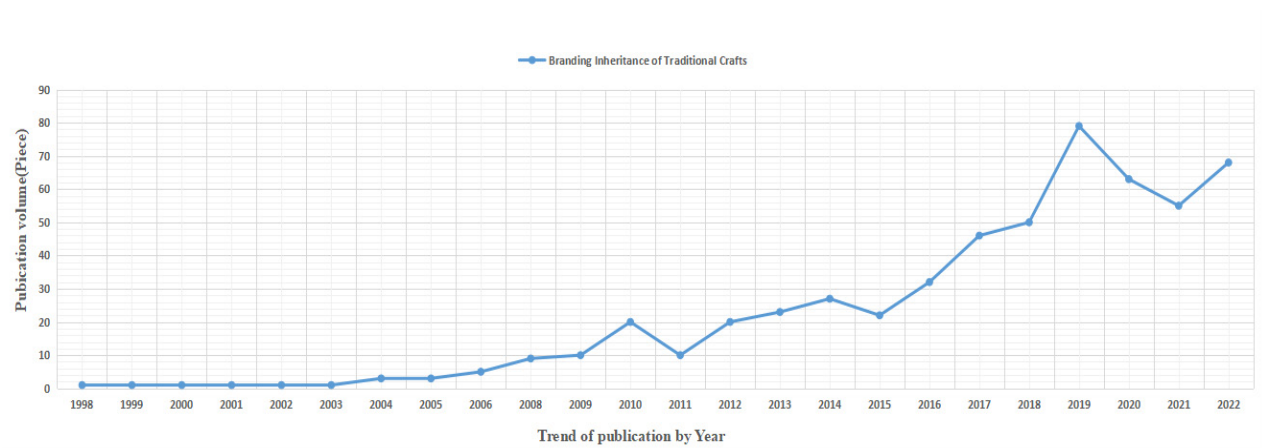
**Figure 3.** Research trends on Branding inheritance mode of traditional crafts. (Source: SCOPUS. Retrieved on 12 March 2023).

Scholars outside China focused on the elements of, and realization approaches to, the branding of traditional crafts. Aounzou, Kalloubi, and Boulaalam presented a system based on the internet of things that used the national label of handicrafts in digital format to monitor products in their lifecycle, ensuring the originality and the traceability of items, and protecting the artistic and brand values of traditional Moroccan handicrafts handed down from generation to generation, from the influence of counterfeit and modern crafts products [20]. Zare et al. conducted a case study on artisanal sodas and concluded that the key to successful branding is communicating product personality, its natural ingredients, and premium quality, as well as segmenting the market based on distribution territory and target audiences' location [21]. Jin and Ryun analyzed the target audience brand association of local Korean handcrafted beers and proposed a strategy for branding from packaging design [22]. Kyungran and Myong argued for the need to promote collaboration between designers and product developers in both crafts and design by providing integrated education for specialists, young artists, craftsmen, and designers, to develop new products by reconciling traditional features and modern functions, and develop internationally renowned brands by marketing through international exhibitions [23]. Kim B.M. and Kim B.Y. suggested that the handicrafts industry should develop brands and adopt brand marketing. They studied three successful cases of traditional crafts brands through brand positioning, brand identification, and the 7Ps marketing model, and proposed that traditional crafts branding should pay attention to the fusion of tradition and modernity, design a perceptive brand identity, and value brand expression. They also emphasized collaboration between designers, craftsmen, and experts [24]. Mevhibe and Ozdemir considered that handicrafts reflect the cultural, natural, and historical characteristics of a region and society, and that geographical indications in handicrafts are an important tool for handicrafts to become global brands as they influence their branding and the faith of markets [25].

Chinese scholars are still the majority in the field of international research on the branding of traditional crafts (Figure 4). Intellectual interest in this topic in China has also shown an overall gradual growth since 2004 (Figure 5). Research by Chinese scholars on the branding of traditional crafts was divided into the following three groups:



**Figure 4.** Countries and Regions with research on Branding inheritance mode of traditional crafts. (Source: SCOPUS. Retrieved on 12 March 2023).



**Figure 5.** Chinese research on Branding inheritance mode of traditional crafts. (Source: CNKI. Retrieved on 12 March 2023).

The first group of comprehensive studies is seen in brand establishing, brand shaping, and brand construction, then the principles and paths of branding are proposed. Zhang analyzed traditional crafts branding from the perspective of the history of technology, arguing that it is a social environmental construction of technology. He proposed to follow the three principles of core techniques, core culture, and cultural reconsciousness of the subjects of the techniques, to deal with the relationship between collective and individual subjects, agricultural and industrial forms, locality and universality, and to create a favorable environment with the cooperation of all sectors of society. He proposed to identify the ethnic and regional characteristics of the crafts as the core, along the three paths of the inheritance of crafts culture, redesign, and crafts inheritance, so that traditional crafts gradually realize branding and move from ethnicity and geography to autonomy [26]. Zhang and Wu argued that the key points to traditional crafts branding are public participation and government cooperation, preserving tradition and modern innovation, enhancing the economic benefit, and deepening cultural benefit, which will promote the integration of



traditional culture and contemporary society, thus generating new structures and functions and driving social development [27]. Sun and Zheng analyzed research data on Chinese traditional crafts brands in terms of brand awareness, brand identification, brand status quo, and brand improvement. They identified the current huge differences between producer and target audience sides in the perception of traditional crafts' visual image recognition, brand standards, and limited production quantities, as well as the insufficient productivity in the traditional crafts industry as resistance to branding, while differentiation and building trust are key to branding. They also pointed out that traditional crafts branding is still in its infancy, and that constantly revising strategies and improving services in response to target audience feedback is an important part of branding traditional crafts [18]. Taking the Tibetan incense of Nyêmo County as an example, Jia proposed branding paths such as shifting the business model to a modern enterprise, increasing capital investment, increasing technological innovation, enhancing practitioners' brand awareness, refining the design, enriching product offerings, improving product quality, registering trademarks, protecting intellectual property rights, and stepping up education and promotion of craftsmanship [28].

The second group of research is involved in cultural connotation, brand design, and influencing factors. Cai explored the theoretical system and methodological model in brand design practice in the context of Shanghai's actual practice, from thinking vectors of the brand design identity, result, relation, and regeneration [29]. Zhang studied the development status of traditional handmade paper from the dimensions of brand identification, brand image, and brand communication, and applied the concept of design regeneration to discuss the form regeneration, function regeneration, material regeneration, and organizational regeneration of handmade paper value regeneration. They built a design model and process of handmade paper brand value regeneration including brand visual regeneration, product regeneration, and organizational regeneration [30]. Wang proposed a brand management model of natural and human resources, production quality management, industrial and policy environment, and products and markets for the regional brand development of geographical indication-protected products in Yunnan Province, China, and further analyzed and pointed out 14 influencing factors and their weights, including geographical environment, cultural integration, and traditional crafts heritage. They accordingly put forward suggestions for branding by insisting on equal emphasis on natural and humanistic environmental protection and development, focusing on quality improvement for geographical indication-protected products, and strengthening brand management in geographical indication regions [31].

The third group of investigations lies in the paths to realizing the branding inheritance mode of traditional crafts in aspects of cultural and creative products, cultural industries, media industries, industrialization, and internet communication. Taking the lacquer thread sculpture industry in Xiamen as a case in point, Wang expounded on how regional brands extract heterogeneous cultural essence from intangible cultural heritage and construct their differentiated selling points, and analyzed the protection strategy of startup traditional crafts cultural and creative brands in terms of copyright, trademark rights, and appearance patents [32]. Upon analyzing the opportunities and challenges brought by the cultural licensing model for brands of distinctive cultural industries under the trend of industrial integration, Wang and Tang suggested building a framework for the industrial upgrading and development of traditional crafts cultural brands, by exploring the digitization of traditional crafts cultural resources, the formation of a cultural licensing plan, and the implementation of culture-empowered market operations [33]. Jin and Yang addressed the two major dilemmas of lacking independent brands and lagging geographical indication protection in the branding of rural traditional crafts industries, proposing the branding path of rural traditional crafts industries by reasonably formulating industrial brand development plans, consolidating system construction, standardizing geographical indication declaration and management, building a brand display platform, and promoting the integration of traditional crafts and tourism [34].

In general, studies in China and abroad all highly recognized the importance of branding for traditional crafts inheritance, and largely explored the elements and paths to realizing branding despite limited availability of previous studies. The overarching framework of these explorations needs strengthening, especially as most of the studies focused on specific regions or crafts; the universal applicability, promotability, and reference ability of research results need to be enhanced. Noting that the core concepts of brand theory—brand awareness, brand identification, brand association, brand positioning, and brand image—appeared repeatedly in research, we were enlightened to study a universal inheritance model through brand theory.

#### **4. Construction of Branding Inheritance Model of Traditional Crafts Grounded on the Brand Theory**

##### *4.1. Analysis of the Advantages of Branding Inheritance Mode*

The American Marketing Association defines the brand as “A name, term, design, symbol, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from competitors.” [35]. Branding experts Kotler [36], Upshaw [37], and Jones [38] all emphasized the role of a brand in helping the target audience identify a specific product or service accurately. Rik stated directly that the original definition of a brand is a differentiation tool [39], and that the identification attribute is a fundamental one, showing the important role of a brand in communicating its value and personality to the outside world, and in quickly creating an exclusive image and independent status in the minds of its target audiences.

In practice, the relationship between the brand subject and the target audience has received increasing attention from management and academic circles. Aaker [40], Keller [41], Kuwahara [42], Shu, and Xiao [43] all stressed that brand is a connection and exchange between the brand subject and the target audience, and that the brand effect is built on a psychological connection between them [44]. Ogilvy [45] and He [46] further remarked that this relationship has to be understood in the context of the feelings of the target audience. Beyond the external identification attribute of brand, branding experts, from the viewpoint of relationship, saw that the communication attribute of a brand that promotes exchange is the internal factor affecting the success of a brand.

However, the communication attribute does not fully reveal the significance of branding. Schultz believed that brand is the value owned and shared by both the brand subject and the target audience, and is a bridge for both sides to benefit from continuously if this two-way value is balanced [47]. Yu and Dai pointed out that brand is an effective means of value premium, and that the value attribute clearly describes the two-way premium effect brought by branding to the brand subject and the target audience [48].

A brand is found with four attributes—identity, communication, value, and culture, after the evolution of branding theory is combed. Then how to shape the brand value? Vincent [49] and Beverland [50] clearly stated that the value came from the social and historical culture contained in the brand. Richard Elliott [51] and Bowen et al. [52] delineated that brand culture affected everything about the brand in their elaboration of brand strategic management from a cultural perspective. The culture attribute, a concrete manifestation of the overall synergy of brand elements, is a deep attribute of a brand that enhances the recognition effect, builds strong relationships, and generates two-way value.

Branding inheritance of traditional crafts aims to promote the heritage of traditional crafts from the dimensions of cognition, recognition, acquisition, and survival by giving play to the identification, communication, value, and culture attributes of a brand. The identification attribute improves the social identification of traditional crafts, and makes them appear in the public’s cognitive space with an exclusive identity and be known, remembered, and recognized clearly and vividly. The communication attribute enables the inheritance subjects to strengthen the relationship between themselves and inheritance objects by improving inheritance ability, studying the needs of the objects, exploring the connotation of the craft, attaching importance to feedback and interaction, and enhances the

inheritance objects' identification with the craft. The value attribute enables heritage objects to gain a sense of belonging to the brand as demand being satisfied, evolving brand loyalty and persistent pursuit of traditional crafts, then the product sales are expanded and the social status and inheritance confidence of heritage subjects are improved and enhanced, forming a virtuous circle in this two-way acquisition to promote the lively survival of the craft. The culture attribute propels the inheritance subject into active identification of social and cultural conditions, close attention to the spiritual needs of inheritance objects, and an objective analysis of the survival state of traditional crafts, then frees the inheritance from the shackles of limited uses and makes it focus on the consciousness of fine traditional national culture contained in traditional crafts, thereby building the general public's respect and affection for traditional crafts for a truly reliable inheritance [53].

#### 4.2. The Paths to Building Brand Attributes of Traditional Crafts Based on Classical Brand Models

Different brand models focus accordingly on the practice and research of branding. This paper selects four classical brand models on the identification, communication, value, and culture attributes, to explore paths to building brand attributes of traditional crafts.

The brand positioning model built by Ries and Trout argued that a brand only was to be built from outside in, by implanting the brand into the minds of target audiences through positioning tools to evoke their cognition and establish a cognitive connection between them and products [54]. The identification attributes are activated by the six-step positioning tool designed by this model. Accordingly, the construction of the identification attribute of a traditional craft brand focuses on the mental analysis and psychological construction of target audiences after identifying them, aiming at shaping brand characteristics that are easier to remember, recognize, and choose, and proceeds in phases with branding determination, brand communication, staff, funds, properties, and policy support as a guarantee (Figure 6).

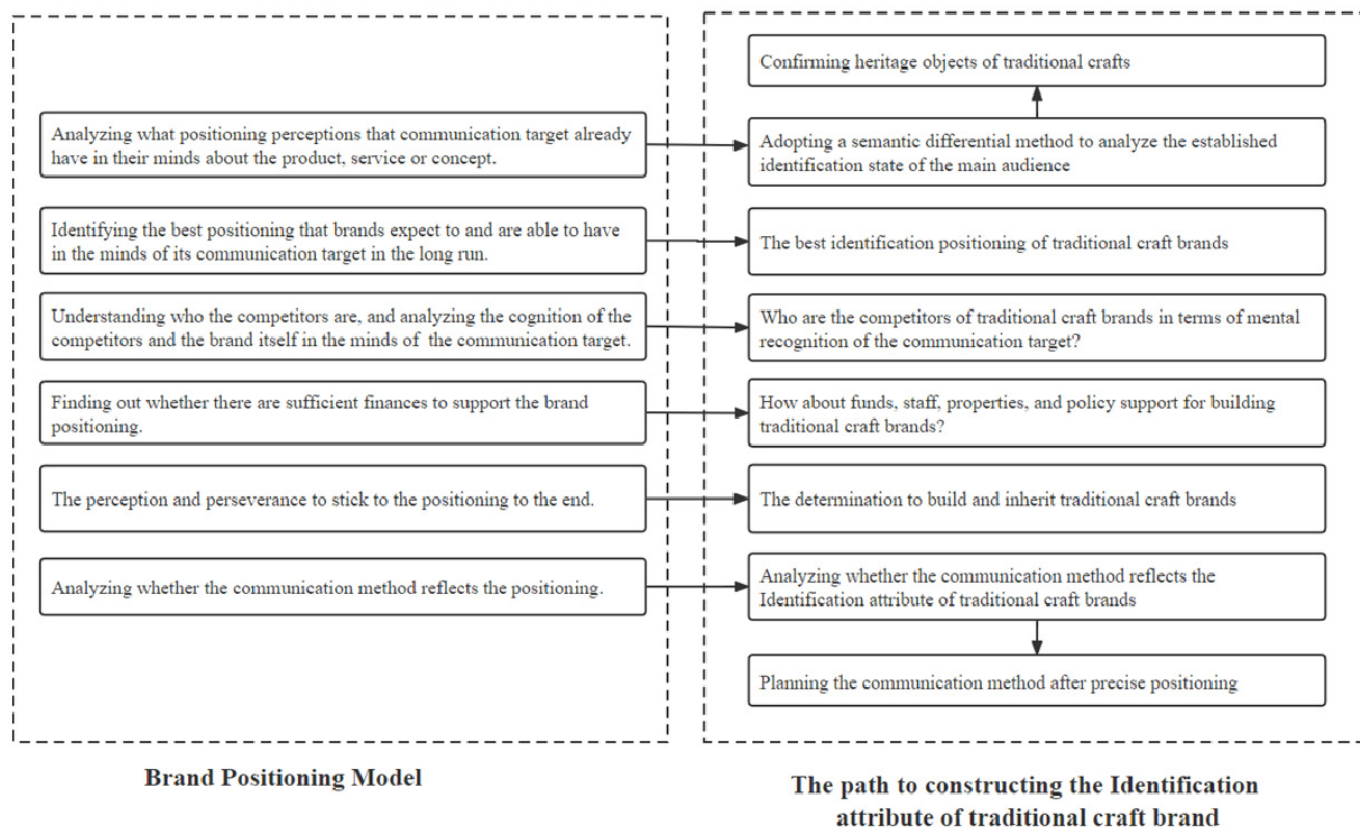
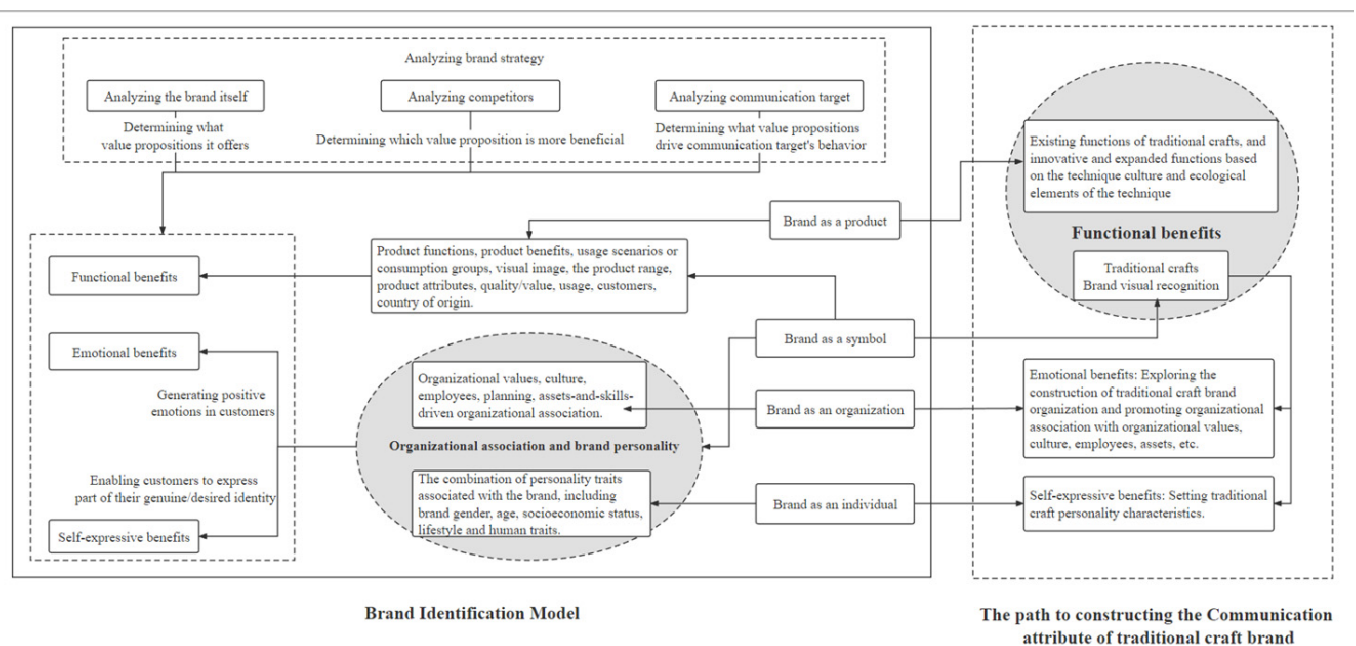


Figure 6. The path to constructing the identification attribute of a traditional craft brand.

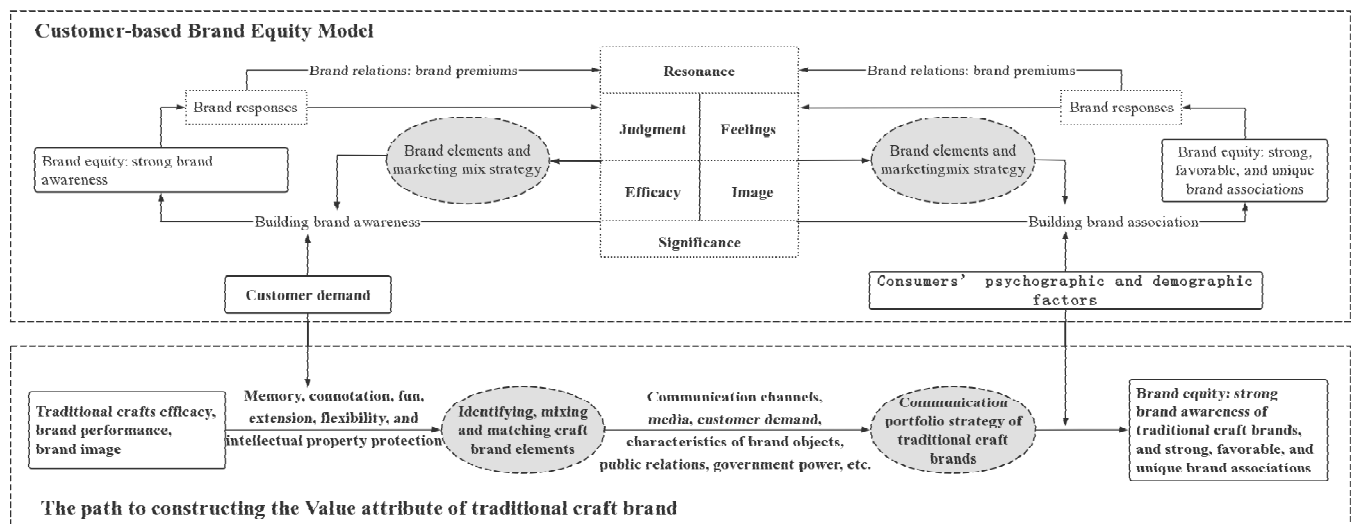
The brand identification model that emphasizes communication attributes (Aaker 1998) argues that strong brand–customer relationships, from the perspective of the brand subject, should be established by guiding brand objects to perceive the value propositions that contain functional benefits, emotional benefits, and self-expressive benefits [40]. The relationship-oriented communication attributes are the emphasis of this model. Accordingly, the construction of brand communication attributes of traditional crafts focuses on identifying their effective value propositions. It is necessary to innovate and expand functional benefits based on product function and performance, craft culture, and craft ecological elements; to promote emotional associations and create emotional benefits based on the social interrelation between craft human environment and craft organizations; to lay craft culture at the core and set craft personality expression benefits; to confirm effective value propositions in combination with the needs of the craft target audience and the value propositions of craft competitors (Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** The path to constructing the communication attribute of a traditional craft brand.

The brand equity model advanced by Keller (1993) considered that brand equity came into being if a high-level brand awareness and a positive brand image were in the minds of the target audiences. It included the value with the correct and positive brand response as its main content brought by the brand subject to the target audience, and the premium effect the brand subject obtains by its resonance with the target audience. This value attributes-oriented model suggested that the brand subject should choose, mix, and match brand elements, taking into account customer demand and target audiences' psychographic and demographic factors, design and implement integrated marketing communication programs to facilitate the target audiences forming highly rational brand awareness and strong, favorable, and unique brand associations [41]. Accordingly, traditional crafts branding should be implemented in both rational and emotional approaches: the rational approach aimed to establish crafts brand awareness with a communication strategy portfolio that satisfies the demand of different brand objects and highlights the functional elements of traditional crafts, taking the efficacy of traditional crafts and products as the main line; the emotional approach establishes crafts brand association, and designs and implements elements communication programs based on the psychographic preference of brand objects, taking the creation of traditional crafts brand image as the main line, and highlighting the ecological elements of culture and art. Finally, the value attribute of traditional crafts brands—brand awareness, brand image optimization of brand objects' value judgment,

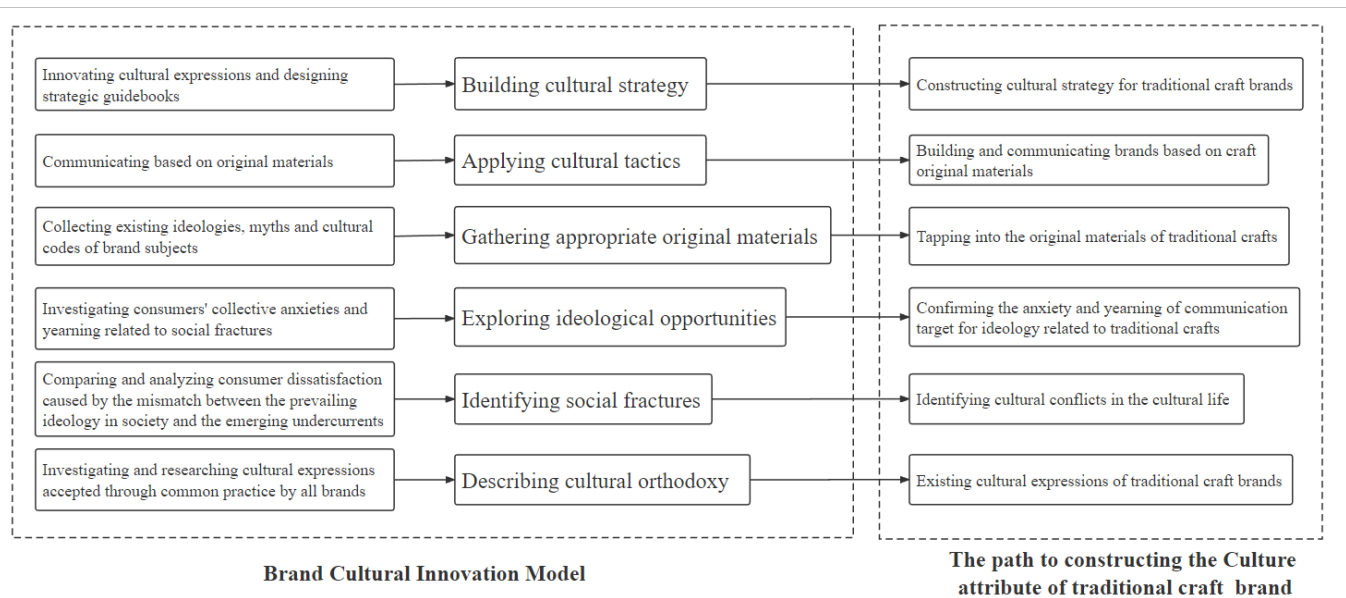
and resonance between brand subjects and brand objects—are formed (Figure 8). It is noted that the communication strategy portfolio and the elements communication plan are not the same as the marketing mix in the customer-based brand equity model, which focuses more on the company's interests and the comprehensive application of marketing devices such as pricing, channels, and distribution; the former two focus more on the formation of cultural awareness of traditional crafts in the minds of target audiences, and the implementation of precise media matrix communication given features of different target audiences in the real society through the coordination of traditional crafts brand elements and the integration of various communication channels.



**Figure 8.** The path to constructing the value attribute of a traditional craft brand.

The cultural innovation model that emphasizes culture attributes (Holt and Cameron) argues that brands exist in history, social life, and culture, and are inherently cultural expressions. Thus, it is necessary to get out of traditional analytical methods of economics, engineering, psychology, etc., and adopt a variety of experimental methods of humanities such as sociology, linguistics, and communication studies to conduct cyclic cultural analyses for building a brand [55]. This model regards brand cultural attributes as an integral part of the strategy and as a guiding principle for the methodology of brand management. From this, the construction of culture attributes of traditional craft brands shifts the focus from functions and emotional benefits of crafts to social ideology and sociocultural demand for crafts, taking this as a strategic premise, to study the dissatisfaction of brand objects with the existing cultural expressions of traditional crafts in light of the cultural forms and humanistic history embedded in crafts, and to look for new opportunities for the development of traditional craft culture and innovate the original cultural expressions to build the brand (Figure 9).





**Figure 9.** The path to constructing the culture attribute of a traditional craft brand.

#### 4.3. Three-Stage Model of Branding Inheritance of Traditional Crafts with Brand Attributes Integrated

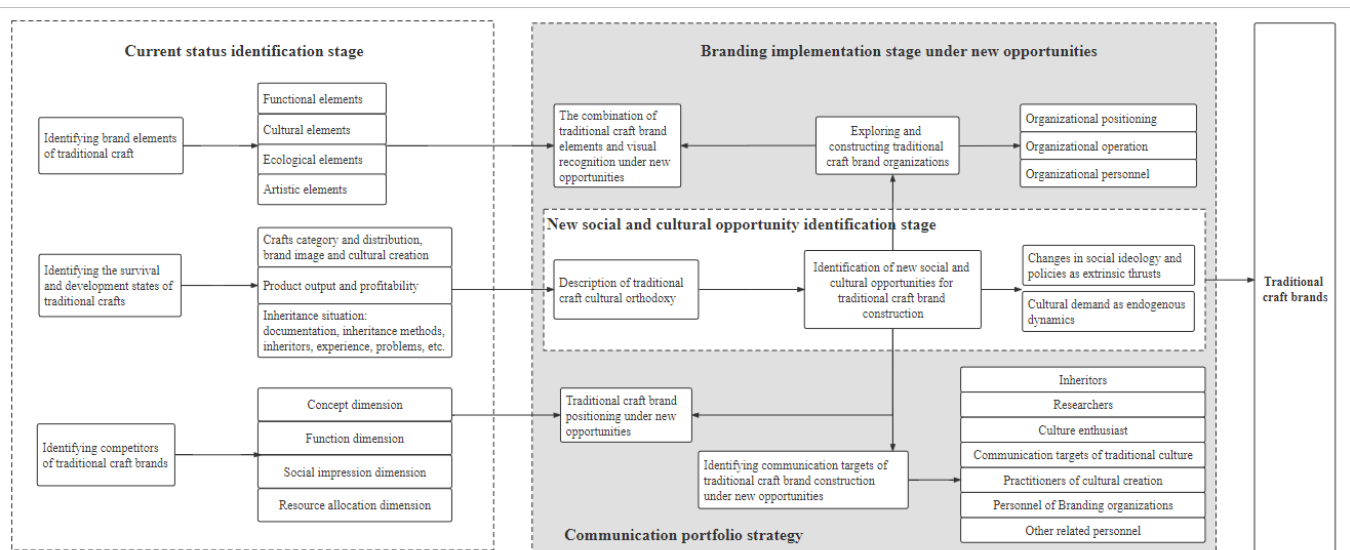
The constructions of the identification attribute, the communication attribute, the value attribute, and the culture attribute are respectively independent and complete brand-establishing processes from the perspective of the models on which traditional craft brand attributes are built. Nevertheless, as each of them focuses on a single brand attribute, it is difficult to achieve a holistic establishment of a traditional craft brand. For instance, the construction of the brand identification attribute emphasizes the mental recognition of the target audience, and there is a lack of expression of social demand for traditional crafts and the wishes of the inheritance agent. The construction of the brand communication attribute emphasizes the perspective of the inheritance agent and focuses on the value proposition of traditional craft brand, but the systematic exploration of value proposition communication strategies is insufficient. The construction of the brand value attribute emphasizes the marketing mix strategy of brand elements communication, but it pays more attention to the functional and emotional elements of the brand, and its focus on cultural elements is mainly on the cultural content contained in the craft itself, with little consideration of the sociocultural environment as the background of brand establishing. The construction of the brand culture attribute takes changes in social ideology as the main environment for brand shaping, and emphasizes the cultural consciousness path to inheriting traditional craft, but the emphasis on functional elements and communication strategies is deficient.

Therefore, integrating paths to building the above-mentioned brand attributes becomes key to the new construction of the branding inheritance model of traditional crafts. From the viewpoint of the content of brand attributes construction, the construction of four attributes is neither a linear progression nor independent of each other, as they intersect with each other in many aspects, such as brand elements identification, target audience analysis, and traditional craft identity, which provides the possibility of implementing idea integration. Based on idea integration, this paper proposes an exploratory three-stage model of branding inheritance of traditional crafts (Figure 10).

The first stage of the three-stage model of branding inheritance of traditional crafts is the identification of the current status of the brand, whose main content comes from the path to constructing identification attributes under Figure 6, including the identification of the survival and development situations of traditional crafts and their competitors' status quo. At the same time, combining the construction of communication attributes as shown



in Figure 7, the analysis of the basic situation of the brand elements of traditional crafts and their potential for successful branding also needs to be considered.



**Figure 10.** Three-stage model of branding inheritance of traditional crafts.

The second stage of the three-stage model of branding inheritance of traditional crafts is the identification of new social and cultural opportunities, which is derived from the path to constructing brand cultural attributes in Figure 9. It underlines that the key to their successful branding is a clear understanding of traditional crafts' cultural orthodoxy (the brand cultural innovation model refers to cultural expressions accepted through common practice by all brands as cultural orthodoxy) and a judgment of the current social and cultural opportunities and needs, not simply the integration of brand elements that traditional crafts possess, to reorganize the cultural expressions to make them more attuned to the spiritual and cultural needs of society and the public.

The third stage of the three-stage model of branding inheritance of traditional crafts is the branding implementation, which is a selective gathering of the paths to constructing four brand attributes, such as identifying the brand positioning under the new opportunities in the identification attributes construction demonstrated in Figure 6, defining the brand target audiences under new opportunities and organizing the brand implementation personnel in the communication attributes construction seen in Figure 7, aggregating the brand elements identified in the first stage and ensuring the capability of traditional crafts to become brands in Figure 6, and communication attributes construction in Figure 7. The identification of implementers, implementation objects, and implementation elements is the basis for implementing the communication strategy mix, and when it is well prepared, the design and implementation of the communication portfolio strategy begin. This concept is reflected in the construction of the four attributes, and it manifests itself in the brand value attributes construction of Figure 8.

#### 4.3.1. Construction Elements of the Three-Stage Model of Branding Inheritance of Traditional Crafts

The first stage of the three-stage model includes the identification of traditional craft brand elements, the state of survival and development, and the state of competitors.

The identification of brand elements is carried out from functional, cultural, ecological, and artistic dimensions. The functional dimension focuses on identifying the characteristics of craft products, the uses of craft products, the uses of cultural creativity products, and the social and cultural uses of craft inheritance. The cultural dimension focuses on identifying the origin and evolutionary history of the craft, the life customs of the craft-producer

group, the cultural traditions of craft processes, the folklore and cultural history matters related to the craft, and cultural beliefs of the ethnic groups and communities to which the craft belongs. The ecological dimension focuses on identifying the growth space of craft raw materials, the natural ecology of craft survival space, and the human ecology of craft survival space. The artistic dimension focuses on identifying the artistic content that can be refined and used for cultural creativity and aesthetic re-creation from craft products, production tools, production environment, and the craft-producer group.

The identification of survival and development states is carried out in the dimensions of crafts category and distribution, brand image and cultural creativity, product output and profitability, and inheritance situation. The crafts category and distribution dimension identify the classification and geographical situation of the craft, and keeps abreast of the documentation and protection of the category and its regional development. The brand image and cultural creativity dimension identify whether the craft has an exclusive name, image identification, and cultural and creative expansion of products and services. The product output and profitability dimension identify the production and sales states of products and services, craft cultural creativity, and cultural tourism services. The inheritance situation dimension identifies inheritance methods, inheritors, inheritance spectrums, inheritance experience, inheritance dilemma, and other situations.

The identification of the state of competitors is conducted from the concept, function, social impression, and resource allocation dimensions. The concept dimension mainly identifies the cognition that is easily confused with the concept of craft. The function dimension mainly identifies other crafts and products that have the same uses or cultural functions as the craft and its products. The social impression dimension mainly identifies the representation of the craft and its cultural elements to the group or region to which they belong. The resource allocation dimension mainly identifies other crafts and products that are inherited with the same staff, funds, and properties support under the same cultural background.

The second stage of the three-stage model of branding inheritance of traditional crafts is the identification of new social and cultural opportunities, including the current cultural descriptions of craft categories and specific crafts, changes in social ideology and new cultural demand, and the policy environment.

The current cultural descriptions of craft categories and specific crafts are the foundation for the construction of branding inheritance of traditional crafts. It can be obtained through interviews and questionnaires in two parts: self-expression of crafts and products by groups of crafts, and cognitive statements of crafts by social groups and the public.

Changes in social ideology and new cultural demands are the endogenous dynamics of branding inheritance of traditional crafts. It is necessary to be objective about technological innovation and changes in production methods and to use methods such as demand research and consumption data analysis to grasp the multilevel and diversified cultural demand. These cultural demands can be the nationals' aspirations for spiritual and cultural life, the structural upgrade of the cultural consciousness of the whole nation, an updated concept that everyone may have cultural demand, the innovation of the business model of integrating culture and tourism, and the iteration of the model of integrating culture and material [56]. As the survey shows, cultural tourism, rural leisure, and ICH's cultural creativity have become new focuses of the people's cultural demand in recent years [57,58].

The policy environment is the extrinsic thrust for the branding inheritance of traditional crafts. It is necessary to collect, organize, and analyze policies to identify policies at all levels that affect the survival of traditional crafts and understand how they play a guiding and guaranteeing role in it. By way of illustration, here are some examples: the strategy of developing a strong culture in China emphasizes "inheriting and promoting the fine traditional Chinese culture, strengthening the systematic protection of ICH, and enhancing the protection and inheritance of excellent traditional crafts of all ethnic groups" [59]; the rural revitalization strategy takes traditional crafts as an entry point for rural revitalization;

the plan on revitalizing China's traditional crafts stresses the promotion of traditional crafts to better meet the people's demand for upgrading consumption in modern life.

The third stage of the three-stage model of branding inheritance of traditional crafts is the branding implementation under new opportunities, including the identification of target audiences, craft brand positioning, the combination of craft elements, the construction of craft brand organizations, and the design of craft brand communication portfolio strategy.

The target audience, based on the specific direction of craft inheritance, is chosen and combined from the following groups: the inheritor group that perpetuates craft, the researcher group that protects craft, the practitioner group that conducts cultural creativity and aesthetic recreation of craft innovation, the organizer group that implements craft branding, the general public group that communicates craft culture, and other groups related to craft inheritance.

The craft brand positioning, based on different target audiences, investigates and researches their impressions of, demand for, and psychographic preferences of the craft, combined with competitor identification to analyze value propositions, thereby determining the craft brand name, characteristics, and brief self-statement that can best mobilize the minds of target audiences.

The combination of craft elements is positioning-oriented, and given different target audiences, the brand elements identified in the first stage are combined and the design of the visual image is accomplished.

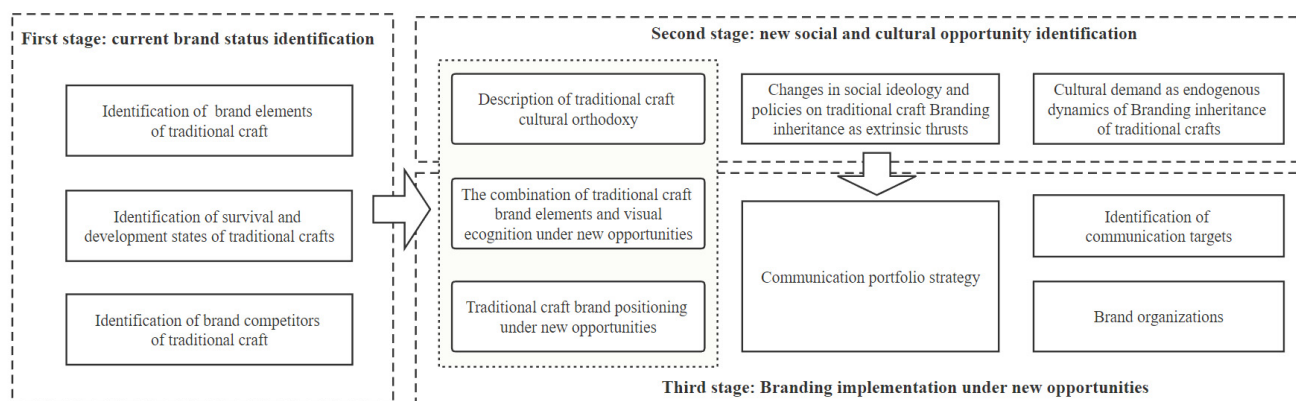
The construction of craft brand organizations is to construct regional joint organizations or independent craft brand organizations from dimensions of organizational positioning, organizational form, operational structure, management style, and personnel structure. Joint organizations set industry standards and gather artisanal synergy, while independent organizations highlight the personality characteristics of a certain traditional craft.

The design of the craft brand communication portfolio strategy is based on the above-mentioned stages. The brand organization chooses and combines communication media to precisely communicate traditional craft brand elements to the brand object, and to promote two-way acquisition between the brand subject and object, thereby realizing brand positioning. The brand communication portfolio strategy also affects the structure and operation of brand organizations.

#### 4.3.2. The Synergistic Relationship of the Three-Stage Model of Traditional Craft Branding Inheritance

The main body of the three-stage model is in a linear progression, based on the identification of the current state of the brand, the identification of new social and cultural opportunities as the background, and branding through brand implementation.

There are reciprocal effects and supporting synergies among these three stages: the results of the identification of the current status of the brand stage influence the description of traditional crafts and cultural orthodoxy in the identification of new social and cultural opportunities stage, as well as the brand elements combination, visual recognition, and brand positioning in the branding implementation stage; the accurate identification of new social and cultural opportunities determines the specific initiatives in the branding implementation stage and influences the focus dimension of the identification of the current status of the brand, especially the identification of brand competitors. In the dynamic process of branding, the survival state of traditional crafts is changing and social and cultural demands are developing, which requires constant review of the current status of brands and new social and cultural opportunities at each stage, and the adjustment to the strategies and measures of branding implementation according to the situation, thus realizing the branding inheritance of traditional crafts by repeatedly revising the way forward (Figure 11).



**Figure 11.** The synergistic relationship of the three-stage model of traditional craft branding inheritance.

## 5. Conclusions

This paper explores social issues regarding traditional craft inheritance: traditional craft inheritance and cultural continuity in specific communities, traditional craft inheritance paths led by Chinese public policy, and a model of traditional craft branding inheritance models.

This paper firstly concerns the significance and existing problems in traditional craft inheritance and cultural continuity in specific communities. It is clear that traditional crafts, a common wealth of mankind, have played important roles in the creation and expansion of world civilizations, and that their effective inheritance has positive contemporary value in the construction of a social economy and people's livelihood, the shaping of the people's collective spirit, and the development of national civilizations. This paper also believes that traditional crafts are large in volume and variety, and have noticeable ethnic and regional characteristics, marked differences in cultural ecology, a large group of heritage objects, and diverse social demands. All of these characteristics make it difficult to have an effective mode of universality for the inheritance of traditional crafts.

This paper then employs the grounded theory to analyze the content of 79 national policies on traditional crafts in China from 1960 to February 2022, and induces, compares, refines, and formulates an inheritance path for traditional crafts under the guidance of current public cultural policies in China, which is well known for its traditional crafts and is the main subject of international traditional craft research; the Chinese government is the first leading force in traditional craft inheritance. China's traditional crafts policies consist of five levels, with bountiful contents and forms. At present, there is no overarching document explaining the inheritance structure of China's traditional crafts. Therefore, this paper chooses the grounded theory, which is of help to the natural emergence of theoretical results from the data, to carry out policy research. Through induction and repeated comparison, the inheritance path of traditional crafts led by current Chinese public cultural policies has been refined and constructed.

The branding inheritance model of traditional crafts is proposed, based on the brand theory. In the second part of the research, it is shown that five models are guiding the inheritance of traditional crafts in China. Among them, the branding model is considered extremely important by policies, practices, experts, and groups of traditional crafts inheritors, though there is a lack of implementation solutions. By studying the existing achievements of the international community on the branding inheritance of traditional crafts, this part clarifies that the current research highly affirms the importance of branding in the inheritance of traditional crafts, and explores the branding elements and implementation paths, but lacks universal research results. The application of the core concepts of brand theory in the available research provides an idea to transcend the boundary of China and use brand theory as an entry point for further research. This paper sorted out four brand attributes, namely, brand identification, communication, value, and culture attributes, and analyzed the advantages of the branding mode for inheriting traditional

crafts, then based on the brand positioning model, the brand identification model, the brand equity model, and the cultural innovation model, the path to constructing brand attributes of traditional crafts with clearer operational logic was explored. After integrating the results of the construction of four brand attributes, the three-stage model for implementing the branding inheritance mode of traditional crafts was proposed, and the construction elements and the synergistic relationship of the model were refined and analyzed.

The path of traditional crafts inheritance under the guidance of public policies proposed in this paper emerged naturally in the current public cultural policy in China, clarifying the overall structure of traditional crafts inheritance by the Chinese government that has not been involved in previous studies, making clear the Chinese experience of the government taking the lead in coordinating the inheritance mode, regulating the inheritance method, and controlling the process and goals through performance appraisal with cultural consciousness and different forms of living inheritance as the goal, providing a reference for the international community to revitalize traditional crafts in specific areas. The international community, according to its current situation of the protection and inheritance of traditional crafts, can position the inheritance goals, coordinate the synergy between the government, nongovernmental organizations, and inheritance groups, choose different inheritance modes, combine inheritance methods, and promote the protection of traditional crafts, to actively promote social economy and culture.

The three-stage model proposed a concrete implementation solution to the branding inheritance mode of traditional crafts, provides a decision-making reference for strategies and contents of further concretization and precision of Chinese traditional crafts inheritance policies. It also provides a scientific, highly operational, and universal implementation framework to the international community for effective traditional crafts inheritance, becoming an operational guide for the inheritance of traditional crafts through branding in given inheritance states, in given regions, of specific categories or with specific techniques.

A 14-year field survey on the genealogy of handmade papermaking techniques inheritance was conducted, and the experience of protecting cultural communities was practiced. Thus, the research team has selected the Tibetan handmade papermaking technique in Sichuan Province, China as the pilot, and carried out the three-stage model. A branding inheritance scheme of the Tibetan paper technique has been explored with the construction of a Tibetan paper museum in Zangthang County, Sichuan as the carrier. This scheme has now been reported to the government, and the research team is actively supporting the inheritors to implement it. This model is being actively and effectively applied in practice to provide a reference for the effective transmission of more traditional crafts.

**Author Contributions:** Y.Z. analyzed the policy, studied the theory, designed the core model, and drafted the manuscript. S.T. conceptualized, designed the framework, and revised the manuscript. M.L. reviewed and edited the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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