

# Cultural Reinvention: design marketing for cultural textile products

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**Abstract:** Cultural products reflect a living culture and evolve despite being based on traditional forms and know-how. Also referred to as traditional cultural expression or expressions of folklore, cultural products derive from culture - the distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group [1]. As cultural products can represent their own society and social group they can also fall into the category of cultural icons. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a cultural icon as “a person or thing regarded as a representative symbol, especially of a culture or a movement; a person or an institution considered worthy of admiration or respect.” More generally, cultural icons are exemplary symbols that people accept as a shorthand to represent important ideas [9]. For successful cultural products, an effective cultural strategy creates a storied product, that is, a product that has distinctive features through which customers experience identity myths [9]. Identity myths succeed when the product performs the right story, and is executed with an affective aesthetic. Fundamentally, the term “cultural products” consists of culture and product. Culture means a symbol of a particular time and society. Consequently, cultural products can be thought of as artifacts produced by and for a specific cultural group. However, commercial needs and desires may and often do mean that although the form and style of the artifact may remain they might be produced by and further other cultural groupings. This working paper builds on an understanding of the term cultural reinvention through the historical and modern consideration of tartan as a case study. It then moves on to a taxonomy of traditional and cultural Korean textiles and identifies possible strategies for the cultural and commercial reinvention of certain of these textiles.

**Key words:** *Cultural products, cultural reinvention, design marketing, textile, tartan, Korea.*

## 1. Introduction

Over the last few decades there has been a growing realization of the importance of culture and cultural industries in the world. Today these industries produce an immense and continuously growing range of outputs [15, 5].

Moreover, in the modern consumer society, culturally shared meanings and practices are produced, reproduced and transformed in the market, through the symbolic processes and practices of production and consumption [14].

Consequently, an accelerating convergence between the economic and the cultural is currently occurring in modern life, and is bringing all kinds of urban and regional outcomes and opening up new opportunities to raise a country's levels of income, employment and social well-being [15].

Thus creating new cultural products in a country and making them unique has grown gradually. Subsequently, successful cultural products which represent their own society and social group should have powerful cultural narratives and myths, citing culturally shared meanings, norms and values and thus give people a sense of structure in their life [14].

Indeed although the importance of research into cultural industries and cultural products has increased, many of the studies look at these concepts as isolated phenomenon, these studies focus on topics such as the cultural approach to marketing (Lindridge and Dibb, 2002; Jamel, 2003; Pulh and Marteaux and Mencarelli, 2008; Banerjee, 2008), product design and development (Kotro and Pantzar, 2002; Gotzsch and Chanaron and Birchall 2006; Mital and Desai, 2007), and developing new products using one's own tradition (Yair and Tomes and Press, 1999; Lin and Sun and Chang and Chan and Hsieh and Huang, 2007) manifesting such an approach is insufficient. Nevertheless, it is far from being practiced in an integrated manner across all sectors, as cultural reinvention which is the way of developing a cultural product, is still in its developing stage as an area of academic study and research.

This article will examine the meaning of cultural reinvention through the case study of Scottish tartans and also presents possible strategies for the cultural and commercial reinvention of products. It will then apply these strategies to develop possible business models for the cultural reinvention of traditional Korean textile products into modern products. It will also suggest some new marketing directions and further research.

## **2. Definition of terms**

### **2.1 Culture**

In the Oxford dictionary, 'culture' is the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group. To understand the meaning of culture, it is important to understand various fields of cultural thought. The fields of anthropology and to an extent psychology and sociology have contributed enormously towards cultural understanding [20].

In anthropology, prior to the 1950's, the concept of culture was viewed as being outdated and ambiguous and often treated in quantitative social science [19]. After the 1950's, the dominant age of behaviourism, with its assumption that most things about people - personality, culture, and language – could be understood as complexes of stimulus and response connections, the concept of culture has changed to knowledge and symbol rather than habit and behaviour. This was rapidly assimilated into anthropology and the human sciences [19]. Thus, culture came to be seen as a symbolic evidence of a particular time and a particular society. In sociology, as Hall (1997) argued,

*'culture is involved in all those practices...which carry meaning and value for us, which need to be meaningfully interpreted by others, or which depend on meaning for their effective operation. Culture, in this sense, permeates all of society'* [8]

Furthermore, Geertz (1973) analysed the meaning of culture as a symbol of society in his research. The concept of culture is expressed in an influential formulation by Geertz (1973) as

*“an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited concepts expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.”* [19]

Consequently, as shown in both opinions of culture, the significance is not only seen less tangible elements of life - meanings, representations and values, for example - but also culture carries particular meanings and constructs and certain tangible forms [5]. Rather, culture is represented at a particular time and a certain society and a particular people's life as a form of symbol.

## **2.2 Cultural products**

*“Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products-products manufactured, indeed, out of tendencies, capacities, and dispositions with which we were born, but manufactured nonetheless.”* [6]

Cultural products reflect a living culture and evolve despite being based on traditional forms and know-how. Also referred to as traditional cultural expression or expressions of folklore, cultural products derive from culture-the distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group [1].

To think of the meaning of cultural products as representing their own society and social group illustrates that they are included amongst cultural icons. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a cultural icon as “a person or thing regarded as a representative symbol, especially of a culture or a movement; a person or an institution considered worthy of admiration or respect.” More generally, cultural icons are exemplary symbols that people accept as a shorthand to represent important ideas [9].

Fundamentally, the term “cultural products” consists of culture and product. Culture means a symbol of a particular time and society for the meanings of culture discussed above. Consequently, cultural products can be thought of as artifacts produced by and for a specific cultural group. However, commercial needs and desires may and often do mean that although the form and style of the artifact may remain they might be produced by other cultural groupings.

Overall, cultural products indicate artifacts made by a culture which have a symbolic meaning of a specific time and distinct members of a specific society.

## **3. Cultural reinvention through a case study of Tartan**

### **3.1 Tartans in Scotland (Definition of Tartan)**

Scottish tartans are 2-and-2 twill woollen or worsted cloths woven in more or less elaborately coloured check designs, and worn as shawls or plaids over the shoulder, and as kilts [7].

Tartan is woven from threads which cross at right angles and the pattern – called the SETT – therefore has, of necessity, to be of rectangular format. It comprises a series of stripes which, although exceptions are not uncommon, generally are (a) the same in both warp and weft of the cloth and (b) are expressed as a half-sett

which repeats, reversing as it goes, along and across the cloth, so that each half-sett is the mirror-image of its neighbour; these introduce further inviolable rules [18].

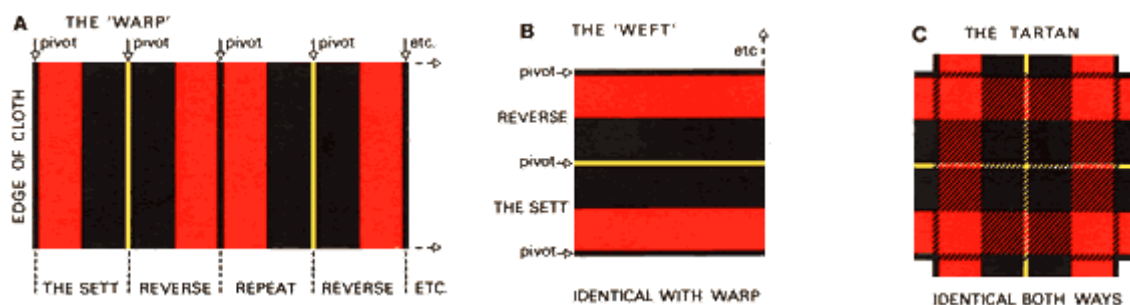


Figure.1 an example of Scottish tartan

“As a design, tartan is unique in that it is the only fabric in existence that can signify the interests or allegiance of the wearer by the inclusion of specifically chosen design elements. Those interests and allegiances can be family, clan, town, city, country, military, employment, hobbies, religious . . . the whole gamut of human activities and interactions in society [18].”

The traditional tartans take the form of colours, extracted from connected historical tartans or numerical elements such as the number of lines or bands. However, nowadays fashion tartans are produced for visual appeal and invariably have no significance attached to any of the design elements included - apart perhaps from mirroring current colour trends.

### 3.2 Evolution of Tartan: From an ancient clan system towards a textile pattern

#### 3.2.1 The origin of Clan Tartan

The “clan tartan myth,” so called because of its tenuous foundation but tenacious appeal, had its roots in the late 1600s. At that time the Highlands of Scotland were less known to English and other Europeans than were the Americas [11].

It is applied to groups of people claiming descent from a common ancestor and calling themselves his ‘children’; the senior member, that is the one most nearly related to the common ancestor, is, in theory at least, the Chief. An important effect of this arrangement was to establish social divisions between clan and clan, rather than between classes [17]. Large and prosperous clans, such as the MacDonalds who set themselves up as Lords of the Isles, formed branches at clan levels and thus there are Mac Donalds of Clanranald, Mac Donells of Glengarry and so on [17].

The Jacobite Army in *The '45 rebellion* was organized in Clan regiments and in such a long and mobile campaign some re-equipment must have been necessary so, however the men may have been dressed at the outset, it is probable that a considerable degree of uniformity must have ensued which results in clan regiments eventually wearing uniform tartans that became Clan tartans by a natural process [18].

#### 3.2.2 Tartan as a kind of pattern

Tartans are the immediately recognizable symbol of a fiercely independent nation. A ubiquitous pattern has been transformed into a super brand signifying all things traditionally Scottish [4].

From the earliest studies of tartan at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it has been generating heated debate from those who see tartan as the visual symbol of an ancient Scottish clan system, and those who regard its role in that same system as primarily a nineteenth-century socio-political invention [4]. The majority of work undertaken prior to the mid-twentieth century was concerned with establishing and defining Tartan as a textile tradition, and identifying specific patterns or sets with the Scottish clan system [4].

The global messenger carried by Highland regiments and football's Tartan Army, inspiring architects, artists, film-makers and contemporary fashion. Tartan has developed from a Highland craft to a mass-produced, globally consumed textile. Thus, it used in both 'traditional' Scottish dress and high fashion, and its sociocultural significance as a pattern, is at once complex and in a process of continual development [4].

Tartan's manifestations will also be considered in arenas as diverse as popular entertainment, art, design and cinema, and it is hoped that this more interdisciplinary and inclusive approach will make tartan popular [4].

#### **4. Cultural reinvention into modern product**

As culture is so dependent on the country it refers to, any attempt to market or reinvent a culturally based product has to begin with a deep understanding of country-specific culture and core values. For brand marketing, cultural dimensions play a vital role when formulating brand image or possible communication strategy [2]. In deed, as Geertz (2000) points out, the increasing number of economic, political, and cultural interconnections has helped expand the "catalogue of available identifications", drawing new identities such as the global consumer [3]. In this light, the starting point for the cultural reinvention of any Korean traditional textile products will be conducted through a detailed review of the Korean marketplace and current marketing strategies employed there. From this, potential target markets will be proposed that will both match cultural and economic requirements. These target markets will encompass Maffesoli's (1996) belief that what unites an individual with the community is the aesthetic experience, that is, the ability to feel emotion together with others in the community and to share the same ambience. Membership of such a community transcends traditional cultural, national and race barriers -any one sharing the same space and a common sentiment can join a community, which has a less articulated but differentiated form[12,10].

Any discussion surrounding the reinvention of cultural based products has to incorporate the positive and negative implications. There are a variety of positive effects for the Korean traditional cultural textile products market in participating in the proposed cultural reinvention. The process can ensure that products are embodied with greater levels of Korean cultural-specific meanings and that these meanings can be made more visible to a variety of new consumers, increasing sales potential and economic revenue. In addition, one of the most important ways in which cultural categories are substantiated is through a culture's material objects. Specifically, clothing, transportation, food, housing exterior and interiors, and adornment all serve as media for the expression of cultural meaning [13]. The fashion system actually invents new cultural meaning in a modest way also it serves as one of the conduits to capture and move highly innovative cultural meaning [13]. However, it has to be recognised that the process of cultural reinvention from Korean traditional cultural textiles to modern product could also entail compromises that may have negative impacts, such as a weakening of the true link between the spirituality of the home country and its' products. As a result any proposed strategy will have to be

sensitive to traditional religions, if it is to successfully balance the needs of the reinvention of Korean traditional products to attract a wider range of potential consumers and making modernized cultural products with strong and true symbolic meaning.

## 4.1 Current Korean traditional cultural textile market situation

### 4.1.1 Products

There are three typical categories in Korean cultural textile products market. The first one is Korean traditional costume (*Hanbok*) divided into traditional style and modern one (*Gaeryang hanbok*). The others (including *Pojagi* and *norigae*) mostly occupy portions in that market which are fashion accessories and materials for everyday life. Generally, traditional textile products are made from natural fibres like silk, gossamer, cotton, ramie. Five basic colours: red, blue, yellow, white, black and also pastel colours. Indeed, in categories other than Korean traditional costume, there are various kinds of items that have been produced as modern products such as mobile phone cases, table runners, handbags, mufflers, tie pins, ties and so on. Nevertheless the variety of items and prices are limited and the products express neither Korean traditional culture nor modern style adequately. Also, *Insa-dong*, the typical place to sell cultural products, has many variations of the same product items so exclusivity will be compromised as will attractiveness to the consumer. Consequently, it is essential to make a representative category for Korean cultural textile products and also to develop a brand which represents Korean culture accurately.

In the case of *Pojagi* (Korean traditional wrapping cloths), lots of Korean traditional textile products are manufactured in different styles, patterns and colours. It occupied a prominent place in the daily lives of Koreans of all classes (the gentry and ordinary) during the *Choson* dynasty (1393-1910). *Pojagi* were used for wrapping as well as for covering a food table, storing, and carrying objects. It can be divided first into two large groups according to their users: *kung po* (wrapping cloths for the palace) and *min po* (wrapping cloths for people). They can be divided further according to their construction, design and the purpose they serve. If they are lined, they are called *kyop po* (*kyop* means 'double'), while unlined ones are called *hot po* (*hot* means 'single'). Those made to wrap fragile objects are often padded with cotton and therefore called *som po* (*som* means 'cotton'), while quilted wrapping cloths are called *nubi po* (*nubi* means 'to quilt'). If they are made with a patchwork design, they are called *chogak po* (*chogak* means 'small segments'), while embroidered wrapping cloths are called *su po* (*su* means 'embroidery'). If they are made to wrap bedding, they are called *yibul po* (*yibul* means 'bedding'). Those for wrapping fabrics are *chon po* (*chon* means 'fabrics') and those for enclosing clothing are called *oppo* (*ot* means 'clothes'. When it is followed by the word *po*, it changes to *op* in sound becoming *oppo*). Especially, *chogak po* is the most popular wrapping cloths used exclusively by the common people. These were wrapping cloths with patchwork designs, which were made with small pieces of leftover cloth. It was decided to form a taxonomy of the various traditional textile products and fig. 2 shows an example of this approach for one type of product known as *min po* [16].

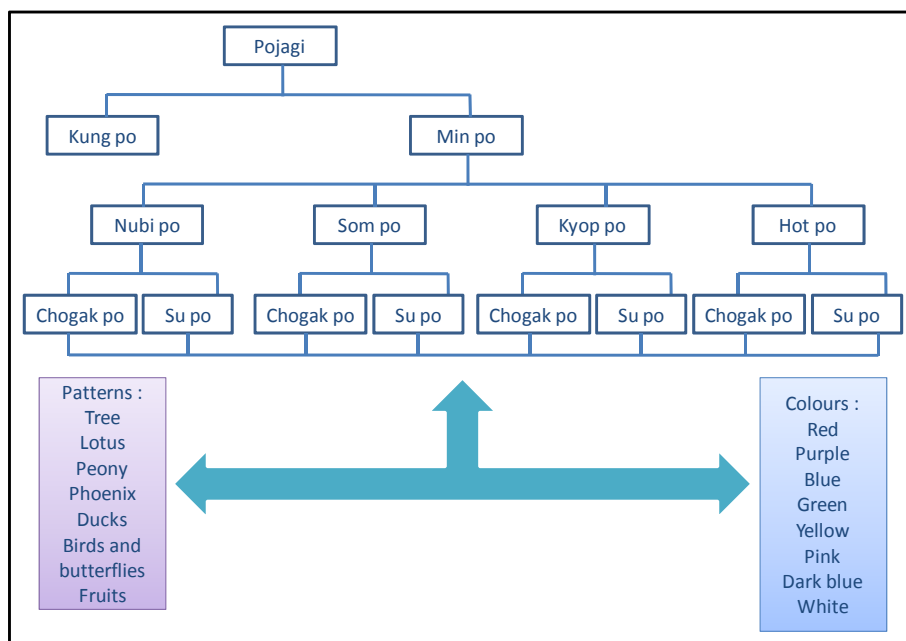


Figure.2 An example of the taxonomy approach for *Min po*

#### 4.1.2 Prices

High quality traditional *Hanbok* and other products like designer's limited works are sold from \$150 to \$2000 in art galleries and museums. In case of modern *Hanbok*, these are sold at \$300 - \$500 and the other materials are marketed from \$10 to \$150. Further, differentiation of the price depends not on the places: on-line or off-line but their shops and the manufacturing methods of the products. For instance, if a shop sells cultural textile products made by hand with a designer or connected with a specific designer's studio, the products will be marketed at higher prices.

Because the largest percentage of the price range within products are middle and low prices, the quality of products tend to be low and that cannot improve the Korean image. Also, several high quality products sold through galleries and museums has comparatively very high price. To satisfy consumers, however, Korean cultural textile products should have different price strategy towards target consumers for constantly high quality and popularization of the products.

#### 4.1.3 Places

There are various distribution channels to sell Korean traditional textile products. Firstly, there are off-line shops like galleries, museums, department stores, duty-free shops, designer's studios, small retail shops (*Insa-dong*, *Myung-dong*) and wholesale markets (*Dongdaemun*, *Namdaemun*). In recent times, indirect marketing lines are gradually growing up such as TV, mail-order selling by catalogue and e-business.

At art shops in galleries and museums, they produce limited design products for special seasonal exhibitions by copying original relics which were exhibited in their places. In this case, the products are ordered to craftsman or designers directly. Indeed, in department stores, the section for cultural products is not separated from jewellery or presents section so it just looks like a present corner in many of them. Moreover, professional art shops or craftsman's studios are managed independently not for commercial purposes but for their own art

works. Although many business enterprises have web-sites and an on-line presence, the majority of sales are conducted through off-line shops.

Consequently, it is necessary to make distinguish plans for diverse distribution channels, in recent times, e-business through web-site is gradually increased which is given encouragement to progressive sale.

#### **4.1.4 Promotions**

As almost all Korean cultural textile products are made by small and medium-sized enterprises on both off-line and on-line markets, it is hard to find any form of aggressive promotion. Nowadays, only a free-packaging, delivery and emailing services which is for explanations about products are offered to customers by several on-line markets.

However, salespersons' insufficient foreign language skills are also a barrier for an effective promotion except in some high quality shops. Additionally, nearly all off-line markets do not have particular characteristics or differentiations with their own concepts.

Thus, a lack of promotions causes limited types of customers, also, most web-sites do not support multi-languages making it difficult for foreigners to access the sites. For a constructive promotion in off-line shops, firstly, the salespersons have to be educated about Korean traditional cultural products and should improve their foreign language skills.

### **5. The possible future design marketing strategies for cultural reinvention**

Cultural reinvention means to combine the meanings of cultural and reinvent into modern products. There are therefore three possible directions for the use of cultural reinvention of successful cultural products.

First of all, there has to be a successful modernization of traditional cultural products which make a compromise between the past and the recent time effectively. For example, colours of modern tartans, although in the same traditional corner of the spectrum, may also be different by individual preferences and current colour trends. In this case showed by (1) on fig.3, the original meaning and function of tartans are constantly preserved.

Secondly, the way to form a prosperous cultural products should be done through a successful transformation into popular items like garments or fashion accessories ((2) of fig. 3). A kind of design elements within traditional cultural products can be used to design a favoured fashion items. For instance, nowadays fashion tartans are not only famous for the traditional Scottish clan system but also as pure fashion patterns. Although changing the original meaning or function of a traditional cultural product, it can be an opportunity to make a universal cultural product which was designed by using particular colours or patterns of one's own traditional cultural products.

Last but not least, as can be seen in (3) of fig. 3, this is a combination of both transforming one of the design elements of own cultural products and transforming into some popular and modern products while modifying the original function of the product. In doing so, it will be easier to attract modern and trendy customers at the present time.

Overall, the first step in cultural reinvention into a modern product is to define a distinctive cultural product as a symbolic meaning of a specific society. Next step is to classify their characteristic design elements. Finally, creating a successful cultural product as cultural reinvention will depend on flexibility for modifying traditional features to modern products.



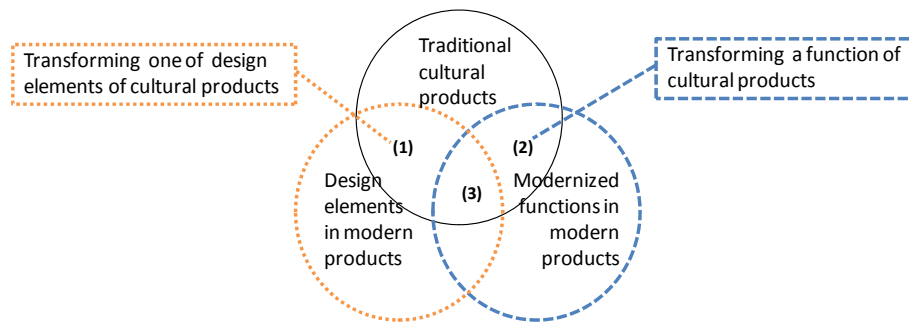


Figure.3 Three options for cultural reinvention within product design

Towards this aim, however, it is crucial to try to identify potential consumers of Korean cultural reinvented textile products market to establish accurate target consumers for efficient design marketing. It may be that we can classify more than three potential consumers but this paper suggests three prospective possibilities of target customers for future Korean cultural textile market with fig.4.

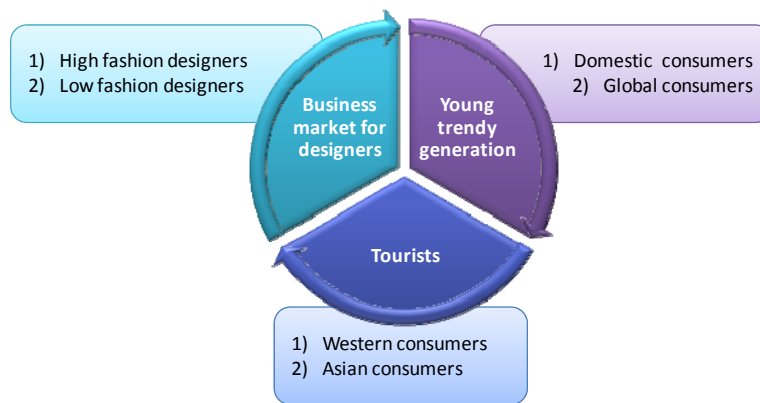


Figure.4 Three options for cultural reinvention for targeted potential consumers

As can be represented in fig. 4, the first target is the young trendy generation divided into domestic and global consumers. Tourists are the second target group subdivided to Western and Asian consumers. The final feasible target is high and low fashion designers who buy designed fabrics. Most Korean traditional cultural product markets, so far, have limited customers who are tourists or who are preparing for ceremonies like marriage. Thus, to extend consumers is essential to enlarge the Korean traditional cultural textile product market.

## 6. Conclusions

The paper has examined the existing market and outlets of traditional Korean cultural products. Specifically it has looked at textile products and has outlined the formation of a taxonomy of these products. This is an ongoing task. The term cultural reinvention has been discussed and the case study of Scottish tartan has been used to exemplify this concept. Finally two models have been put forward to explain initial ideas on how the strategic thinking is taking shape. The authors are on a journey and there are more steps to come. Completion of the taxonomy will help us to choose the most suitable products, patterns, colours and materials and then the transformation process will take place.

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