Research on the Application of "Trendy" Design in the Innovative Design of Jingdezhen Ceramic Toys

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Abstract. Aiming at the problems of homogenization of Jingdezhen ceramic toy products and aging consumer groups, as well as the transformation opportunities brought by the rapid development of the trendy toy market, this paper systematically discusses the application paths of "trendy" design in the innovative design of Jingdezhen ceramic toys. On the basis of defining the core concepts of "trendy" design and ceramic toys, this paper demonstrates the necessity and feasibility of introducing trendy design into traditional ceramic toys starting from the industrial foundation of Jingdezhen. The research proposes design strategies from three dimensions: modeling language, color decoration and cultural symbols, and combines three market paths of orphan collection, mass production and practical trendy toys, with typical cases of Jingdezhen ceramic trendy toys in recent years for verification. The research shows that trendy design does not deny traditional ceramic craftsmanship, but is a feasible scheme that organically connects traditional craftsmanship with contemporary aesthetics, cultural symbols and emotional consumption on the premise of respecting the characteristics of ceramic materials. The trendy transformation of ceramic toys not only provides incremental space for Jingdezhen's traditional ceramic industry, but also opens up a practical path for the contemporary activation of intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: Trendy Design, Ceramic Toys, Jingdezhen, Innovative Design, Application Research.

1. Introduction

Generation Z, referring to people born between 1995 and 2010, has become an important force in the consumer market. Existing studies have pointed out that this group prefers cultural and creative products with trendy visuals, collection value and story connotations (Ding Ning, 2026; Zhang Chuang et al., 2026). Against this background, ceramic trendy toys have developed rapidly. The warm glaze texture, handmade scarcity and cultural heritage of ceramics adapt to the development needs of trendy toys. The ceramic Molly sold 40,000 sets in 2 seconds after its launch, and the joint-color porcelain archaeological blind box of the Palace Museum and MINISO has been launched in mass production, which proves that the cross-border integration of ceramics and trendy toys has been implemented and mass-produced.

Jingdezhen boasts a complete thousand-year-old porcelain-making process and has produced traditional ceramic toys since ancient times, which is suitable for the development of ceramic trendy toys, but it currently has prominent shortcomings: single product modeling, outdated design and weak online marketing. From March to June 2026, the author visited the Taoxichuan Cultural and Creative Block and found that although practitioners have tried to develop ceramic trendy toys, they lack systematic design ideas. Therefore, this paper focuses on two core issues: how to innovate the design of Jingdezhen ceramic trendy toys under the constraints of ceramic craftsmanship? What product routes should be matched with different market positioning? This paper refines design strategies from modeling, color and cultural symbols, and explores three paths including limited-edition products, blind boxes and practical trendy toys.

2. Concept Definition and Industrial Foundation

2.1. Concept Definition of Trendy Toys and Ceramic Toys

Trendy culture, namely "popular culture", refers to a specific lifestyle and cultural phenomenon within a certain period of time. In ancient times, the phrase "all the rage" was used to describe the popularity of an event. In fact, trendy culture has existed since ancient times. Trendy toys have three core characteristics: fitting trendy visual design, limited numbered release, and providing consumers with circle identity recognition (Liu Nansheng, 2023; Chen Jianying, 2022). This standard is also applicable to ceramic toys, which only need to be adjusted according to the constraints of ceramic craftsmanship [1].

Ceramic toys are made of ceramics and have both ornamental and playable functions. Compared with resin and PVC toys, their special glaze color and handmade craftsmanship increase their added value. However, grouting molding is difficult to replicate complex shapes, and high-temperature firing is prone to blank shrinkage and deformation; while the differentiated texture generated by firing can be transformed into the scarcity of single products, further improving product value [2].

2.2. Industrial Foundation of Jingdezhen's Ceramic Trendy Toy Development

Jingdezhen's ceramic industrial chain covers the whole process from raw ore mining, mud preparation, molding, decoration to firing. In particular, a large number of small kilns and shared workshops have emerged in Jingdezhen in recent years. Lotte Ceramic Art Society is a typical representative, providing low-cost and small-batch production channels for independent designers. In addition, Jingdezhen has more than 30,000 entrepreneurial studios and over 60,000 porcelain-making workshops, gathering tens of thousands of young ceramic creators at home and abroad, which has consolidated the talent and industrial foundation for the research and development of ceramic trendy toys [3].

3. Three Paths of Design Strategies

3.1. Modeling Style

Modeling is the first visual impression of trendy toys on consumers. Most traditional Jingdezhen ceramic toys are reduced-scale utensils and retro animals, which are difficult to adapt to contemporary trendy aesthetics. Trendy toys often adopt anthropomorphic, cartoon and minimalist shapes, but due to process constraints such as bubble and material shortage in grouting and blank shrinkage during firing, resin trendy toy designs cannot be directly applied [4].

Huang Haijun's "Trendy Chronicle" IP adopts Q-version modeling based on literati prototypes, with the head accounting for one-third of the body length, integrating tradition and trend, and has participated in many exhibitions, verifying its market and academic value.

Hang Taotao, a graduate of Jingdezhen Ceramic University, developed a split-firing spherical joint doll with a joint gap controlled at 0.3~0.5mm, which improves playability. The split firing of parts allows separate replacement of damaged parts, effectively reducing production losses.

3.2. Color Decoration

Glaze color is the core of ceramic visual expression. After high-temperature oxidation and reduction flame firing, the same glaze formula will have subtle differences in color development in each kiln. This process uncertainty, although a production shortcoming, can become a unique highlight of ceramic trendy toys. Colored glazes are colored with metal and mineral pigments; adjusting the iron element ratio and firing temperature can change the warm and cold tone of warm yellow glazes. Kiln transformation glazes adopt layered glazing by utilizing temperature differences in the kiln, and the finished products have unique textures and colors that cannot be replicated by industrial toys [5].

For decorative patterns, traditional peony and interlocking branch patterns can be simplified and refined, retaining the main shape, deleting complicated details, and controlling the line width within 1~2mm to adapt to the decal process of small trendy toys.

3.3. Cultural Symbols

The trendy design of ceramic toys is not a negation of tradition, but a reactivation in the process. Jingdezhen is rich in local historical and cultural resources, such as the literary allusions of Bai Juyi and Fuliang tea, the Ming Dynasty plain three-color duck-shaped incense burner unearthed from the Imperial Kiln Site, and traditional auspicious beast images such as lions and kylins. In creation, local culture can be sorted out first, symbolic elements with strong visual expression and story extension can be screened out, and then recreated with trendy design language to test market response [6].

4. Market Mechanism and Three Product Paths

4.1. Limited Release Strategy

The core of the limited release strategy lies not in "small circulation", but in "the reason for scarcity". For example, the non-replicability brought by handcraftsmanship or the randomness of glaze color development can be the reasons for limited release. For instance, POP MART's MEGA ROYAL MOLLY "Yan Yan Ru Zha · Porcelain" has a global limited release of 199 pieces. This product adopts Jingdezhen's intangible cultural heritage "carved flower" craft with extremely high difficulty, and any slight error will lead to product scrapping. Therefore, each piece is equipped with an independent number and collection certificate [7].

4.2. Blind Box Strategy

The experience of ordinary blind boxes lies in two points: the sense of surprise before opening and the sense of achievement in the collection process, and hidden styles have become must-collect items for many blind box enthusiasts [8]. In Jingdezhen, the Imperial Kiln Museum has made the Ming Dynasty plain three-color duck-shaped incense burner into a blind box series. As of December 2024, Taoxichuan Cultural and Creative Block has launched 9 series of blind box products. Conventional products adopt grouting molding to ensure controllable output and cost. Hidden styles create scarcity through manual modification or special glaze colors. Essentially, this method activates the purchasing enthusiasm of target customers by setting a small number of scarce products on the basis of conventional products [9].

4.3. Practical Trendy Toys

The logic of this path is to increase the practicality of ceramic toys. Relying solely on appearance to attract consumers is not a sustainable design method. Integrating practical functions enables ceramic toys to enter daily consumption scenarios and cover more ordinary consumers [10]. For example, products with aromatherapy functions have achieved mature practical results. Some stall owners in Taoxichuan Cultural and Creative Block design ceramic aromatherapy devices into animal or human shapes, with essential oil placed at the bottom to volatilize fragrance slowly by heating. This solves the problem that ceramic ornaments are "only for viewing but not for use", and significantly improves consumers' purchasing willingness [11].

5. Case Analysis and Problem Reflection

To obtain comparable conclusions, this section selects three representative products for comparative analysis from five dimensions (see Table 1).

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Three Representative Ceramic Trendy Toy Products

Dimension	MEGA ROYAL MOLLY "Yan Yan Ru Zha · Porcelain"	Palace Museum × MINISO Color Porcelain Archaeological Blind Box	Migratory Bird Ceramics "Xiao Kun Cat"
IP Foundation	POP MART Independent IP	Co-branded IP	Designer Original IP
Process Implementation	Carved Flower + Pastel + Refiring	Qing Dynasty Glaze Color Reproduction + Grouting Molding	Handmade + Colored Glaze Decoration
Production Cost	High (high process added value)	Medium (diluted by mass production)	Medium-High (high manual proportion)
Market Feedback	Sold out in 2 seconds with multiple premium appreciation	Sustained hot sales	Good reputation and stable sales volume
Reproducibility	Extremely Low	Medium	Relatively High

The analysis shows that the Molly model relies on top IP and capital investment, which is difficult for ordinary designers to replicate; the Palace Museum blind box relies on cultural institution authorization, opening up the track of "museum cultural creativity + trendy toys"; the Migratory Bird Ceramics model represents a feasible direction for most Jingdezhen creators — establishing differentiation through personal aesthetics and building consumer trust through handmade temperature. Cai Dongming, the chief designer of Migratory Bird Ceramics, stated that the reason for choosing ceramics is that "ceramics can last for thousands of years", which accurately summarizes the permanent collection value of ceramic materials.

6. Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, the author puts forward three practical suggestions. First, strengthen the coordination of design and craftsmanship. In the early stage of the project, designers and craftsmen should communicate synchronously to avoid firing problems in advance, and craftsmen should provide iterative optimization ideas combined with design demands to promote innovation in both directions. Second, reserve a sufficient trial production cycle. Glaze color presentation depends on materials and firing processes. The trial production time should not be less than 40% of the total cycle, and small products need at least three rounds of glaze tests with complete records of glaze material and kiln temperature data for iteration. Third, match product routes according to positioning. Blind boxes and high-end limited editions are not applicable to all categories, and mass production, orphan collection and practical trendy toy directions should be reasonably selected combined with audience positioning and cost. The innovation of ceramic trendy toys should integrate traditional craftsmanship and contemporary trends, and transform the unique scarcity of handmade ceramics into brand value.

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