

# Innovative Development and Research of Wuhan City Gifts from the Perspective of Neo-Cultural Creativity

-- A Case Study on Character Design from the Han Opera "Cosmic Edge"

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**Abstract:** With the continuous enhancement of China's comprehensive strength and the increasing satisfaction of basic living needs, there is a growing demand for spiritual and cultural experiences. Cultural and creative products, serving as vital instruments for urban cultural promotion, still suffer from serious homogenization and lack of localized uniqueness. From the perspective of "neo-cultural creativity," this paper explores how urban gift design can satisfy contemporary aesthetic needs while highlighting the individualized characteristics of urban culture. Through literature reviews and case analyses, the current status, opportunities, and challenges of the urban gift industry are examined, and targeted strategies for innovation and development are proposed. Taking the Han opera "Cosmic Edge" as an entry point, this paper investigates the application of Han opera elements in modern design, and how these integrations can enhance cultural value and communication impact, offering practical guidance for the inheritance and promotion of Hubei's regional culture.

**Keywords:** Neo-cultural Creativity; Urban Culture; Urban Gifts; Han Opera Elements.

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## 1. Introduction

The rapid rise of global cultural and creative industries, coupled with China's strategic shift from cultural awareness to cultural confidence and cultural strength, has spurred the vigorous development of the cultural and creative sector. Cities increasingly utilize unique cultural resources to craft distinctive and appealing "city gifts," aiming to promote city spirit, image, and cultural identity. Neo-cultural creativity shifts focus from entertainment-centered production to content-rich, meaningful cultural products, emphasizing the integration of traditional culture and modern design.

## 2. Overview of Neo-Cultural Creativity

Proposed in 2019, the concept of neo-cultural creativity emphasizes IP (Intellectual Property) development, fusing cultural and commercial value. It advocates for people-centered design that meets users' needs while promoting cultural consumption and social benefits. Designers must highlight core cultural narratives and integrate traditional elements with contemporary aesthetics and emotional resonance.

### 2.1. Current Situation of Wuhan City Gifts

In recent years, the urban gift industry has developed vigorously in China and has become an important way to promote urban culture. Urban gifts are not only souvenirs for tourists to remember the city, but also representatives and disseminators of urban culture. With the improvement of China's comprehensive national strength and the acceleration of the urbanization process, more and more cities have begun to pay attention to the excavation and utilization of local cultural resources, and show the unique charm and cultural heritage of the city through urban gifts. These gifts are not only popular in the domestic market, but also gradually stepping onto the international stage, becoming an important window to display Chinese urban culture.

The development of urban gifts shows a trend of diversification and innovation. More and more cities realize that urban gifts are not only a commodity, but also a form of cultural output and a display of urban image. Therefore, more attention is paid to cultural connotations and creative design in the design. Many urban gifts draw inspiration from elements such as the city's history, geography, and celebrities. Through unique designs and production techniques, they show the unique charm and cultural heritage of the city. At the same time, the types of urban gifts are becoming increasingly rich, covering not only traditional souvenirs and handicrafts, but also books, audio - visual products, digital products and other forms to meet the needs of different people.

However, in the development trend of urban gifts, Wuhan city gifts face some challenges and problems, which are mainly summarized as follows:

**1) Serious homogenization of cultural and creative products:** In Wuhan's cultural and creative design, cultural and creative products are seriously homogenized, with low originality. Most of the cultural and creative products on the market imitate each other. The types are mainly tapes, fridge magnets, and bookmarks. The methods of extracting elements are relatively single, and the design methods are simple, directly applying elements with few eye-catching designs.

**2) Uneven quality of cultural and creative products:** Some cultural and creative products are shoddy and counterfeited. Most of them directly come from the wholesale market, which seriously affects the quality of tourist commodities. The shopping environment is also relatively simple, reducing consumers' purchasing power. Only a very small number of products can directly reflect the local characteristic culture. For example, there are many traditional handicrafts in Wuhan, but due to a lack of technology and brand awareness, they have not been widely spread.

**3) Lack of connotations in cultural and creative products:** In major scenic spots in Wuhan, common souvenirs are mostly handicrafts such as pottery and porcelain ornaments, bookmarks, fan surfaces, and pendants with the

mark of the Yellow Crane Tower. Although these products are marked with the patterns of the Yellow Crane Tower or Panlong City, they often give the impression of simply attaching these marks or printing the same scenic spot photos on different items, lacking real cultural depth and connotations. These commodities have not fully displayed the unique culture and regional characteristics of Wuhan. Therefore, their value as tourist commodities has not been effectively reflected. They can neither meet the spiritual needs of tourists nor achieve the dissemination and publicity of Wuhan culture.

### **3. Innovation Strategies for Wuhan City Gifts under Neo-Cultural Creativity**

In the context of neo - cultural creativity, the development of Wuhan's cultural and creative products needs to rely on current popular communication means for inheritance and development, and be spread in diversified innovative forms to excavate regional cultures with rich cultural connotations. In response to the existing problems of Wuhan city gift cultural and creative products, this paper proposes innovative paths for Wuhan cultural and creative design from three aspects from the perspective of neo - cultural creativity

#### **3.1. "IP + Neo - cultural Creativity": Creating Traditional IP with Diversified Techniques**

Under the concept of neo - cultural creativity, IP construction has become an indispensable part of promoting urban culture. First of all, it is necessary to deeply excavate and sort out the city's history, geography, humanities, and customs to find representative and uniquely charming urban symbols and stories. These elements can cover the city's landmark buildings, traditional festivals, local cuisine, and folklores, all of which have the potential to become materials for IP creation. Taking Wuhan as an example, its symbolic Yellow Crane Tower, Yangtze River Bridge, and bustling Hankou Zhenjie are all highly representative urban elements. On the basis of clarifying urban elements, design IP images and arrange storylines. By endowing IP with distinct personalities and attractiveness, creating vivid characters, rich emotional cores, and fascinating storylines, more audiences can be attracted and recognized. Nowadays, neo - cultural creativity is most widely applied in the museum field, and there are many successful cases worthy of reference and reflection. Taking the Palace Museum as an example, with the emergence of the "IP + neo - cultural creativity" concept, the image of the Palace Museum has undergone a fundamental change. It is no longer the traditional solemn and ancient place, but a place full of vitality. The image of the Palace Museum has been reshaped, becoming more lovely and vivid, and winning the love of young people. In urban cultural and creative products, everything related to the city, including stories, artworks, and popular culture, may become the creative source of neo - cultural creativity. Neo - cultural creativity can not only enliven the city's culture, but also promote the dissemination and promotion of urban culture.

#### **3.2. Integration of Traditional Culture and Technology**

The artistic value of traditional cultural and creative products is mainly reflected in appearance aspects such as patterns and craftsmanship, usually in a static form. However,

with the progress of science and technology, various industries in the cultural field have taken advantage of technological development, from online live - streaming on social media to digital exhibitions in museums, promoting the development of traditional urban cultural and creative products. By combining cultural creativity with emerging scientific and technological tools, design can increase users' interest and participation, enhance interactivity, and thus promote effective communication between products and consumers. Among the Wuhan elements mentioned above, Wuhan's city gifts, mainly handicrafts themed on the Yellow Crane Tower, modern designs inspired by the Yangtze River Bridge, and souvenirs reflecting the traditional commercial culture of Hankou Zhenjie, are all important carriers of Wuhan culture. From the perspective of neo - cultural creativity, these city gifts can be re - created in digital, interactive, and storytelling ways. For example, augmented reality technology can be used to let tourists experience the reproduction of historical scenes when visiting the Yellow Crane Tower, or virtual reality technology can be used to let them feel the magnificent scene of the bridge construction on the Yangtze River Bridge. In this way, Wuhan's traditional culture can not only find new living and development space in modern society, but also glow with new vitality with the help of technology. In the future, with the continuous progress of science and technology, more traditional cultural and creative works in Wuhan will be presented to the audience in more innovative and interactive ways, further promoting the development of the urban cultural industry.

The integration of science and technology with traditional culture can better display the cultural characteristics of Wuhan. Traditional culture can not only find new living and development space in modern society, but also glow with new vitality with the help of technology. This is not only helpful for enhancing Wuhan's urban image, but also can inject more cultural connotations and market competitiveness into city gifts.

#### **3.3. Social Media Promotion**

At the same time, by relying on platforms such as the Internet and social media for extensive dissemination and promotion, relevant content can be released on platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and Douyin to attract more users' attention and participation, and conduct commercial operations. Peripheral products, cultural derivatives, theme activities, etc. can be launched to enrich the forms and contents of urban cultural IP, and achieve a win - win situation of commercial value and cultural value. Before Nayuki Tea's co - branding cooperation with the Palace Museum, the co - branding promotion method had already achieved success in many fields. The co - branded products of Nayuki Tea and the Palace Museum include a variety of special - made tea drinks and baked goods. The design inspiration for each product comes from the cultural relics and cultural elements of the Palace Museum, such as the classic buildings, traditional handicrafts, and historical stories of the Palace Museum. For example, the design inspiration for the Palace - pattern Nayuki Tea Gift Box (Figure 1) is drawn from the Huangdi Huiwenbian Erlong Xizhu Zairong Carpet in the Kangxi period and the bright yellow silk - embroidered Yunlong cotton socks. These products integrate the characteristic elements of the Palace Museum in packaging design and tea - drink formula, showing a strong cultural heritage. At the same time, this co - branding model can cooperate with urban

- related industries to carry out joint marketing and brand promotion, further expanding market share and profit space. This not only enhances the brand image and market influence, but also successfully spreads traditional Chinese culture.



Figure 1. Nayuki Tea Gift Box with Palace Museum Patterns (Source: <https://www.foodaily.com/index.php/articles/35650>)

#### 4. Analysis of Neo-cultural Creativity's Innovation: A Case Study of Cosmic Edge's Character Design

In the context of the neo - cultural creativity era, it is of great significance to find the development path of Han Opera culture. As one of China's intangible cultural heritages, Han Opera culture has high value for inheritance, protection, and development. It is not only of great significance for cultural development, but also can play a positive role in promoting the economic and cultural development of the region. As a new development concept, neo - cultural creativity emphasizes the importance of establishing a new cultural production method. Since the proposal of neo - cultural creativity, it has played a positive role in fields such as the Palace Museum and Dunhuang, and achieved good results. Understanding the development status of Han Opera culture and taking Han Opera repertoires as representatives to explore the development path of Han Opera culture from the perspective of neo - cultural creativity can promote the dual development of the regional economy and culture, and enable excellent traditional culture to truly enter people's daily lives.

##### 4.1. Analysis of the Current Situation of Han Opera

Han Opera is the "provincial opera" of Hubei and one of the famous local operas in China. In its early days, it was also called "Chu Tune", "Han Tune", "Pihuang Tune", "Chu Qiang", "Chu Qu", etc. As a precious heritage of Chinese traditional culture, Han Opera still plays an important role in today's society. In recent years, with the continuous development of science and technology, Han Opera has faced some problems. First, the impact of modern entertainment forms such as movies and TV dramas, as well as the change of audience tastes, has limited the development of Han Opera. Han Opera has gradually been replaced by movies, TV dramas, variety shows, and some pop music. Some people reject and oppose Han Opera, believing that it cannot meet the psychological needs of the public. Second, the number of Han Opera troupes and Han Opera actors has gradually decreased. In Wuhan, except for drama classes in institutions of higher learning such as the University Opera Alliance, there is only the Wuhan Han Opera Theatre, a professional Han Opera troupe. At the same time, due to the reduction of troupes and performance times, some Han Opera actors may change their careers or switch jobs, and now there are less than 100 Han Opera actors. Finally, the audience group is single. The audience of Han Opera is mostly middle - aged and elderly people, and it cannot open up a market among young people. From the above problems, it can be seen that they are all

affecting the future development of Han Opera.

##### 4.2. Overview of the Cosmic Edge Repertoire

Cosmic Edge is set in the Qin Dynasty. It mainly tells the story of Zhao Yanrong, the daughter of the powerful official Zhao Gao during the period of the Second Emperor of Qin. In order to resist the forced marriage by the King of Qin, she pretended to be crazy, even disfigured herself, and made a scene in the Golden Palace. In the early days, this play was not popular. It was not until it was successively performed and adapted by Peking Opera master Mei Lanfang, Han Opera master Chen Bohua, and Yu Opera master Chen Suzhen that Cosmic Edge gradually became active in front of the audience. The three masters are also known as the "Three Peaks of the Cosmic Edge".

##### 4.3. Design and Innovation of Character Imagery

First, starting from the plot and background story of Cosmic Edge, the characters are selected. The author selects four main images, namely Dan role - Zhao Yanrong, Jing role - Zhao Gao, Sheng role - Kuang Fu, and Chou role - Kang Jianye (Figure 2) as the character prototypes for this design.

In the character modeling design, geometric shapes, Wuhan architectural elements, and innovative action forms are combined to create unique character images (Figure 3). First, geometric - shaped patterns are used to divide the characters and decorate the clothing and accessories, creating a modern and fashionable feeling. In terms of color, bold and high - saturation blue and pink are used as the main colors to make the characters more visually impactful. Second, the personalities and characteristics of the characters are expressed through innovative action forms. Unique action modeling, combined with geometric - shaped gestures and movements, makes the performance of the characters more vivid and artistic. This design can not only attract the audience's attention, but also make the characters more three - dimensional and distinct. In addition, by integrating Wuhan's architectural elements, the outlines of famous Wuhan buildings such as the Yellow Crane Tower and the Yangtze River Bridge are added to the background of the character modeling. The characters are skillfully integrated with the urban landscape, highlighting the uniqueness and charm of Wuhan culture. This can not only show the traditional charm of Han Opera characters, but also reflect modern aesthetics and innovative spirit, endowing traditional culture with new connotations of the times, and making the character images more regionally - characteristic and culturally - connotative.



Figure 2. Roles of Sheng (Male Role), Dan (Female Role), Jing (Painted - face Male Role) and Chou (Clown) (Source: [https:// mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6TCmVXenp2FoQUjMvXkT1g](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6TCmVXenp2FoQUjMvXkT1g))

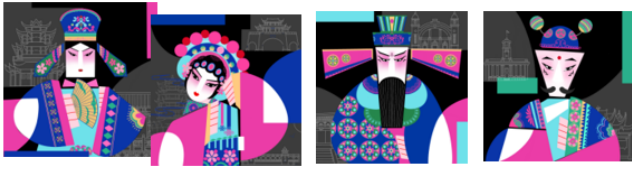


Figure 3. Innovative Character Design (Drawn by the Author)

#### 4.4. Applications from the Perspective of Neo-cultural Creativity

Through the innovative design of the character images in the Han Opera Cosmic Edge (Figure 4), considering the concept of neo-cultural creativity and closely adhering to the cultural essence, the design works should not only have artistic beauty, but also pay attention to commercial feasibility and social influence, so that they can better integrate into contemporary cultural life and produce positive social benefits. In applications, digital illustration technology can be used to enhance the interactivity of the drawn character images through technological means. This can not only be widely spread on social media and digital platforms, but also attract the attention and love of the younger generation. Cross-border cooperation and brand co-branding can also be carried out, such as with clothing, accessories, home supplies, etc. Han Opera character images can also be integrated into digital content creation such as animation and games. By creating Han-Opera-themed animations and game characters, traditional Han Opera stories and characters are presented to the audience and players in an interactive and dynamic form. For example, a mobile game themed on Han Opera can be developed, and the classic Han Opera stories can be adapted into game plots, allowing players to understand Han Opera culture while having fun. Through these innovative applications, Han Opera culture can not only glow with new vitality in modern society, but also promote its dissemination and development in different fields, achieving a win-win situation of cultural value and commercial value.



Figure 4. Full-body Image of Characters in Han Opera (Drawn by the Author)

## 5. Conclusion

With the continuous advancement of the tide of the times, the inheritance and development of traditional culture have always been key points that we must confront directly and explore in depth. When we look back on the past, it is not difficult to find that traditional culture, having gone through the baptism of time, is not only a profound accumulation of

the national spirit but also a precious source that nourishes the diversified development of modern society. From ancient traditional handicrafts to classic opera arts, from traditional thoughts imbued with philosophical wisdom to unique folk cultures, they jointly constitute the rich context of Chinese culture.

The emergence of the concept of neo-cultural creativity undoubtedly builds a brand-new bridge for the modern transformation of traditional culture. It breaks through the limitations of the traditional cultural and creative model, deeply integrates cutting-edge technology with cultural creativity, and reshapes the path of communication and development of traditional culture. Through the precise excavation and innovative integration of cultural resources, neo-cultural creativity enables traditional culture to be presented in a more vivid and diverse form in the public eye, greatly expanding its audience base and market space. This article takes the Han opera repertoire Cosmic Edge as a starting point, and through the innovative application of integrating traditional opera character images with modern design, it not only preserves the rich cultural traditions but also conforms to modern aesthetics and consumption demands. Moreover, by giving full play to the cultural communication and educational functions of museums, it makes greater contributions to the development of social culture

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