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Analyzing Ceramic Products in Museum Cultural and Creative Branding

-- Using "Palace Museum Taobao" as an Example

Yiting Zhu

Jingdezhen Ceramic University, Jingdezhen, 333000, China

Abstract: With the growing emphasis on traditional culture, museum tourism has gradually become a new trend. Museum cultural and creative products, derived from cultural relics, have entered the lives of the public, satisfying both practical and spiritual needs for collecting cultural artifacts. As an essential part of China's material cultural heritage, ceramics have found extensive use in museum cultural and creative branding. This article, through an analysis of ceramic cultural and creative products within the "Palace Museum Taobao" brand, examines the design methods employed. It also offers valuable insights and inspiration for regional museum cultural and creative branding.

Keywords: Cultural and Creative; Ceramics; Brand; Palace Museum Taobao.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of China's economy and culture, a cultural tourism trend has flourished. The general public's levels of knowledge and appreciation have significantly increased. Conventional museum exhibitions can no longer meet the growing demands of the public for knowledge and aesthetics. The public has started to pay more attention to cultural and creative products produced by museums, hoping to collect items that blend the unique elements of museums with innovative designs.

In this context, the Palace Museum has employed a brand-building approach for its cultural and creative products, providing them with a systematic visual identity. They have utilized marketing strategies of the new media era, established e-commerce channels, and strengthened consumer brand awareness. In a series of branding practices, the "Palace Museum Taobao" brand, authorized by the Palace Museum Cultural Service Center and operated by the Beijing Shangchao Creative Commemorative Products Company, has gained a large following of young fans. The unique expression of "Palace Museum Taobao" has provided us with many new perspectives for interpreting traditional culture.

2. Museum Cultural and Creative Brands in the New Media Era

2.1. Marketing Characteristics in the New Media Era

New media refers to digital, internet-based mass media that differs from traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television. It breaks the limitations of the traditional media framework by not only delivering text and images but also rapidly disseminating audio and video content and enabling real-time interactive live broadcasts with the audience. New media leverages the internet and digital technology, offering immediacy, interactivity, and multimedia capabilities, making it a form of media that facilitates global communication.

In this context, traditional marketing methods have undergone significant changes. New media marketing requires staying up to date with emerging technologies, promoting products through various online platforms, innovating multiple marketing strategies, and delivering information to the audience with greater precision.

2.2. The Current State of Chinese Museum Cultural and Creative Brands

Museum-created cultural and creative products serve to showcase the cultural spirit of museums, allowing for the continuation and reinterpretation of cultural resources through tangible items that are more in line with modern lifestyles. Museum cultural and creative products leverage their distinctive elements and incorporate them into modern life through redesign, giving materialized cultural resources practical and collectible value.

In the context of new media, museum cultural and creative products are gradually becoming branded. More and more museums are establishing brand images and marketing channels, harnessing the strengths of various industries, such as design, manufacturing, advertising, and content creation. They also benefit from the exchange of information from both within and outside the industry to expand their creative thinking. However, on the whole, the development of cultural and creative brands in Chinese museums is still in its early stages, and the issue of homogeneity exists in the majority of cultural and creative products. Consumers struggle to establish differentiated brand recall points, as many products are designed with traditional elements and craftsmanship in mind.

Furthermore, while ceramics play a significant role in many museums, the application of ceramics in the cultural and creative brands of regional museums is often lacking. Many of these products feature overly traditional patterns that do not meet the demands of modern audiences.

3. "Palace Museum Taobao" Cultural and Creative Brand Development Overview

3.1. Transformation of the "Palace Museum Taobao" Cultural and Creative Brand

The "Palace Museum Taobao" cultural and creative brand is a successful case of transformation in the context of new media. In 2008, the physical store of the Palace Museum Taobao was established, and although it improved its profitability to some extent, it struggled to achieve significant sales growth. However, on October 21, 2014, a Weibo user named "@ The British joke encyclopedia" posted a picture of new earphones designed by the Beijing Palace Museum, along with a humorous remark: "These are in-ear earphones. Will anyone be willing to wear them to listen to music? Besides the elderly emperor." This Weibo post sparked a public discussion and set the Palace Museum's cultural and creative products on fire on the internet.

From that point on, "Palace Museum Taobao" underwent a transformation in its brand image. It repositioned its target audience as young people, using a combination of culture and entertainment to capture their attention. It was through these creative and practical cultural and creative products that the Palace Museum acquired a youthful and vibrant image, making the solemn palace appear approachable. "Palace Museum Taobao" gradually evolved from an ordinary Taobao store to a brand, gaining numerous young users who voluntarily became loyal fans of Palace Museum cultural and creative products. During this process, its subsidiary brands also became more diverse, leading to a trend of "cross-industry" collaborations.

3.2. Cultural and Creative Products of "Palace Museum Taobao"

The Palace Museum possesses an abundance of cultural resources and a profound cultural heritage, representing China's outstanding traditional culture spanning thousands of years. The "Palace Museum Taobao" cultural and creative brand leverages these unique cultural resources, offering a wide array of cultural and creative products, numbering in the thousands.

Based on my research, during the 2023 "618" (a popular shopping festival in China), the products available in the "Palace Museum Taobao" store included 111 pieces of Palace Museum-themed document notebooks, 81 home decor products, 69 jewelry items, and 66 pieces of Palace Museum ceramics, among others. These cultural and creative products encompass various aspects of daily life, ranging from practical household items to trendy toys that carry the distinctive essence of the Palace Museum. For instance, the "Bao Gege" series in the Palace Museum's blind boxes, which feature adorable court ladies, caters to the aesthetic preferences of a younger audience by adding a touch of cuteness to traditional palace characters.

4. Design Characteristics of Ceramic Products in "Palace Museum Taobao"

Based on the information provided, ceramic products have a prominent place in the product design of "Palace Museum Taobao." Most of these ceramic products include items such as tea sets, mugs, tableware, and they are also used for items like incense holders, scented candles, and coasters. Through my research, I have identified several design characteristics of the ceramic products within the "Palace Museum Taobao" collection.

4.1. Overall Atmosphere of "Cuteness" (Meng Hua) Characteristics

The "cuteness" (Meng Hua) approach is pervasive throughout the entire Palace Museum cultural and creative brand. It is evident not only in the narrative style and design of cultural and creative products but also in the content shared on the official Palace Museum Weibo account. This transformation imbues the traditionally solemn and authoritative elements with a warm and adorable quality, exemplifying the phenomenon of "authoritative cuteness." This approach bridges the gap between traditional culture and younger audiences, creating a sense of "cute contrast."

While embracing "cuteness," the Palace Museum cultural and creative team maintains a careful balance by avoiding excessive trivialization of history. The significance of "authoritative cuteness" lies in the fusion of elite culture with popular culture, rather than turning cultural heritage into pure entertainment. Consequently, the team adheres to a "three-element" principle when developing products—elementality, storytelling, and heritage. Each cultural and creative product should highlight the distinctive elements of the Palace Museum, ensuring that they convey the underlying story and symbolic significance while remaining accessible and relatable to the public. On the other hand, every product is created with the aim of cultural communication, striving to connect the cultural heritage of the Palace Museum, spanning hundreds of years, with the lives of modern people. By making these products practical for everyday use, the team enables the broader public to genuinely experience the essence of Palace Museum culture.

For example, the "Moon Rabbit Incense Holder" is a ceramic incense holder in the shape of a jade rabbit, inspired by the Ming Dynasty's "Twelve Earthly Branches" white jade rabbit, known for its adorable and lustrous appearance. Lighting an incense stick with this holder, you'll see the fragrant smoke slowly rising, creating a delightful atmosphere. The rabbit is considered a celestial creature in Chinese folklore, and ancient people associated this auspicious image with the white jade rabbit, imbuing it with various symbolic meanings. It was seen as a symbol of good fortune, and Yuxin, from the Northern Zhou dynasty, praised it in the "Supplement to the White Rabbit" as "radiant, noble, and beautiful as a fox, a symbol of lunar virtue, and an embodiment of golden brilliance (Bright more male, color Tai fox, month de symbol, gold fine table Rui)." In this product, the showcased element from the Forbidden City is its collection of "White Jade Twelve Earthly Branches - Rabbit", carrying positive connotations and crafted into a practical and aesthetically pleasing incense holder.

4.2. Introducing a Fusion of Modern and Traditional Ceramic Products

"Ceramic products in the Palace Museum Taobao" encompass innovative modern designs that prioritize the reinterpretation of traditional elements for practical use and contemporary home decor. Additionally, there are products that involve the restoration and recreation of artifacts and historical heritage based on the Palace Museum's collection.

The production of these products strictly adheres to traditional craftsmanship, preserving and passing on Chinese traditional ceramic culture while bringing historical relics to the public eye. Examples include the "Blue and White Twelve Months Flower God Cup," the "Imitation Yongle Blue and White Hand-Pressed Cup," and the "Five Great Kilns Teacup Set," among others. Among these, the craftsmanship of the "Imitation Yongle Blue and White Hand-Pressed Cup" is the most faithful to the original. It replicates the blue and white hand-pressed cup artifact from the Palace Museum with meticulous hand-painting and firing by Jingdezhen craftsmen. The cup features a sunflower at its center, bearing the inscription "Made in the Yongle Era." Its body is adorned with twining lotus patterns, symbolizing the continuous cycle of life. The cup is elegant and spacious in shape, with a slightly widened mouth that fits comfortably in the hand's grip. The natural and lustrous blue and white coloration is even and understated, reminiscent of the blue and white in Yongle and Xuande in Qing Dynasty, showcasing rare beauty and craftsmanship.

4.3. Fresh and Elegant Color Palette

The ceramic products in the Palace Museum Taobao feature a color palette that has undergone a modernized treatment, emphasizing a fresh and elegant color scheme. To cater to contemporary aesthetic trends, the Palace Museum Taobao typically limits the color selection in ceramic product designs to no more than three colors, aiming for a clear and harmonious effect. This approach not only ensures a unified overall color theme for the ceramic products but also highlights their texture and delicacy. Furthermore, there is a focus on reducing the saturation of colors compared to traditional porcelain. Instead of the rich and vivid colors found on traditional porcelain, the ceramic products in the Palace Museum Taobao tend to lean towards soft and muted hues, such as light blue, pale green, and beige. These gentle colors evoke a sense of warmth and comfort while showcasing the refinement and elegance of the ceramic products. This color scheme reflects the Palace Museum Creative Team's understanding of the aesthetics of ceramic artifacts and their innovation in blending traditional culture with modern life**.**

For example, the "Squirrel and Grape Pattern Tableware Series" takes inspiration from the Qing Dynasty's "Squirrel and Grape Pattern Bowl." It offers a range of tableware that includes bowl sets and plate sets, featuring the traditional squirrel and grape motif. Traditional blue and white porcelain often employs rich and vibrant blue colors to depict patterns with high color saturation. However, in this "Squirrel and Grape Pattern Tableware Series," the Palace Museum Creative Team has chosen a softer shade of pinkish blue as the primary color and employed overglaze painting techniques. The reduced color saturation in this palette imparts a gentle and graceful appearance to the patterns. Furthermore, they have added accents of liquid gold, enhancing the sense of depth and refinement in the design.

4.4. Harmonious Beauty in Decorative Patterns

These ceramic cultural and creative products are not only unique in their shapes and color choices, but they also possess a distinctive modern sense of rhythmic beauty in their decorative pattern compositions. When designing patterns and compositions for ceramic cultural and creative products, it is essential to ensure a harmonious relationship between the object and its ornamentation. This involves not only focusing on the aesthetics of the patterns but also considering how the shape of the object affects the overall decoration. Ceramic products have three-dimensional characteristics, and what may be visually appealing on a two-dimensional plane might not necessarily align with the three-dimensional aspects of the object. Consideration must be given to the curvatures, protrusions, and other unique features of the ceramic item to ensure that the patterns seamlessly integrate with the shape of the object, creating the best possible visual impact. This requires a meticulous analysis of the object's form before the design process, a deep understanding of the characteristics of the patterns inherent in the artifacts and making necessary adjustments and refinements to ensure their mutual adaptation and harmony.

For example, the inspiration for the "Chunhua Series Tea Set" is derived from a Qing Dynasty painted enamel openwork floral and fruit-patterned plate from the Palace Museum's collection. The original artifact featured a flat, openwork composition with a rich interplay of flowers, fruits, and blue leaves, complemented by graceful butterflies and exotic rocks. When applied to tea sets, this design is transformed into a three-dimensional Chinese-style composition. The intricate patterns, branches, butterflies, and other elements are no longer entwined but are instead distributed across the three-dimensional surface of the object, creating a unique layout. This transformation in composition accentuates the overall shape of the object, emphasizing spatial aesthetics. The extensive use of empty spaces on the object's body is another significant shift. These blank areas harmoniously integrate with the specific patterns, forming a sense of rhythmic beauty.

4.5. Proficient in Applying Cross-Disciplinary Elements

The ceramic products in "Taobao's Palace Museum" draw inspiration from a wide array of sources, extending beyond ceramic artifacts themselves. They incorporate elements from other museum collections, historical relics, and even animals. For instance, the "Best wishes Covered Cup" is inspired by a painting in the museum's collection, the "Shen Zhou Li Shi Tu" scroll, while the "A phoenix comes with Grace to rest Teacup" takes inspiration from the Palace Museum's "Phoenix Plum Blossom-Lined Robe". The "A thousand Li of rivers and mountains Wine Cup Set" features elements from the " A thousand Li of rivers and mountains". In addition, the Palace Museum Creative Team is adept at recognizing popular elements associated with the Palace Museum in online culture. For example, the hand-painted "Palace Museum Cat Cup Mat" combines the adorable Palace Museum cats with the museum's artifacts, depicting a cat lying on a cloisonné enamel floral-patterned box, revealing its soft belly. The "Palace Museum's Snow Temperature-Sensitive Cup" draws inspiration from the picturesque snow scenes on the palace walls and incorporates color-changing technology. As the warm water inside the cup heats up, it gradually reveals an image of the Forbidden City with red walls, white snow, courtyard trees in bloom, and the Palace Museum in all its glory.

5. Conclusion

At the core of museum cultural and creative brands lies the

preservation and promotion of culture, with creativity serving as a pivotal means of expression. Ceramics, as a treasure of traditional Chinese culture, offer an opportunity for innovative cultural and creative product development, contributing to the preservation and reinvigoration of traditional Chinese culture, and facilitating its dissemination and revival. By studying the overall ambiance, color schemes, compositions, and element extractions in ceramic products from "Taobao's Palace Museum," this article provides inspiration for museum cultural and creative designers. When designing museum ceramic cultural and creative products, it is essential to consider several key factors, including designing around the museum's overall atmosphere to establish a strong brand image, creating compositions and color palettes that resonate with modern aesthetics, and skillfully discovering and applying various elements related to the museum from different fields. Through these approaches, cultural and creative products can effectively convey the essence of traditional culture while aligning with contemporary preferences, fostering a deeper connection between the public and the museum's heritage.

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