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Design of Wuhan Regional Cultural IP Image for "Chu Culture Figures"

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Abstract: Wuhan has a long and profound cultural history, as well as unique artistic charm. With the development and progress of the times and society, more and more people are gaining a deeper understanding of Wuhan's regional culture. As a central city in Central China, the emergence of Wuhan's regional IP image is conducive to promoting the city's unique culture externally, thereby fostering the better development of tourism in Central China and enhancing China's cultural confidence. This paper aims to provide references for the design and development of IP images and products themed around "Wuhan" through the investigation and research on the regional cultural IP images of Wuhan, Hubei Province.

Keywords: Design of Wuhan Regional Culture; Intellectual Property Image Design; Cultural and Creative Products.

1. Introduction

Driven by people's growing demand for cultural diversity, the potential of the current IP image market has been further explored. However, most existing IP images in the market focus on commercial characteristics, and their cultural heritage, regional features, and design quality are worthy of further refinement. From the perspective of the industry's long-term development, the continuous improvement of IP images and the persistent pursuit of cultural connotations have been the goals that designers have jointly strived for in recent years. Regional IP images deserve more research and application across industries, as they are products that can enhance cultural confidence. [1]

Essentially, a regional IP image is a generalized design of a region or city. The scientific and reasonable design of its regional characteristics can not only promote the sales of regional characteristic products but also help improve the city's image and people's cultural confidence, which is in line with the design concept of catering to the general trend of current social development.

This paper conducts a detailed multi-angle analysis and description of the design background, purpose, and significance of Wuhan's regional IP images, and carries out appearance improvement on existing regional IP images to meet cultural needs.

2. The Concept of IP Image

2.1. Basic Concepts of IP

IP, short for Intellectual Property, was initially a definition in the legal field. Later, it gradually evolved into a professional term in commercial marketing, usually referring to a widely known brand image or one endowed with certain significance.

The IP that people often talk about can be roughly divided into two types. One is IP images, such as the anime IPs of Marvel and Disney. The other includes popular variety show and film/TV IPs like the recently viral Sisters Who Make Waves, Twenty Your Life On, and A Little Reunion. The threshold for IP creation is relatively low—it can be based on a long-standing historical story or temporarily created by enterprises or designers.

A successful IP first possesses extremely high recognition and awareness. Examples include Spider-Man, Hulk, Sun Wukong, and Kumamon. These IPs are widely applied and can appear on various items. [2]

Second, an IP must have rich background stories. This not only shapes a vivid image but also deepens people's impression, which is crucial for enriching the IP's connotation.

Finally, an IP needs to have commercial monetization and extension capabilities. Commercial monetization is the core of the IP concept, representing a kind of ownership relationship. The term "property" inherently implies value and monetization. Through its own extension capability, an IP can cooperate with a variety of products to facilitate monetization.

2.2. Design Principles for Traditional Cultural IP Images

Traditional culture is the spiritual treasure of the Chinese nation, and the protection and inheritance of traditional culture must be taken seriously. The emerging form of IP image design can shorten the emotional distance between brands and audiences through cool appearances and approachable personalities. Combining IP with traditional culture is also a new form of protection and inheritance. The most important thing in the design of traditional IP images is to both preserve cultural connotations and meet modern communication needs. Sometimes these two aspects may conflict, so designers need to make certain trade-offs based on actual circumstances. [3]

(1) Balancing Historicity and Modernity Chinese culture is extensive and profound, embodying a profound national spirit. Having undergone historical tempering, its value is unquestionable. What designers need to consider is how to effectively integrate IP images with traditional culture in the current internet era, or rather the artificial intelligence era. They also need to explore and develop ways to endow traditional culture with new cultural vitality, create new national cultural symbols, and contribute to the development of the cultural industry.

The so-called modernity of IP images, as an emerging communication form, lies in leveraging modern visual

elements and communication methods to form advantages. The so-called historicity means injecting traditional culture into its core, aligning with the contemporary context to meet the needs of modern audiences. On the premise of preserving the original essence to the greatest extent, it helps establish a sound connection between traditional and modern cultures.

(2) Balancing Regionality and Communicability There is an old Chinese saying: "One soil nurtures one people." Culture is rooted in specific environments, including natural, regional, and social environments. This is also one of the important factors restricting cultural communication and promotion. For example, a well-known cultural classic or living tradition in a certain region may lack popularity and recognition in other areas, which seriously hinders cultural dissemination and development. This problem is even more prominent for some niche or endangered traditional cultures.

Therefore, when IP images serve as carriers of specific cultures, they can transcend cultural and customary boundaries to achieve emotional communication. Designers need to reconcile the contradiction between the unique challenges brought by regionality and the adaptability required for widespread development through IP image design. They should seek a more essential ideological core to meet the emotional and value pursuits of people in different regions. By leveraging the unique affinity and connotation of IP images, designers can maintain regional characteristics while gaining broader recognition and affection.

(3) Balancing Artistry and Commerciality Traditional culture encompasses the aesthetic ideas and philosophical perceptions in Chinese tradition, inherently possessing extremely high artistic value. Commerce is not the criterion for measuring artistic value, but a culture rich in artistic value will surely have unique commercial value.

Combining traditional culture with commerce and developing culture into an industry is a win-win cooperation for traditional cultural brands. It enables horizontal and vertical interactions, forming greater influence and commercial value. In the design of traditional cultural IP images, while extracting cultural elements to obtain artistic value, designers must also fully consider the acceptance capacity of the commercial market. They should not be arrogant or highbrow, ignoring the importance of the market.

3. Current Situation and Case Analysis of Regional IP Image Design

3.1. Analysis of the Current Situation of Regional Cultural and Creative Development Types in China

Regional culture refers to the unique traditional culture of different regions and ethnic groups. When integrated with cultural and creative products, it forms products with distinct cultural heritage, which should reflect regional characteristics and fulfill the function of spreading traditional culture. As spiritual consumer goods carried by material products, China's major regional cultural and creative products can be roughly divided into three categories by the end of 2022: "architectural symbol-based", "catering-based", and "ethnic-based". [4-5]

(1) Architectural Symbol-based

With a long history, China boasts numerous outstanding and representative ancient buildings. To reflect regional cultural features, regional cultural and creative products usually adopt local iconic buildings, simplify them into symbols, and apply them to designs. However, some current designs over-symbolize architectural features, resulting in a serious lack of cultural connotation. They merely use architectural visual symbols without combining specific cultural carriers or considering audiences' spiritual needs, leaving the symbols without a proper presentation context.

(2) Catering-based

As stated in Records of the Grand Historian: "Kings regard the people as heaven, and the people regard food as heaven." Many designers integrate local delicacies into cultural and creative works to highlight regional characteristics. While the original intention is good, blind application of food illustrations to products like T-shirts, pillows, tote bags, and postcards—without suitable carriers or proper design integration—leads to severe homogenization. Such products lack innovation, feel monotonous, and ultimately backfire.

(3) Ethnic-based

China is a multi-ethnic country, with each ethnic group having unique culture. Many provinces have developed ethnic birthplaces into famous scenic spots to boost local tourism and inherit unique cultures. For example, cultural and creative designs for the Miao people in Guizhou feature distinct mythological and simple life elements that differ greatly from Central Plains culture, attracting tourists' curiosity. The diverse ethnic cultures in Guizhou provide flexible themes for local cultural and creative designs, enabling a harmonious integration of ethnic charm and historical culture.

3.2. The Current Problems and Solutions of Regional IP Image

AExisting Problems

(1) Lack of Regional Cultural Targeting

The most serious problem in current regional IP design is the lack of regional cultural targeting. When we travel, we always see different IP images representing local cultures, and these IP images are often used as the basis for co-branding collaborations with various types of commodities. If an IP cultural product can be seen anywhere in a city, then where is the connotation of this IP reflected? The most important thing about a regional cultural IP is to embody its unique regional culture. An IP without cultural connotation cannot be called a regional IP, but only a commercial IP or a commercial image.

(2) Lack of Innovative Design

At present, the design concepts of many regional IPs are relatively outdated and lack innovation, making it difficult to meet the aesthetic needs of young people and lacking emotional resonance with the audience. In order to reflect regionality, the design of many IP images simply imposes visual symbols that can reflect regional characteristics onto the IP images without carrying out innovative design on them. This leads to the formed IP images lacking modern aesthetics and failing to make viewers interested in them.

Solutions

(1) Strengthen the Application of Regional Characteristic Elements

In the process of designing regional IPs, more attention should be paid to regional characteristics, such as architecture, clothing, fine arts, cuisine, etc. A series of simplification, improvement and application should be carried out on these elements to fully integrate the IP with regional characteristics. Only in this way can viewers associate the IP image with the region at the first sight, improve the recognition of the IP image, and play a role in communication.

(2) Improve the Innovation of Regional Characteristics

The most important thing to improve the innovation of IP is to abandon the doctrine of "taking". It is necessary to carry out modern optimization on the "taken" regional characteristics to make them conform to the current popular trends and resonate with viewers, so as to maintain the priority of the IP image; otherwise, it will be eliminated by the market in advance. For example, the design of the famous IP Pop Mart is often associated with high-profile events, which can not only activate its design vitality, but also promote its brand to a larger platform.

3.3. Case Analysis of Hubei Regional Cultural IP Image

The research aims to combine excellent Hubei regional IP design to analyze the methods and ideas of traditional regional cultural IP design. The case study will focus on the civilization of two local regions in Hubei, ultimately serving the development of local cultural and tourism industries, and is suitable for research and comparison. Within the general commonality, different emphasis is placed on the characteristics and needs of different regional themes, and two important directions for IP image design are analyzed separately.

(1) Shennong Little Wild Man - Distinctive Image Presenting Regional Characteristics (Figure 1)

On May 18th, "Shennong Little Wild Man", one of the members of the Shennongjia IP family in Hubei, officially debuted at the 2023 Shennongjia Forest Tourism Product Launch Conference, marking the official announcement of the image of the Shennongjia IP family.

Shennongjia was once famous for the legend of the wild man, who is said to be known as the "mountain demon". It is a mythical creature that is one of the important design elements extracted by the "Shennong Little Wild Man". It incorporates many regional characteristics of Shennongjia, draws on the head shape of Shennong's long horns and undulating mountains, and also incorporates Shennongjia's characteristic highland red as the facial color, showcasing the regional characteristics vividly. In terms of personality, it also endows IP with the characteristics of tiger head and tiger brain, which is very attractive.

The design of IP image through distinct regional symbols is a highly effective way in regional IP design. This not only maximizes the reflection of regional characteristics, but also quickly endows IP with cultural connotations.



Figure 1. "Shennong Little Wild Man" IP Packaging Display

In addition, the IP image of "Shennong Little Wild Man" utilizes the content recorded in myths and legends and the inherent image in the minds of the public, creating a contrast with the public's psychology in the design of the image. While it has a serious expression of culture, it also gives it fun and entertainment, making it easy to leave a deep impression among the audience.

(2) Phoenix - Deepening Personality Shaping through Regional Culture (Figure 2)

The appearance of this IP image is a red phoenix, with flame crests and feathers, as well as a pair of cute and beautiful phoenix eyes. There has been a saying since ancient times that "Chu people worship phoenixes". Even today, phoenixes still play an important cultural role on the land of Jingchu, and the design inspiration for this IP image also comes from this.

The name of this IP image is not actually Phoenix, and its true nickname has not been determined yet. However, from the initial nickname, it can be inferred that Phoenix is the foundation of this IP, and its distinct regional characteristics will reflect the IP's personality traits in multiple ways. The phoenix, as a core element that spans thousands of years and perfectly embodies the history of Jingchu culture, is undoubtedly the best choice for image design elements. In the process of designing the IP image, this design captures the core element of the phoenix and adjusts its shape multiple times. It does not pursue the proportion and color of the phoenix standard, but rather pursues its characteristics in form, curve, and rhythm, which is in line with the feelings given by Jingchu culture. Incorporating the wisdom and spirituality of people from the agricultural culture of Chu into the image of IP, endowing it with unique personality traits, greatly enriching the personality connotation of IP, making it easy to interact with viewers and resonate with them.



Figure 2. Phoenix IP design image display

4. Development Plan for the Prospect of Wuhan's IP Image

Wuhan's blind box IP should focus on the core of regional culture, deeply tapping into iconic elements such as the Yellow Crane Tower, Yangtze River finless porpoise, hot dry noodles, and Han embroidery. With "cultural materialization + cute design" as the core direction, it will create a series of products: regular models focus on the younger translation of classic cultural symbols, hidden models integrate intangible cultural heritage craft details or city-exclusive scenes, and seasonal limited editions innovate shapes in combination with Wuhan's characteristic events such as cherry blossom season and river crossing festival. On the sales side, adhering to the strategy of "offline scenario penetration + online full coverage", it will cooperate with core scenic spots such as the Yellow Crane Tower and Hubu Lane to set up exclusive blind box sales points, settle in subway cultural and creative stores and commercial district trendy toy counters, and simultaneously lay out e-commerce platforms and social e-

commerce live broadcast rooms to expand reach channels. For communication, it will launch online activities such as the "Wuhan Blind Box Hidden Model Challenge" and "IP Image Secondary Creation Collection", cooperate with local KOLs and trendy toy bloggers for promotion, and strengthen user interaction and word-of-mouth communication. In addition, it can extend the development of blind box peripheral derivatives (such as keychains and stationery sets) and carry out cross-border co-branding with local cultural and tourism projects and brands, building a complete ecology of "blind box products + cultural communication + commercial monetization". This will make Wuhan's blind box IP an important carrier for regional cultural output, while developing a new growth pole for the cultural and tourism industry, achieving the dual improvement of cultural value and commercial potential.

5. Conclusion

Regional culture is an important component of Chinese civilization, and the individuality and diverse trends of cultural creative design have enabled Chinese culture to no longer be confined to traditional ranks and develop rapidly, now even reaching international design standards. In the information age, bravely breaking traditional limitations is not only a comprehensive reform of regional culture, but also a new understanding of contemporary design. This design utilizes abstract exaggeration, symbolic metaphor and other artistic expression techniques to integrate the local culture of Wuhan with the blind box of the iP image, following a pioneering and innovative design thinking, and endowing cultural and creative products with new era connotations in terms of connotation. The sense of identity generated by regional culture is easier to convey to the audience and achieve emotional resonance with them.

Regional culture can be analyzed through the simplification of traditional visual elements, the recombination and combination of colors, and the application of production materials. It is found that incorporating regional culture design into IP image products can provide more cultural connotations for the products, thereby enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the image in regional culture.

Regional culture and innovative design are interdependent, with two different dimensions merging together to stimulate product vitality and give new vitality to regional culture.

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