



Harnessing Wuhan Wharf Culture for Regional Cultural IP Development and Cross-Media Communication Design: A Pathway to Enhance Wuhan's Cultural Tourism

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to examine the significant contribution of Wuhan's wharf culture to the development of the city's regional cultural intellectual property (IP) and to investigate how cross-media communication design strategies can effectively enhance Wuhan's cultural tourism industry, thereby fostering a dual prosperity of economy and culture. Wuhan is situated in Hubei Province and is known as the "thoroughfare of nine provinces" and the "province of a thousand lakes." It is endowed with a distinctive geographical location and an abundance of historical and cultural resources, which provide an exceptional foundation for the creation of cultural IP. The study commences with the definition of the terms "cultural tourism industry" and "cultural intellectual property (IP)" and proceeds to present a historical overview and an analysis of the current status of Wuhan's wharf culture. Subsequently, the intrinsic connections between wharf culture, morning meal culture, and wharf chant culture are analyzed, as well as the absence and construction strategies of Wuhan's regional urban IP image. Finally, the latest theories and practices of cross-media communication design are integrated to propose specific implementation pathways and expected effects, with the aim of providing a valuable reference for the innovative development of Wuhan's cultural tourism industry.

Subject Areas

Art

Keywords

Wuhan Wharf Culture, Cultural IP Design, Cross-Media Communication,

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly developing era of globalization and informatization, cultural tourism has emerged as a crucial driver of local economic transformation and growth. As a fundamental element of cultural tourism, the development of cultural IP is crucial for enhancing the appeal and competitiveness of tourist destinations. Wuhan, a city with a rich historical heritage and profound cultural roots, boasts a distinctive wharf culture that encapsulates the city's spirit and serves as a valuable asset for regional cultural IP development. This paper presents an academic and logical investigation into the cross-media communication design of Wuhan's wharf culture in the context of cultural IP creation.

Initially, Historical Background and Current Status Analysis of Wuhan Wharf Culture

The rise of Wuhan wharf culture can be traced back to the early Qing Dynasty. With the increasing prosperity of commercial activities at the confluence of the Yangtze River and Han River, Hankou became the distribution center for salt from the two lakes, the transportation hub for grain, and the trading center for agricultural and sideline products. Hankou was famous for its eight major wharves: Aijia Zui, Guan Sheng Ci, Wu Sheng Miao, Lao Guan Miao, Jie Jia Zui, Da Ma Tou, Si Guan Dian, and Hua Lou. Ye Tiao Yuan's "Hankou Bamboo Branch Words" depicts this period of Hankou as a bustling commercial city with "twenty li long street with eight wharves, many carriages and sedan chairs on land, and many boats on water" [1]. As an important place for goods transshipment and personnel traffic, the wharf not only promoted economic prosperity but also nurtured a unique wharf culture. During this period, social groups such as wharf workers, business gangs, and guilds gradually formed, and their interactions and cooperation built a complex social network, laying the foundation for the formation and development of wharf culture.

The wharf culture of Wuhan, situated at the confluence of three rivers, has developed a distinctive regional identity over centuries. This identity is manifested not only in the customs, work songs, and architectural styles of dockworkers but also in the profound spiritual values of their zest for life, commitment to work, and urban belonging. Collectively, these attributes define the allure of Wuhan's wharf culture, offering a rich source of material and inspiration for cultural IP design.

However, with the rise of modern transportation modes (such as railways, highways, and aviation), including railways, highways, and aviation, has led to a decline in the significance of water transport, which has in turn diminished the influence of wharf culture. Nevertheless, as an important part of Wuhan's history,

wharf culture still has a profound impact on the city's cultural identity and historical memory. In today's world, there is a general trend of integrated development of culture and economy, and the role of cultural soft power in the development of metropolises is becoming increasingly important. To accelerate the construction of Wuhan as a "cultural city" and a "creative capital," it is essential to pay high attention to promoting the modern transformation of Wuhan wharf culture, enhancing its connotation, promoting its spirit, and continuously playing its functional role [2].

Cultural IP is defined as a set of symbols, images, elements, narratives, or objects that possess distinctive emotional and value meanings and are capable of withstanding market testing. It represents a cultural value system and spiritual connotation and is a form of intellectual property. The essence of cultural IP resides in its distinctive cultural connotations and creative value, which can confer economic and brand value, as well as substantial social and cultural value. In the contemporary era, the principal conduits through which cultural IP stimulates consumer expenditure are the advancement of the tourism industry and the promotion of high-quality development. The impact of cultural IP on the advancement of the tourism industry can be observed in the following areas.

Firstly, it serves to enhance the visibility and attractiveness of tourist destinations. Cultural IP, with its distinctive and exclusive nature, has the potential to capture the attention and interest of tourists. The integration of local cultural elements with tourism can serve to enhance the visibility and attractiveness of tourist destinations, thereby attracting a greater number of tourists who are motivated to experience and travel to these locations.

Secondly, it facilitates cultural exchange and regional cooperation. Cultural IP is not merely a resource for the tourism industry; it is also a cultural symbol and a means of communication. The promotion of local cultural activities and the creation of cultural tourism routes facilitate cultural exchanges and cooperation between different regions and countries, thereby enhancing mutual understanding and friendship.

Thirdly, it creates business opportunities and increases revenue. The development of tourism products and services related to local culture, based on cultural IP, can bring more business opportunities and increase income for tourist destinations.

Fourthly, it enhances the tourism experience and the likelihood of tourists returning to the destination. Cultural IP can provide tourists with distinctive travel experiences and memories. By integrating local cultural elements with tourism, tourists can gain a deeper understanding of the local history, culture, and customs, thereby improving the tourism experience and increasing the likelihood of tourists returning to the destination.

Fifthly, it shapes the image and brand of tourist destinations. By integrating local cultural elements with tourism, unique tourism brands and images can be created, attracting more tourists to travel, thereby stimulating residents' consumption [3].

The development of the cultural and creative industry has become an important direction for promoting urban transformation and upgrading. In this context, deeply exploring the connotation and value of wharf culture and constructing a regional cultural IP with distinctive characteristics is of great significance for enhancing the competitiveness of Wuhan's cultural tourism industry. This provides an unprecedented opportunity for its modern transformation. The transformation of traditional wharf culture and the establishment of modern wharf culture is a complex systematic project and a dynamic development process. It is necessary not only to grasp its contemporary connotation and spiritual essence but also to achieve cultural awareness and sublimation at a deeper level. By exploring the essence of wharf culture and integrating it with contemporary aesthetics and market demands, it can be transformed into cultural and creative products and urban IP images that are timely and appealing. This approach preserves and promotes traditional culture while injecting new vitality and growth drivers into the city's cultural tourism sector.

2. Correlation of Wuhan Wharf Culture with Related Cultural Groups

2.1. The Formation of “Zao Guo” Culture and Its Correlation with Wharf Culture

Over time, the cultural significance of Zao Guo has evolved, resulting in the emergence of a lifestyle that is distinct and significant in its own right. The demands of the wharf environment, with its need for strenuous physical labour in a limited time frame, led dockworkers to favour high-calorie, convenient breakfasts. This dietary custom subsequently became more widely adopted, leading to the emergence of the distinctive “Zao Guo” culture. It can be argued that the formation of “Zao Guo” culture is intricately linked to wharf culture and represents an important dietary manifestation of wharf culture.

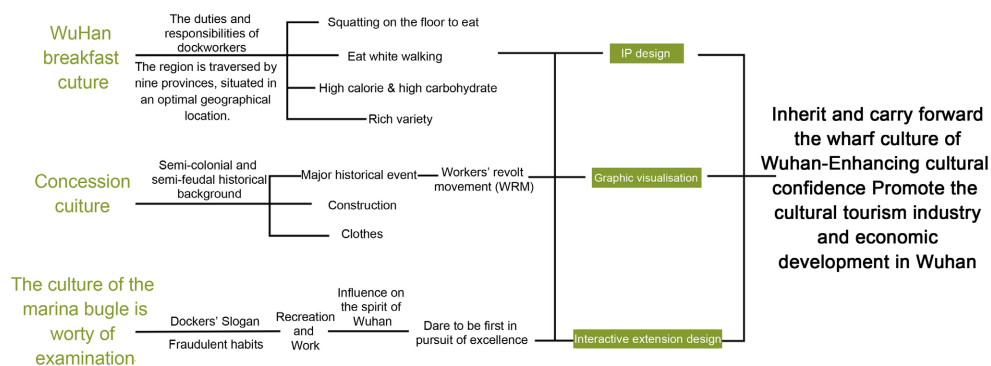
2.2. The Artistic Value and Social Significance of Wharf Chanting Culture

Wharf chanting is a type of labor song created by wharf workers during long-term heavy labor practice, with distinct local characteristics and a strong sense of rhythm. Wharf chanting is a product of the laboring people during their work process and a crystallization of their wisdom. It runs through the entire labor process of the working people, serving as a way for them to vent their inner frustrations and suppressed emotions. By shouting chants, they express their expectations for tomorrow and their longing for a better future life [4]. It not only shows the tenacious spirit of wharf workers but also reflects their optimistic and upward-looking attitude towards life. As a form of folk art, wharf chanting has a unique artistic charm and social value. It constitutes an essential element of the culture associated with wharf work and represents a significant emblem of the regional

culture of Wuhan.

2.3. The Synergy among the Three

Wuhan wharf culture, “Zao Guo” culture, and wharf chanting culture complement each other, jointly forming Wuhan’s unique urban cultural landscape. Wharf culture, as the cornerstone, provides the soil for the formation and development of “Zao Guo” culture and wharf chanting culture; in turn, “Zao Guo” culture and wharf chanting culture strengthen the characteristics and charm of wharf culture. This interplay not only enriches Wuhan’s cultural connotation but also enhances the city’s cultural soft power and competitiveness (See **Figure 1**).



Under the back ground of Wuhan dock culture,the IP image of Wuhan dock workers and its interactive extension design are represented by the extraction of early culture, dock chant culture and concession culture.

Figure 1. The cultural groups related to Wuhan wharf culture provide research directions for this project. Source: Zhang Qing, Central China Normal University.

Through on-site visits to the Wuhan Jiangnan Guan Museum and the old sites of related wharves, I was able to photograph and archive a series of historical images that illustrate the evolution of Wuhan’s wharf culture (See **Figure 2**).



Figure 2. A partial display of the development history of Wuhan’s wharves at the Wuhan Jiangnan Guan Museum. The image was sourced from Zhang Qing (photographed), Central China Normal University.

3. The Discovery of the Absence of Wuhan's Regional Urban IP Image

At present, Wuhan has achieved certain results in the field of cultural and creative industries, but there is still a problem with the absence of regional urban IP images. On the one hand, existing cultural and creative products are mostly concentrated on “Guo Zao” food culture, Jingchu culture, and landmark buildings, lacking cultural and creative products themed on wharf culture; on the other hand, in terms of cross-media communication, there has not yet formed a wharf culture IP image with widespread influence. This absence not only limits the development potential of Wuhan's cultural tourism industry but also affects the city's cultural communication power and influence. With the in-depth development of the urban economy, the IPization of the city brand is an inevitable trend. On the one hand, for the audience, they have shifted from pursuing material foundations to looking for psychological needs. On the other hand, for the city, the IP ization of the city brand is essentially a transition from focusing on the city itself to being audience-centered, allowing the audience to form a long-term and stable cognition of the city. The city brand is a branch of urban marketing, aimed at conveying urban image information to the public [5].

Concurrently, an article published by Changjiang Daily in October 2023 indicated that the Wuhan Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism considers the reinforcement of the protection and advancement of Han Opera art to be of paramount importance for the purpose of accentuating the regional cultural characteristics of the city, revitalizing the “big dock” of opera, and establishing a culturally prosperous new era of a heroic city. This also demonstrates that the city has the requisite policy support to facilitate the development of the distinctive Wuhan wharf culture.

This statement highlights the commitment of the municipal government of Wuhan to the cultural heritage and contemporary expression of its wharf culture, particularly through the lens of Han Opera, a traditional art form with deep roots in the city's history. By emphasizing the importance of cultural preservation alongside modern development strategies, Wuhan is positioning itself to leverage its historical assets to enhance cultural tourism and economic growth, ensuring that the city's unique cultural identity remains a vibrant part of its future development.

4. Construction Strategies for the Absence of Wuhan's Regional Urban IP Image

Given Wuhan's riverine geography, water is the lifeblood of the city, and the Han River culture is the soul of Wuhan's culture. The poetic verse of Li Bai, “Playing the jade flute in the Yellow Crane Tower, the river city falls plum blossoms in May,” serves to illustrate the profound cultural heritage of Wuhan, which is inextricably linked to its aquatic environment. In order to construct a city IP image with regional characteristics, it is essential to gain an in-depth understanding of

the essence and value of wharf culture. This entails the cataloguing of the historical context of wharf culture, the analysis of the living conditions and spiritual perspectives of dockworkers, and the extraction of the core elements and symbols of wharf culture. Such endeavours will result in a comprehensive and profound understanding of wharf culture, providing robust support for subsequent design endeavours (See **Figure 3**).



Figure 3. Project concept diagram. Source: Zhang Qing, Central China Normal University.

4.1. Innovative Cultural IP Image Design

It can be concluded from multidimensional urban image analysis that the project should reflect distinct Wuhan regional characteristics and spirit in the design of Wuhan's IP image. This is in order to gain citizen recognition. Concurrently, it is essential to strengthen the IP image's correlation with other industries. This is in order to spawn related cultural and creative products. These are intended to cater to the purchasing needs of citizens and tourists. This will thereby augment the city brand's economic value [6]. Prior to the implementation of the project, data was collected on the gender distribution of consumers, their understanding of Wuhan wharf culture, and their willingness to purchase related cultural and creative products. Additionally, representative keywords characteristic of dockworkers were identified. The results of the survey indicate that over 70% of consumers are female, which serves to highlight the dominant role played by women in the consumption of cultural and creative products. Furthermore, the survey results suggest that there is a need to enhance public awareness of Wuhan wharf culture, given that 65% of respondents indicated that they were completely unfamiliar with it. Conversely, 14% demonstrated comprehensive awareness, while 21% reported familiarity with the subject matter but lacked a detailed understanding. The data indicate that while some consumers have a basic grasp of Wuhan wharf culture, overall public knowledge is limited. This presents opportunities for cultural education and promotion, as evidenced by the fact that over 80% of respondents expressed interest in purchasing Wuhan wharf culture-related products. This high level of purchase intent, despite limited cultural understanding, indicates a strong market interest. It is, therefore, feasible to design and produce a series of cultural products centred on Wuhan wharf culture, which is likely to be well-received. The public shows significant interest and recognition of Wuhan wharf culture, particularly in terms of artistic expression and interactive experience. The launch of a suite of IP image designs and related interactive extensions will facilitate the living legacy of Wuhan wharf culture.

In the design of the project's IP character images, a significant number of extant historical sculptures of Wuhan dockworkers and an in-depth examination of

archival photographs were consulted in order to accurately portray the visual characteristics of dockworkers (See **Figure 4**).

The attire of the dockworkers was characterized by simplicity and practicality, comprising loose-fitting trousers and short-sleeved or sleeveless tops. This allowed for unimpeded movement when handling cargo. Their footwear consisted of straw sandals or cloth shoes, which were adapted to accommodate the prolonged periods of standing and walking. The prolonged engagement in heavy physical labour may have resulted in the development of a tanned complexion due to prolonged exposure to the sun. The utilization of various tools was an integral aspect of their work, including carrying poles, baskets, burlap sacks, and hand-carts. These tools not only facilitated their work but also contributed to the formation of their distinctive image.



Figure 4. The images presented herewith depict historical photographs and sculptures of dockworkers. The collection was assembled by Zhang Qing, of Central China Normal University.

4.2. Research on Cross-Media Communication Design for Wuhan Wharf Culture in Regional Cultural IP Creation

A comprehensive investigation and contemporary transformation strategies, while maintaining the essential elements of wharf culture, integrate modern design concepts and technological methods to create IP images with a distinctive identity and recognisability. Such images may include personified dockworkers, symbolic animals or objects, and so forth, showcasing their distinctive charm through the use of intricate lines, vibrant colours, and lively expressions.

4.3. In-Depth Exploration and Creative Narration of Storytelling

The focus is on the life and work scenarios of dockworkers, with the construction of a series of engaging plotlines and character relationships. These narratives should integrate Wuhan's historical culture, local customs, and regional traits, presenting the unique allure and profound legacy of wharf culture through nuanced storytelling and vivid portrayal. Concurrently, modern narrative

techniques and audio-visual language are employed to enhance the appeal and dissemination of the narrative.

4.4. Innovative Practice of Cross-Media Communication Design

1) Integration and application of AR real scene interaction technology

Using AR technology to integrate IP images and stories into real scenes, creating an immersive experience space. Tourists can interact with the super-sized IP images placed at the landmark building of Jiangnan Guan by scanning with their mobile phones, feeling the unique atmosphere and charm of wharf culture. This innovative method not only enhances the participation and experience of tourists but also strengthens the appeal and competitiveness of cultural and creative products.

2) Creative display of space interaction exhibition and screen interaction media

Create interactive exhibitions and interactive installation art themed on wharf culture in physical spaces. By combining multimedia technology and artistic design, IP images and stories are presented to the audience in various sensory forms, such as visual, auditory, and tactile. At the same time, screen interaction media technology is used to achieve online and offline linkage and interaction, expanding the dissemination channels and audience range.

4.5. Diversified Strategies for the Development of Cultural and Creative Peripheral Products

1) The design of products focuses on both creativity and practicality

In the design of cultural and creative peripheral products, the combination of creativity and practicality is emphasized (See **Figure 5**). By cleverly integrating elements and symbols of wharf culture, products with both artistic beauty and market demand are designed. For example, a series of emoticons, stationery, stickers, and other practical products are designed with the image of wharf workers as the prototype. Fast-selling cultural and creative products are conducive to quickly covering the market, enhancing the presence of the city's IP image, and strengthening people's recognition of the IP image [7].

2) Quality control and brand building

In the product development process, strictly control the product quality and craftsmanship to ensure that each product reflects the essence and quality of wharf culture. At the same time, strengthen brand building and promotion efforts, and enhance the market recognition and reputation of products through a unified brand image and marketing strategy.

4.6. Comprehensive Promotion of Urban Cultural Construction and Brand Promotion

1) Enrichment and diversification of cultural activities

Regularly hold various cultural activities and exhibitions themed on wharf



Figures 5. Series of design results based on Wuhan wharf culture Source: Zhang Qing, Central China Normal University.

culture, such as cultural festivals, forums, and performances. These activities showcase the unique charm and rich connotation of wharf culture, attracting more citizens and tourists to participate and feel the unique flavor of urban culture.

2) Full utilization of new media channels

Use social media, short video platforms, and other new media channels for brand promotion and cultural dissemination. Attract user attention and interaction by publishing high-quality content and creative videos; use big data analysis technology for precise positioning of the target audience to achieve precise marketing and promotion.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that Wuhan’s wharf culture has considerable potential for development and commercialization as a regional cultural IP. By undertaking a profound examination of its intrinsic nature and effecting innovative transformations into cultural and creative products and urban IP images, it is possible to imbue Wuhan’s cultural tourism industry with greater dynamism and facilitate its continued and sustainable growth. The distinctive Wuhan dockworker IP image serves as the visual foundation for a series of derivatives. The focus of future research and practice is on the application and innovation of cross-media communication design, with the objective of utilizing cultural soft power to promote the comprehensive development of Wuhan City. Concurrently, it is essential to monitor market demand and audience feedback, continuously refining product design and marketing strategies to achieve a harmonious balance of cultural

heritage and commercial value.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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