

# Message Delivery of Cultural and Creative Products Under Cultural Industries

Chi-Hsiung Chen<sup>1,2</sup> and Shih-Ching Lin<sup>2</sup>(✉)

<sup>1</sup> Department of Product Design, Chungyu Institute of Technology,  
No. 40, Yi 7th Rd., Keelung 20103, Taiwan, ROC  
chenchs@cit.edu.tw

<sup>2</sup> Graduate School of Design, Doctoral Program,  
National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, No.123,  
University Rd., Sec. 3, Douliou 64002, Yunlin, Taiwan, ROC  
malinda0810@gmail.com

**Abstract.** Taiwanese culture is diverse, rich and sophisticated. After a long-term accumulation, it also has acquired solid cultural capacity. In the meantime, in recent years, the government has actively promoted policies on the cultural and creative industry, which has stimulated the developmental trends of creative industries and created new opportunities for many cultural and creative products. As a result, it has brought a lot of negative phenomena of “cultural industry” to Taiwan. Consequently, the initially good intention of the government in promoting the cultural and creative industry has eroded away the subjectivity and creativity of culture. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore and find the balance between two aspects – “commercialization” and “preservation of the spirit of cultural connotation” – in the process of developing cultural and creative products. Through case studies and fieldwork survey, this study performed analysis based on observations of special cultural activities and sceneries in Taiwan. Questionnaires were designed through the three-level theory of cultural coding. Design patterns and indicators of cultural and creative products were formulated based on visitors’ feedbacks and will be provided as a basis of reference for future designers of cultural and creative products. There are three findings obtained from this study: (1) High degree of correlation between cultural and creative product designs and cultural activities is fundamental and will create a memory connection with the products in a consumer’s brain. (2) Experiential models and handmade designs can enhance consumers’ understanding of culture. (3) Through the three-level theory of model design – integrated thinking of the strategic level, the connotative level, and the technical level – cultural products can effectively deliver cultural messages to consumers and at the same time create cultural styles.

**Keywords:** Cultural and creative products · Cultural industry · Consumer psychology · Message delivery introduction

## 1 Introduction

The rise of a cultural economy has brought forth the development of a global cultural industry that reinterprets and transforms local cultures into cultural symbols to be applied in product design, giving birth to various cultural merchandises. In the supply aspect, the features of the merchandise of cultural creative are their differentiation and uniqueness, which are promoted in the market with highly competitive marketing strategies. In the demand aspect, the consumers' needs tend to be unstable and unpredictable.

Various types of consumers in today's market are all different; hence a barrier in communication exists when products of cultural creative merchandisers intend to enter the consumers' lives with their cultural spirit. Thus, in order to build a perfect bridge to connect the cultural connotation and the consumers' resonance, we need to find out effective models for various cultural merchandise that target different groups of consumers, and further apply these findings accordingly in product design to fulfill the consumers' expectations about these merchandise of cultural creativity.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Design and Cultural Economy

The 21st century is the time for culture, and the arrival of the age of cultural economy means the impact of culture to contemporary society is more widespread and in-depth. "Culture" and "economy," two fields that used to be considered incompatible, began to overlap, thus the rise of "Cultural Economics." This indicates that culture and economy were two unintegrated major fields, but the development of a cultural creative industry has been accelerated due to changes in society and the pressure of global culture.

Whether to increase cultural elements in some industries or industrialize certain cultures, the economic value generated by culture has impressed many, as the reviving culture brings forth prosperous economic visions, and further become important goals for a nation's cultural strategies and economics. Zukin (1995) emphasized that culture is not only capable for propelling the industries in terms of the economic aspect, but can also be used as the basis of the economy, providing product concepts for an entire line of products; the relationship between culture and economy has transformed from traditionally contradictory to mutual beneficial. Lash Urry (1994) had the same idea, indicating that a mutual beneficial relationship exists between culture and economy; culture is presented as merchandise because of economy, and economy is enhanced through culture in terms of beautification and embedded connotation, and elevates life quality and cultural recognition (Liang and Zhang 1995). Product design plays the role of cultural messenger in cultural economy, delivering cultural messages to the consumers through symbolic cultural codes and semantic con-version, such cultural merchandise also allows the consumers to foster affection toward local culture and boosts the value of culture.

### 2.2 Three-Level Theory of Cultural Codes

Design is a kind of communication; culture is the symbolic messages of products (Yang 1989). Based on research on the relationship among the three aspects of “design,” “symbols,” and “communication,” cultural symbolism for design is constructed, and the three-level theory was raised in design, namely a “technical level,” “connotation level,” and “strategic level,” as shown in Fig. 1.

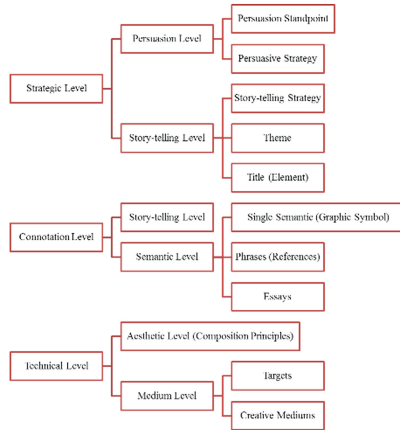


Fig. 1. Three-level Theory of Cultural Codes (Yang 1989, Illustration by the Researcher)

### 2.3 Consumer Psychology

According to the EBM model (shown in Fig. 2) constructed by Engle et al. (2001), consumers’ behaviors are the activities people engage when they acquire, consume and dispose products and services. The EBM model divides consumers’ decision-making process into seven main phases, namely, need recognition, search for information, pre-purchase alternative evaluation, purchase, consumption, post-consumption evaluation and divestment.

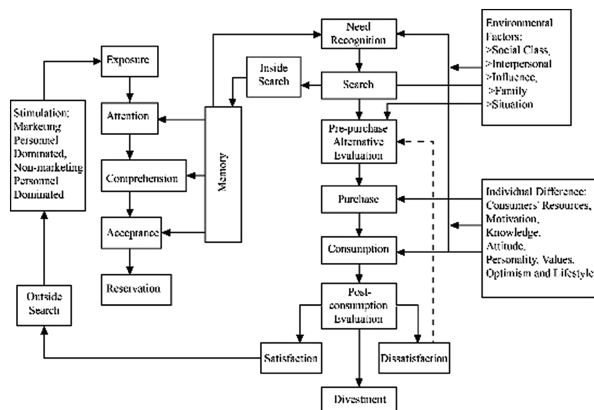


Fig. 2. Entire Model of Consumers’ Decision-making Process (Engle et al. 2001)

### 3 Research Design

This study aims to explore unique Taiwanese cultural activities in depth. At the same time, analysis was conducted on three cultural events – The Sky Lantern Festival in Pingxi, Sanyi Wood Carving Festival, and The Hakka Tung Blossom Festival, which were chosen and announced by Taiwan Tourism Bureau as unique Taiwanese cultural events. Cultural meanings and cultural elements were studied based on these three events. Field research method was used to visit and retrieve on-site relevant cultural elements. On top of that, in-depth interview was conducted with consumers to understand their cultural interpretation and awareness. After compilation and analysis, modifications on the actual design and design model were carried out. The study process flowchart is shown in Fig. 3.

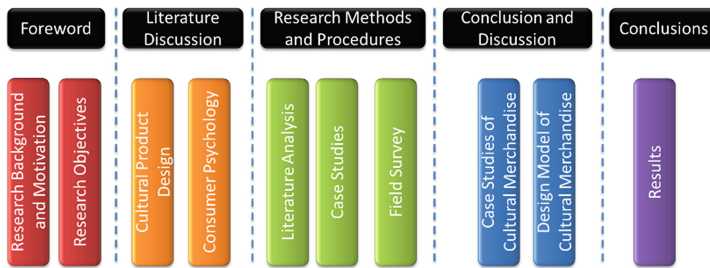


Fig. 3. Study process flowchart

### 4 Results and Discussion

According to the three major unique cultures selected by Taiwan Tourism Bureau, this study conducted case analysis on The Sky Lantern Festival in Pinxi, Sanyi Wood Carving Festival, and The Hakka Tung Blossom Festival. Through on-site visit and investigation and literature review and collection, their cultural elements were understood. In addition, based on the cultural codes theory, detailed analysis was conducted, which will be available to be used as a reference for future innovative product design.

#### 4.1 Case Introduction

**The Sky Lantern Festival in Pingxi.** According to the legend, sky lanterns have the history of about 150 years. Before the establishment of The Sky Lantern Festival in Pingxi, it was just one of the local folk activities. Since 1989, initiated by local people, it was promoted into a special festival of New Taipei City. Moreover, during the millennial New Year's Eve, a cross-century Sky Lantern Festival in Pinxi was held for the thought of remembering Taiwan after being wounded in the devastating 921 earthquake, making a big leap onto the international stage.

**Sanyi Wood Carving Festival.** Sanyi Village, Miaoli County, is an internationally renowned woodcarving village, originated in the 1920 s. In the early time, carvings were mainly made out of natural, rare wood. In early 1970, Sanyi woodcarving reached its peak period. Having won fame both at home and abroad, most products were exported. In the 1980 s, due to poor economy resulted from international energy crisis, the woodcarving industry reflected upon how woodcarving products could be leveled up into artworks. The establishment of Sanyi Wood Sculpture Museum in 1995 has gathered woodcarving practitioners from around the country to this village to learn and observe each other, from which a village that is known for its sculptures has formed.

**The Hakka Tung Blossom Festival.** Every year during the transition between spring and summer, from the north mountainous area of Changhua, Taiwan, to Hualien, Taitung in the eastern region, beautiful snow-white sceneries of Tung blossoms are seen everywhere on mountains. Especially in the Hakka villages in Taoyuan, Hsinchu, Miaoli in April and May, fluttering of snow-white pedals has formed the most beautiful scenery in Taiwan.

#### 4.2 Results of Interview Questionnaire

Based on the locations of the cultural events, this study conducted field research and analysis for three times. In addition, the design of questionnaire and in-depth consumer interview are based on the cultural codes theory and cultural and creative product design model. Random sampling method was used separately in Pingxi District in New Taipei City, Sanyi Village in Miaoli County, and Nanzhuang Village in Miaoli County to conduct interviews with consumers who went there to participate in the cultural activities. After the results of the interviews were compiled and analyzed, a structure was created as seen in Fig. 4.

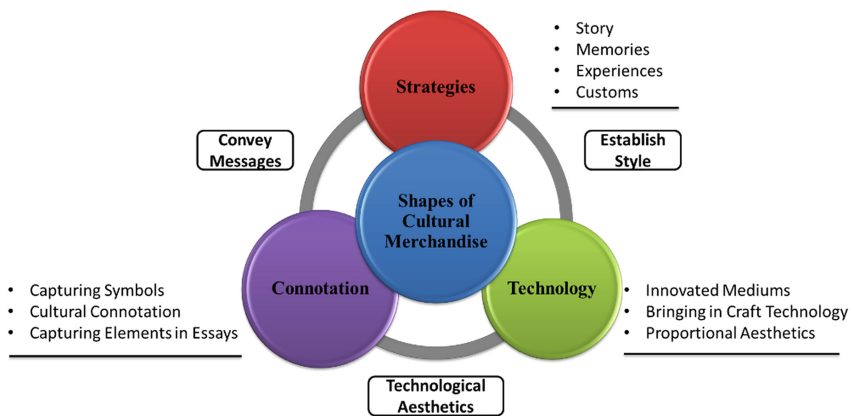








Fig. 4. A structural diagram of consumer cultural elements

According to the cultural and creative product design model, this study conducted relevant questionnaire interview to understand consumers’ interpretation of cultural products. In general, the questionnaire is divided into three properties - style aesthetics, message transmission, and craft aesthetics – to carry out in-depth interviews. Consumers have fixed impressions toward certain cultural styles. Therefore, regarding style aesthetics, the interpretation of cultural elements and the application of shapes and colors will influence consumers’ perception of cultures. In terms of message transmission, in response to the direct presentation of cultures, consumers experience awakening of their past memories. In terms of craft aesthetics, creative design thinking, introduction of traditional crafts, and introduction of innovative technologies are the main factors that attract consumers’ attention.

**4.3 The Retrieve and Application of Cultural Codes**

Through literature analysis and the three-level theory of cultural codes, this study chose three unique Taiwanese festivals – the Sky Lantern Festival in Pingxi, Sanyi Wood Carving Festival, and the Hakka Tung Blossom Festival – and conducted in-depth study. Through field research investigation, on-site participation of cultural activities, and in-depth interviews, relevant cultural codes were retrieved to carry out product design and numbering as shown in Table 1. In addition, their design concepts were organized as shown in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Design and numbers of the cultural products

Cultural events	Design practices	
The Sky Lantern Festival in Pingxi		
	A-1	A-2
Sanyi Wood Carving Festival		
	B-1	B-2
The Hakka Tung Blossom Festival		
	C-1	C-2

The design practice of this study focuses on unique Taiwanese festivals – The Sky Lantern Festival in Pingxi, Sanyi Wood Carving Festival, The Hakka Tung Blossom Festival to conduct product design. The design direction of The Sky Lantern Festival in Pingxi products uses sky lanterns as the main design element. The implications of

**Table 2.** Design concepts of the cultural products (source of data: organized by this study)

NO.	Name	Design concept
A-1	Sky Lantern Wall Lamp With Key Hooks	Utilizing the prayer image of sky lanterns with the design of wall lamp, it symbolizes leaving a light for people who come home late. It also conveys a meaning of wishing people safe wherever they go.
A-2	Sky Lantern Style Lamp For Reading	When sky lanterns rise into the sky, it symbolizes people's wishes have reached the heaven. It uses magnetic floating method to increase cultural interest.
B-1	Ruins of Long-teng Bridge Lunch Box	Having railroad meal on railway trains is a shared memory of Taiwanese people. Manufactured by Sanyi traditional carpenters, the local well-known tourist attractions are integrated on both sides based on the design of "Ruins of Long-teng Bridge". It can be used for placing chopsticks. Both the chopsticks and lid are printed with rail tracks so that consumers can associate with the historic glorious appearance of the Ruins of Long-teng Bridge.
B-2	Ruins of Long-teng Bridge Sauce Dish	Sauces are one of the soul elements of the Taiwanese gourmet snacks. Most Taiwanese people have the habit of dipping sauces while having meals. On both sides of the dish, there are "Ruins of Long-teng Bridge" chopstick stands. Using latch structure combined with the dish, when not in use, it can be easily disassembled and stored.
C-1	Tung Blossom Color Changing Cup	The design is based on the image of falling Tung flowers. Using the method of color changing to create the gradient effect.
C-2	Tung Blossom Notebook	Using Hakka dying techniques, a link of memory is made through the color changing Tung blossoms. It symbolizes the image of endless life after flowers fall off.

blessings and prayers of sky lanterns are incorporated into the product design, through which the connectivity between the cultural product and local features is enhanced. Moreover, the special significance of "bringing wishes and blessings home" increases consumers' willingness to purchase. The design direction of Sanyi wood carving products integrates the local landscape "Ruins of Long-teng Bridge" into the design process. Woodcarving and wood material decorations are moderately incorporated onto parts of the products to integrate woodcarving art with traveling experience, enhancing tourists' memory connection. The design direction of the Hakka Tung Blossom Festival products is based on the most direct way of reference, with which the image of Tung blossoms is applied onto products. In addition to the application of totems, this allows consumers to associate the products with the romantic vibe of Tung blossom rain.

#### 4.4 The Model Construction of Cultural and Creative Product Design

Based on the three-level theory of cultural codes, through participation of the cultural activities and in-depth interviews, this study aims to understand consumers' understanding and interpretation of local cultures so that the practical design of cultural products can be reestablished. According to the research results of in-depth interviews and practical design, this study focuses on the three-level theory of cultural codes and the results of design research. Based on the correlated development of the three levels – style aesthetics, message transmission, and craft techniques, through in-depth interviews, other individual factors are compiled and the model of cultural and creative product design is constructed, which is shown in Fig. 5.

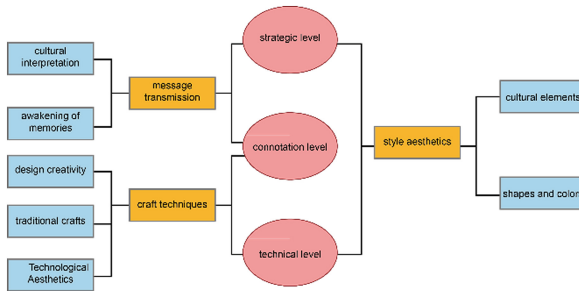


Fig. 5. The model of cultural product design

## 5 Conclusion

In the process of designing cultural products, through understanding consumers' interpretation of cultures, design conception is conducted focusing on the understanding and concepts of cultural implications. In addition to the increased intensity of cultural message transmission, customers can better resonate with the products. Through the three-level theory of cultural codes, this study conducted in-depth interviews and studies with consumers to re-examine the design model of cultural products, through which practical design is carried out. Through the results of the practical design, the study compiled the following three points of conclusion.

1. There is a high degree of correlation between cultural and creative product design and cultural activities, which enable consumers to make memory links based on products.
2. Through the integrated conception of the three-level theory model, in terms of style aesthetics, cultural product design must place emphasis on the application of cultural elements and the configuration of highly relevant shapes and colors. Regarding message transmission, cultural interpretation and memory linking must be emphasized. As for craft techniques, emphasis should be placed on design creativity, the application of traditional crafts and the introduction of innovative technologies to enhance the value, with regard to cultural spirit and industrial economic aspects, of cultural products.



3. Through the comprehensive conception of cultural product design, based on consumers' understanding and interpretation, a more accurate design can be created to effectively transmit cultural meanings.

## References

Wang, H., Ruilin, H.: *J. Des.* **16**(4) (2011)

Yang, Y.: *Cultural Foundation of Design: Design, Symbols and Communication*. Pacific (1989)

Zukin, S.: *The Culture of Cities*, pp. 1–48. Blackwell, London (1995)

Liang, B., Changyi, Z.: *J. Geogr. Sci.* **39**, 31–51 (2005)

Feng, J.: *Culture is Good Business, Design Culture Guided Reading* (2002)

Taiwan Tourism Bureau, Ministry of Transportation. <http://www.taiwan.net.tw/w1.aspx>