

Re-engaging with Cultural Engagement: Innovative Product Design of Cultural Field Experience

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Abstract. This study aims to construct the components of effective analysis of cultural products to develop a design process that is appropriate for the cultural field. The research concept is based on an integrated experience of design experiments. Targeting the actual demands of the cultural field, the cases analyzed provide pragmatic solutions. This study contributes a systematic and timely process of design in the cultural field with the use of a complex scenario, as well as the application of such a process to produce concrete results in design service. Results can aid in future planning and implementation of solutions.

Keywords: cultural field experience, cultural product, product design, experience design.

1 Introduction

Cultural assets are the key element of creating local sustainable experiences. When globalization carries on more actively, it wipes local cultures out more easily. But, when the world becomes more internationalized, local traditions appear more important. Cultures are associated with extensive economic benefits. These cultural activities, be it a festival, service experience or engagement enlivened, all are associated with the development of related products, with derivative benefits that often carry weight in respect to the propagation and preservation of a culture. What cultural product design is capable of is being the media conveying cultures and exhibiting lifestyle. When a culture spreads in the form of products, not only does it transform, employ and communicate the contents of local culture but also highlights recognition of local culture and the image that symbolizes the local place. For designers of product development, when facing the complexity of cultural field, it is necessary to effectively assess the questions and design demands to set out efficient design processes. The contribution of this study is an attempt to develop a systematic and flexible process to identify and implement a design. Results can provide designers

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with guidelines on re-examining and re-promoting cultures and giving new economy and heritage to cultures. These cultures should embrace international views and strike a balance between local demands and those of a globalized business.

2 Literature Review

The emotion and narratives in cultures are a key boost to promoting marketing locality. Where nations, cities as well as regions begin to give serious thought to the preservation and development of their own cultures, “cultures” become crucial opportunities of adding value to each region and create separation and distinctiveness of markets. Globalization, causing homogenization though, is not all negatively influential; it does create different opportunities. The emotion and narrative contents in cultures are capable of evoking resonance, which matches the contemporary consumption culture well, allowing consumers to look for unique emotional experiences and touch of stories whereby to get psychologically satisfied. That encourages local industries to reconsider the features of local cultures, based on which they develop local cultural product, whereby to assist in the development and preservation of local culture and creation of global business opportunities. As experience economy becomes a fashion, sensible elements like emotion and culture are taken into account for every operation of industry, with focus placed on the increase of total feeling of service in consumers. The abundant creativity locally in Taiwan has been treated by diverse cultures; together with the diverse and unique sense and looks of Taiwan cultures, it is the energy for adding value to cultures that can be employed to industrial development, field development, brand development and product development.

2.1 Developing Creative Tourism in Cultural Experience Field

Living today requires more than the satisfaction with materials as in the past; it needs updating emotional experiences now. What is needed first is recreational life, in which people begin to pursue creative experience in space of travel. A main form of recreation is cultural experience. Different cultural contexts and lifestyles are understood through knowing regional scene and sight, of geography and of human. Richards and Raymond define ‘creative tourism’ as *‘tourism which offers tourists the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences which are the characteristic of the destination where they are undertaken’* (2000:18). In the perspective of travelers, they are allowed more time, space and resources to interact with local places, even to learn different lifestyle. From the angle of local economic development, travel of cultural experience is a means to allow local assets, both tangible and intangible, to possibly become elements of product that can be experienced and marketed. Thus, cultural experiences can become ways of providing enjoyment, excitement and expression of emotion. Richards (2011:1237) emphasizes, the common components of creative tourism are ‘participative, authentic experiences that allow tourists to develop their creative potential and skills through contact with local people and their culture’ (Richards, 2011:1237). Therefore, the research intends to develop an

adoptable design process that helps consumers go deep into the field and creates for them profound, unique cultural impression.

2.2 Cultural Awareness and Product Development

Consumers are no longer interested in standardized product produced in mass production (Delaney et al. 2002:46); cultural differences that exist between nations, cities, fields and groups become important elements of identification used in experiences and consumption. In the cultural tour to a country, shopping is probably a simplest form of cultural experience (Hsieh & Chang, 2006). Memorabilia can inspire tourists to use them to compare with their daily life they are used to, and to widen their view of world, realizing the differences between their own culture and others, further to experience cultural life more really (Littrell, 1990). By consumption of cultural product, tourists expect to ensure unique experiences that is impossible in their home countries (Lee, Kim, Seock & Cho, 2009). Hence, in the condition of tourism development, how to effectively transform the local resources feature into product with benefit of added economic value is what the designer should contemplate when accessing to the field and presenting the design.

When designing, however, designers are also subject to their own cultures (Press and Cooper, 2003); the presence of cultural differences will force them to self-adapt based on different cultures and divide their own product (Van Raaij, 2005). Different comprehension of cultures thus becomes a distinct condition for designers when making design. They use their own feeling and perspective for the cultures, combine their practice of design, based on regional humane features for designing, employing local cultural features as design contents, to create uniqueness and differentiation in the competitive global market and increase competitiveness and identification of product (Lin, R. T., 2007). To convey cultural messages and present cultural values via product; to enhance the appeal and emotional bond of cultures through beautification by design.

3 Research Method

Based on the above context and on the product design process, this study constructed a process that suits the development of the cultural field. The aim is to provide designers with elements of effective analysis of the structure of cultural products. A case study that divided the process of design and analysis into three stages was used, as shown in Fig. 1.

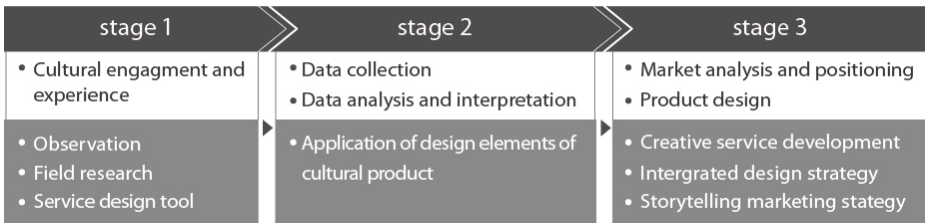


Fig. 1. Stages of the product design process to promote the cultural field

Stage 1: Selecting a specific cultural field, which was Longshan Temple in Taipei City. For this field, data were gathered, observation made and cultural context explored, gaining insights into the gaps and opportunities of the field, to propose possible concepts of creative products. Field survey was used to introduce the perspective of service design; service design tools were used to uncover field problems. With customer journey map used as design and observation tools, contemplation and search were made as to the stages of: “How does a customer become aware of the service?”, “How does a customer join the service?”, “What are the different ways a customer might use the service?”, and “How does a customer grow with the service?” to understand the gaps arising in the steps from acquiring information to entering the field and exiting it, and to present designer’s insights. The gaps identified at this stage were 1. Entering field: the tourists are not familiar with the place, do not know the course of visiting nor the meaning of the equipment used in the temple; 2. In the field: they have no ideas about the gods or the rules of visiting; 3. Exiting the field: unfamiliar with other scenic sites around the field, or about selection and sending memorabilia. Having identified these questions, the designer began to analyze existed products, whereby to understand the property of similar products in market.

Stage 2: Gathering data. This step included obtaining information on the designs of related products in the market, analyzing their design concepts and elements, and from the comparison of these elements, constructing the narrative elements that suit the development of the field culture. These elements will serve as the basis for future design ideas.

Stage 3: Working on product proposals with the use of the design elements obtained in cultural product analysis at the previous stage, with center placed at cultural emotion and idea which can be translated into stories as marketing strategies, and by developing in the directions of product functions, pattern styling, manufacturing techniques and material applications (as shown Fig. 2), respectively, or by recombining them, with expert opinions expressed in interviews taken into consideration as well as reflecting to the marketing and mass production for merchandising the relevant items. Such design process can serve as an innovated one for constructing cultural fields.

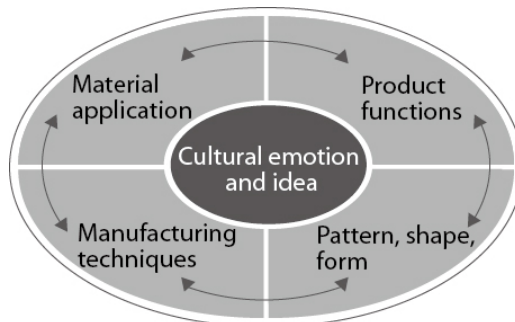


Fig. 2. Design elements of cultural products, with cultural emotion and idea as the core values from which development can be pursued in each of the directions of product functions, pattern styling, manufacturing techniques, and material application.

The design overall is about the creative product stressing on visualized information for the purpose of making the creative items that help tourists understanding the ritual culture of Longshan Temple, so that believers and travelers visiting the Temple can have recognition by way of the designed cultural product. The series of items, which was created by linking the observed gaps and the five elements under study, combines the properties of function, guide and memory. It dawns on visitors to Longshan Temple about the sequence of pilgrimage and what each deity blesses. It also includes amulets of which visitors can take one piece with them after the visit hoping for peace. The tour guide texts further include the introduction to a tour to the business areas around the Temple and marketing the history of Manga area of Taipei, where the Temple sits. All this history and experience will bear the value of reference and memory for one who has paid the visit.

4 Results and Discussions

Basically, this study focused on the search for design gaps and building of a model for commercial design. Regarding the process of service design into which cultural creative product is introduced, it was found that in the model as Fig. 1 shows, design creativity can help preserve cultural values and present distinct looks and impressions. Fig. 3 shows Case 1, a guide booklet designed for the field overall to solve the trouble for first-time visitors in knowing the sequence of pilgrimage. The booklet has contents including information on the stores around the field. The information presented renders peripheral clustering effect to this cultural field, which draws crowds and makes feedback. Case 2 represents a set of postcards that describe the processes and tools used in the design process. The concept is to communicate the beauty of crafts in Taiwan through postcards sent to people in other countries. Case 3 is a graphical representation of lottery poems. The idea was to connect tradition and modern graphics by creating new characters for each poem on the basis of the image of a "dragon," a representative symbol of prosperity in Chinese culture. Rendering dragons with a symbolic image creates a character that represents novelty. These are only a few examples alongside many other items yet to develop.

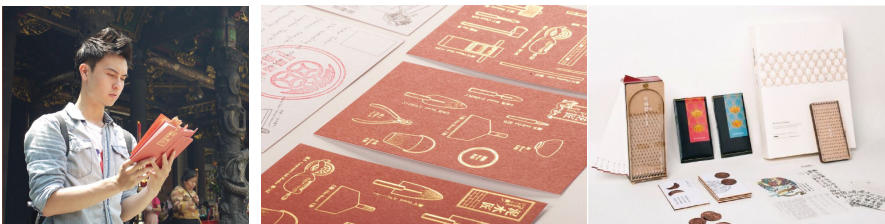


Fig. 3. Three design cases that introduce innovative cultural products in which the design elements of cultural product are applied

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The whole design process begins by field observation, which, with the assistance of service design tools, allows the designer to uncover and catalogue more systematically the gaps existing in the field, whereby to effectively shorten the time of early-stage design and observation without wild-goose chase-like exploration. That is followed by steps of design process, which reorganizes elements employable in product design through field analysis. This is literally building the design database for cultural field to become basic data for extended application in future design. In establishing the design items, the observational results in Stage 1 are considered. The identified gaps are solved by designing, and relevant design factors are comprehensively compared. The directions of emotions and ideas, product functions, pattern styling, manufacturing techniques, and material application are also considered to produce the final design products at the final stage. These steps comprise the process of product design and development for the cultural field of Longshan Temple (as shown Fig. 4).

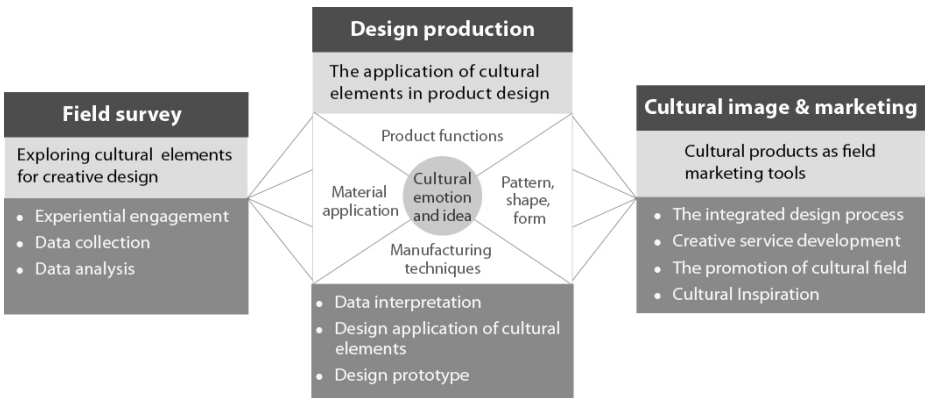


Fig. 4. Constructs in the process of product design and development for the cultural field of Longshan Temple

The purpose of design processes is to minimize a black box process and thus make all design steps transparent. Unquestionably, the creativity and ingenuity of a design ultimately rely on the designer's cumulative experiences and distinctive insights. However, we will still attempt to clarify the process steps of design in the hope of shortening the trial period involved. In addition, we will be able to allow systematic assessments and analysis of the resources involved in local features during future planning on field tourism by local regions. This aim can be achieved through related tools and the design directions reorganized in this study, so that maximum benefits can be achieved.

Acknowledgments. The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support for this research provided by the National Science Council of Taiwan under Grants No. NSC-101-2410-H-224-041.

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