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Article

Research on Multidimensional Design of Huaiyang Mud Dog Cultural and Creative Products Based on the Taihao Mausoleum Temple Fair

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Abstract: Huaiyang Mud Dog, as a national-level intangible cultural heritage, carries the primitive genes of Fuxi culture and serves as a unique cultural symbol in the Central Plains region. The Taihao Mausoleum Temple Fair attracts over 8 million tourists annually, providing a natural sales scenario and cultural dissemination window for Mud Dog. However, the current sales model of Mud Dog at the temple fair remains at the "street stall" stage, with problems such as single product forms, weak brand awareness, and extensive consumption experience. This paper takes the Taihao Mausoleum Temple Fair as the core scenario, integrates brand design and marketing theories, and proposes a design path for deep integration of branding and temple fair economy. The research constructs implementable plans from six dimensions: brand positioning, brand identity system, product strategy, pricing strategy, channel strategy, and promotion strategy, and explores innovative models of experience marketing and private traffic operation, aiming to provide systematic theoretical and practical paths for the transformation and upgrading of Mud Dog from traditional handicraft to modern cultural brand.

Keywords: Huaiyang Mud Dog; Taihao Mausoleum Temple Fair; Brand Design; Marketing; Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance

1. Introduction

Huaiyang Mud Dog is a traditional handicraft originating from Huaiyang District, Zhoukou City, Henan Province. Its historical roots can be traced to the mythological narrative of Fuxi and Nüwa creating humans from clay, which has led to its recognition as the "Number One Dog Under Heaven" and a "living fossil" of early Chinese civilization. In 2014, Huaiyang Mud Dog was officially included in the fourth batch of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative Items List [1]. Its forms are ancient and symbolic, typically featuring a black base decorated with colors such as red, yellow, white, and green. The decorative patterns embody profound cultural meanings related to reproductive worship and totemic beliefs, making it an important "living artefact" for the study of prehistoric culture [2].

Taihao Mausoleum, as a central site associated with Fuxi culture, hosts an annual temple fair from the second day of the second lunar month to the third day of the third lunar month. The event has recorded peak single-day visitor numbers exceeding 820,000, reflecting its significant cultural and social influence [3]. During the temple fair, Huaiyang Mud Dog, together with compressed steamed buns and cloth tigers, is recognized as one

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of the "Three Treasures of Taihao Mausoleum" and serves as a popular cultural souvenir for visitors [4].

However, the current development of Huaiyang Mud Dog faces several challenges. From a branding perspective, there exists a phenomenon of "high traffic but weak brand identity," as visitors often lack lasting recognition or memory of the product after purchase [5]. From a marketing perspective, the product remains at the level of basic transactions, lacking experiential engagement and failing to convey deeper cultural value. From an industrial perspective, issues of "inheritance without innovation" persist, as artisans rely primarily on temporary stall-based sales during the temple fair, while younger generations show limited interest in continuing the craft, resulting in the absence of sustainable development models [6].

Against this background, the core research question of this study is how to utilize the Taihao Mausoleum temple fair as a central scenario, integrate brand design and marketing theories, and construct a systematic development pathway for Mud Dog cultural and creative products that achieves both cultural dissemination and economic value [7]. The study is grounded in two key theoretical perspectives: brand design and marketing. The former focuses on establishing cultural identity through brand positioning, visual identity systems, and narrative construction, while the latter emphasizes market-oriented strategies, including the 4P framework (product, price, place, promotion), as well as experiential marketing and private-domain traffic operations. Together, these perspectives aim to form a multidimensional and integrated design approach that balances cultural depth with practical applicability [8].

2. Current Situation of Mud Dog in the Context of the Taihao Mausoleum Temple Fair

During the Taihao Mausoleum Temple Fair, Mud Dog sales are mainly concentrated inside and outside the Meridian Gate and along the main thoroughfares of the temple fair, primarily in temporary stalls. According to the author's on-site field investigation and observations in March 2026, these stalls mostly use plastic sheets spread on the ground and simple shelves for display, lacking a unified image design. From the perspective of brand touchpoint management, this phenomenon indicates a systematic lack of brand experience. Sales time is highly concentrated from early February to early March in the lunar calendar, showing significant seasonality, reflecting the structural problems of a single product line and over-reliance on a single scenario [9].

Analyzing the product form, the Mud Dog sold at the temple fair currently presents the following characteristics: First, product homogenization is prominent. The market mainly features traditional shapes such as Ancestor Monkey, Unicorn, Nine-headed Bird, etc., with prices concentrated in the 5-20 RMB range, lacking tiered design for different consumer groups [10]. Second, packaging is crude, mostly wrapped in newspaper or plastic bags, failing to convey brand value or meet the demands of the gift market. Third, quality varies greatly. Due to the lack of uniform quality standards, some products are roughly made, negatively impacting the overall image [11].

From the perspective of consumer segmentation, tourists can be classified into three categories: The main consumer group consists of middle-aged and elderly pilgrims and prayer-offering crowds, whose consumption motivation is mainly prayer souvenirs, focusing on the product's "spiritual power" and "symbolic meaning." The potential consumer group includes young tourists, parent-child families, and study tour groups, with consumption motivations including curiosity, cultural experience, and gift-giving [12]. This group has higher requirements for product design, interactivity, and shareability. Additionally, there is a small group of culture enthusiasts and collectors who seek the artistic and collection value of handcrafted pieces by inheritors.

In summary, the current sales of Mud Dog at the Taihao Mausoleum Temple Fair have three core problems: From a brand design perspective, there is a lack of clear brand

positioning, systematic brand identity, and coherent brand narrative; From a marketing perspective, the product strategy is singular, the price range is too narrow, channels are extensive, and promotion is lacking; From a business model perspective, there is a lack of industrial chain integration and value chain upgrading. These problems constitute the logical starting point and practical target of this research (As shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2).



Figure 1. Sales Scene of Huaiyang Mud Dog Cultural and Creative Products (Photo taken by author).



Figure 2. Author's Field Research Scene (Photo taken by author).

3. Brand Design Strategy: Building the "Taihao Mausoleum · Mud Dog" Cultural Brand

3.1. Brand Positioning: Establishing a Unique Market Position

Brand positioning constitutes the core of brand strategy, addressing the fundamental questions of identity, target audience, and differentiation [13]. Based on the cultural resources of Taihao Mausoleum and the product characteristics of the Mud Dog, this study proposes the following brand positioning framework [14].

The brand name may be defined as either *"The Clay Footprints of Taihao"* or *"Fuxi's Gift."* The term "Taihao" directly references the geographical and cultural origin, while "clay footprints" highlights both the material attributes and the symbolic implication of cultural traces associated with Fuxi. Alternatively, *"Fuxi's Gift"* conveys the core value proposition of a culturally significant souvenir rooted in the Taihao Mausoleum tradition. The overall brand tone is defined as "ancient yet contemporary, mysterious yet accessible, and folk-oriented yet refined." This positioning seeks to preserve cultural authenticity while aligning with modern aesthetic expectations, thereby achieving a balance between tradition and contemporary design [15].

Target market positioning follows a differentiation strategy. The core market consists of pilgrims and worship-oriented visitors, emphasizing the concept of a "sacred object for

blessings." The growth market includes young tourists and parent-child groups, focusing on the idea of "cultural experience." The niche market targets cultural enthusiasts and collectors, positioning the product as an "art collectible."

During the "14th Five-Year Plan" period, Zhoukou City has intensified efforts to develop local cultural resources, resulting in the launch of nearly 200 types of "Hongzhou Li" cultural and creative products. Within this context, "Taihao Mausoleum · Mud Dog" can be positioned as a sub-brand within the "Hongzhou Li" system, thereby contributing to a broader brand matrix and enhancing overall cultural branding effectiveness.

3.2. Brand Identity System: Constructing a Unified Visual Language

The brand identity system represents the visualization of brand positioning, encompassing key elements such as logo, color, graphics, and packaging. The logo design may draw on the most representative motif of the Mud Dog-the facial ornamentation of the Ancestor Monkey-and integrate it with the architectural outline of the Taihao Mausoleum. As a core image within Mud Dog iconography, the Ancestor Monkey symbolizes human origins and carries cultural meanings associated with early forms of ancestor worship [16]. Combining this motif with the architectural imagery of Taihao Mausoleum enables the layering of cultural symbols, thereby enhancing both the cultural depth and recognizability of the brand.

The color system should retain the traditional scheme of a black base combined with five vibrant colors characteristic of Mud Dog design. The black base conveys a sense of mystery and solemnity, while colors such as red, yellow, green, and white create strong visual contrast. From a cultural semiotic perspective, black corresponds to "Yin," representing containment and origin, whereas the brighter colors embody "Yang," signifying vitality and activation. Red and yellow are associated with the elements of fire and earth, while green and white correspond to wood and metal, collectively reflecting the cyclical logic of the Five Elements. By standardizing these color values, a distinctive brand color system can be established and consistently applied across various brand touchpoints [17].

Auxiliary graphics can be developed by abstracting and simplifying typical Mud Dog forms-such as the Ancestor Monkey, unicorn, nine-headed bird, straw-hat tiger, and monkey-headed swallow-into a cohesive visual pattern library. These graphic elements can be applied to packaging, promotional materials, and cultural product derivatives, ensuring visual consistency while allowing for sufficient variation and adaptability.

The packaging system should be structured across three tiers to address different consumption scenarios. The basic version may utilize a kraft paper box with a branded sleeve, maintaining low production costs and targeting products in the lower price range. The gift version can adopt a wooden box accompanied by a cultural booklet, including product descriptions and explanations of symbolic meanings and craftsmanship, suitable for higher-value items. The experiential version may feature a portable transparent package combined with a DIY painting kit, including unpainted Mud Dog forms, pigments, brushes, and instructional materials, designed particularly for parent-child interaction. In this context, packaging functions not only as a means of product protection but also as a medium of brand communication and a carrier of cultural meaning.

3.3. Brand Narrative: Telling the Cultural Story of Mud Dog

Brand narrative serves as a critical bridge for establishing emotional connections between a brand and its consumers. Mud Dog possesses rich cultural resources that can be mobilized for narrative construction, including the mythological legend of Fuxi and Nüwa creating humans from clay, as well as the historical evolution of Mud Dog from a ritual object to a carrier of ancestor worship beliefs. Additional narrative resources include the symbolic meanings embedded in the eight major Mud Dog forms, the

intergenerational transmission of craftsmanship, and the contrast between the dedication of traditional artisans and the innovative practices of younger inheritors.

Based on these cultural assets, a three-layer narrative system can be developed. The core layer focuses on the origin stories of Fuxi culture and Mud Dog, establishing a strong cultural foundation for the brand. The intermediate layer interprets the forms, symbolic meanings, and craftsmanship processes of Mud Dog, thereby communicating the brand's professional and cultural value. The peripheral layer highlights the stories of artisans and user experiences, enhancing emotional engagement and relatability.

These narrative elements can be disseminated through multiple media formats, including brand manuals, product descriptions, short videos, and live streaming platforms. In this way, consumers are not only purchasing a product but also engaging with and carrying forward a cultural narrative.

3.4. Brand Management Mechanism: Ensuring the Continuous Accumulation of Brand Value

Brand building requires strong institutional support. It is recommended to establish a "Taihao Mausoleum Mud Dog Brand Management Committee," composed of representatives from the Taihao Mausoleum scenic area, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center, and practitioner groups. This body would be responsible for brand authorization, quality control, and the standardization of visual identity and product specifications. Products that meet established quality standards would be granted the right to use the official brand logo. In addition, a product traceability system should be implemented, whereby each branded item includes information on the maker and production date, accessible through QR code scanning.

At present, the development of Mud Dog craftsmanship reflects both traditional continuity and innovative exploration. On one hand, there exist practitioners who adhere closely to traditional artistic styles and techniques; on the other hand, there are emerging approaches that integrate technological innovation and intellectual property strategies, such as the "studio + household" production model. The brand authorization mechanism should therefore take into account the diversity of practitioner groups, establishing differentiated standards that both preserve traditional craftsmanship and encourage innovation.

4. Marketing Strategy: Achieving Commercial Transformation from Product to Brand

Brand design solves the problem of "who I am," while marketing needs to solve the problem of "how to let consumers know me, buy me, and remember me." The following discussion unfolds from four dimensions: product, price, place, and promotion.

4.1. Product Strategy: Building a Differentiated Product Matrix

Entry-level products (priced at 10-30 RMB) target pilgrims and general tourists. Product forms include traditional small items and zodiac-themed series. These products function primarily to drive market awareness through high sales volume and act as entry points for consumer engagement. For example, zodiac-inspired series integrating Mud Dog forms with symbolic themes such as prosperity and success demonstrate the potential for combining traditional imagery with contemporary consumer preferences.

Experience-level products (priced at 30-80 RMB) target parent-child families and study tour groups. Product forms include DIY painting kits and clay modelling experience packages. According to data from the Huaiyang District Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center, the number of Mud Dog practitioners has exceeded 5,000, with over 1,000 workshops and more than 1,000 individuals trained annually. In the past five years, experiential teaching activities have engaged over 100,000 participants, providing a strong foundation for the development of experience-based products.

Gift-level products (priced at 80-200 RMB) target young tourists and gift-giving consumers. Product forms include themed gift boxes and co-branded editions. These may

involve collaborations with other regional intangible cultural heritage products to develop integrated cultural gift sets, or partnerships with the Taihao Mausoleum scenic area to create location-specific souvenir packages. Such strategies enhance product value through cultural integration and branding synergy.

Collection-level products (priced above 200 RMB) target cultural enthusiasts and collectors. Product forms include handcrafted works and limited-edition items. High-quality pieces created within traditional craftsmanship systems can be positioned as art collectibles. These products may adopt pre-sale or limited-release models to enhance scarcity, perceived value, and collectability.

4.2. Pricing Strategy: Establishing Clear Price Anchors

The current pricing of Mud Dog products is concentrated within the 5-20 RMB range, which is insufficient to meet diverse consumer demands or support brand premiumization. To address this limitation, a four-tier pricing system is proposed: entry-level products (10-30 RMB) to drive market awareness through volume; experience-level products (30-80 RMB) to enhance brand identity through emotional engagement; gift-level products (80-200 RMB) to expand consumption scenarios through gifting functions; and collection-level products (above 200 RMB) to establish a high-end brand image through scarcity and craftsmanship value.

In terms of pricing management, a hybrid model combining unified pricing and authorized pricing is recommended. Official brand stores and online flagship channels should implement standardized retail pricing to ensure price stability and brand consistency. Authorized distributors may adjust prices within a defined range, subject to reporting and approval mechanisms. At the same time, brand premium capacity can be gradually strengthened through strategies such as packaging enhancement, cultural value integration, and limited-edition releases.

4.3. Place Strategy: Omni-Channel Integration of Online and Offline Platforms

Offline channels should be structured around the Taihao Mausoleum Temple Fair, forming a "one core, two wings" spatial layout. The core zone, located within the main ceremonial area, should function as a flagship brand space for image display and high-end product sales, featuring a unified visual identity. The eastern zone should target mass consumption and interactive experiences, with standardized stalls and dedicated experience areas. The western zone should focus on younger consumers and cultural derivatives, establishing a creative marketplace that combines Mud Dog products with related cultural goods and leisure-oriented consumption scenarios.

Beyond the temple fair, offline expansion can include collaborations with transportation hubs, cultural institutions, and tourism networks. For example, brand counters can be established in major railway stations, while partnerships with museums and scenic sites can support co-branded retail spaces. Integration with study tour programmes can further extend experiential consumption.

Online channels should complement offline distribution through a digital ecosystem. Each product package may include a QR code linking to a dedicated mini-program, providing functions such as cultural interpretation, craft demonstration videos, online purchasing, and experience booking. In addition, official flagship stores can be established on major e-commerce platforms, while short-video and social media channels can be used to generate traffic through content-driven engagement.

4.4. Promotion Strategy: Integrated Communication and Seasonal Marketing

Promotion should be understood not only as a pricing mechanism but also as a means of brand communication and user engagement. A strategy of seasonal and event-based marketing is recommended. During the peak temple fair period, limited-edition products can be introduced to create scarcity and stimulate attention. Topic-driven

marketing strategies-such as highlighting limited handcrafted editions-can enhance consumer interest and brand visibility.

At other key periods, targeted campaigns can be implemented. For example, "Intangible Cultural Heritage Experience Weeks" during major holidays can combine product sales with educational activities; summer programmes can focus on parent-child engagement through themed workshops; and traditional festivals can be leveraged to introduce culturally themed promotional packages. Pre-sale strategies for major holidays can further strengthen demand planning and brand anticipation.

In terms of integrated communication, a multi-platform approach is essential. Short-video platforms can be used to disseminate experiential content related to the temple fair and Mud Dog craftsmanship; collaborations with cultural influencers can enhance visibility; on-site advertising within the scenic area can reinforce brand presence; and media coverage can further expand public awareness.

5. Experience Marketing and Private Traffic Operation: Creating Deep Consumption Value

5.1. Experience Marketing Design: Transforming Consumption into Memorable Experiences

Experience marketing emphasizes the creation of memorable consumption scenarios that foster emotional connections between brands and consumers. Based on the context of the Taihao Mausoleum Temple Fair, the following experience-oriented activities are proposed.

(1) "Create Your Own Mud Dog at Taihao Mausoleum" Experience

Located in the eastern experience zone, this activity takes the form of a 30-minute workshop guided by an inheritor, during which participants learn basic shaping techniques. The activity is priced at approximately 50 RMB per person and may include firing and mailing services. Participants can receive their finished work along with an experience certificate. Such hands-on engagement enables visitors to connect tactilely with traditional craftsmanship, fostering deeper cultural understanding and emotional resonance.

(2) "Tracing Mud Dog" Stamp-Collection Activity

Five check-in points are established within the temple fair, each corresponding to a Mud Dog motif (e.g., Ancestor Monkey, Unicorn, Nine-headed Bird). Visitors who collect all stamps can exchange them for a limited-edition badge. Photo backdrops at each station encourage social sharing, thereby generating secondary dissemination. This activity integrates gamification and social interaction, effectively extending visitor engagement time and enhancing participatory enjoyment.

(3) "Mud Dog Blessing Ceremony" Cultural Experience

In a designated area of the core zone, a ritualized activity combining painting and blessing is introduced. Visitors purchase unpainted Mud Dog forms, decorate them under guidance, and participate in a blessing ritual before taking them home. The traditional five-color system symbolically corresponds to the "Five Blessings," thereby enriching the cultural meaning of the product and transforming consumption into a ritualized cultural experience.

5.2. Private Traffic Operation: From One-Time Visitors to Long-Term Users

While the temple fair generates substantial offline traffic, such engagement is often temporary. Private traffic operation aims to convert short-term visitors into long-term user communities.

User Conversion Mechanism:

Each product package includes a QR code linking to brand-operated digital platforms (e.g., private groups or official accounts). Incentives such as coupons or small gifts encourage users to join, facilitating the transition from offline consumers to online participants.

Content Operation Strategy:

Regular content updates-including cultural knowledge, product releases, inheritor stories, and event announcements-help maintain user engagement. Exclusive benefits such as priority access to limited products and special discounts further strengthen user loyalty.

User Segmentation Strategy:

Users are categorized based on consumption behavior and engagement levels. High-value users receive personalized services, such as customized products and exclusive experiences, while potential users are encouraged to convert through targeted incentives.

The overall objective is to transform transactional relationships into sustained cultural engagement and emotional identification.

6. Multi-Party Collaboration and Effectiveness Evaluation

6.1. Stakeholder Collaboration Mechanism

The successful implementation of the proposed framework depends on coordinated collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including practitioners, temple fair organizers, local government, and cultural enterprises.

Practitioners:

Their role should evolve from producers to brand partners. Measures include establishing stable cooperation mechanisms, providing subsidies for participation in experiential activities, and introducing incentive systems to encourage innovation. Scalable production models that combine craftsmanship with industrial processes demonstrate strong development potential.

Temple Fair Management:

Their role should shift from venue providers to platform operators. This includes optimizing stall management systems, standardizing visual presentation, and incorporating Mud Dog-related activities into official event programming.

Local Government:

Government bodies should act as resource integrators by incorporating Mud Dog branding into cultural and tourism development policies, facilitating educational programs, and supporting media promotion. Existing policy frameworks linking cultural branding with employment and industrial development provide strong institutional support.

Cultural and Creative Enterprises:

Their role should expand from distributors to co-developers. By introducing professional design teams, sharing distribution channels, and co-developing cultural products, enterprises can enhance both innovation capacity and market reach.

6.2. Effectiveness Evaluation System

The effectiveness of the proposed strategy can be assessed across two key dimensions:

Brand Equity:

- Brand awareness (recognition rate among visitors)
- Brand favorability (positive evaluation ratio)
- Brand loyalty (repurchase rate and recommendation intention)
- Brand association (core impressions linked to the brand)

Market Performance:

- Annual sales volume and growth rate
- Product profit margins
- Market share within temple fair souvenirs
- Repurchase rate and customer retention

Over a three-year implementation period, the following outcomes are anticipated: increased product sales, improved practitioner income levels, significant growth in

experiential participation, expanded media exposure, cultivation of younger practitioners, continuous product innovation, and a higher proportion of branded product sales.

7. Conclusion

This study, centered on the Taihao Mausoleum in Huaiyang, proposes an integrated framework combining brand design and marketing strategies to support the contemporary transformation of Mud Dog. Rather than repositioning it as either a purely artistic object or a detached commercial product, the study emphasizes preserving cultural authenticity while adapting to modern consumption patterns and aesthetic preferences.

Brand design establishes a clear cultural identity and coherent visual language, enabling recognition, memorability, and dissemination. Marketing strategies—through the systematic application of product, price, place, and promotion—facilitate purchasing, experience, and identification. Experience marketing enhances value beyond the product itself, while private traffic operation transforms temporary visitors into long-term participants.

As a central cultural space, the Taihao Mausoleum Temple Fair embodies a continuous cultural lineage from mythological origins to contemporary practice. The significance of this research lies in enriching this cultural ecosystem, diversifying product forms, and encouraging broader public engagement. By promoting the transition of Mud Dog from a low-value souvenir to a culturally meaningful brand, extending its presence beyond seasonal contexts, and broadening its audience across age groups, this study outlines a feasible pathway for the sustainable and living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

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