

Research on Innovative Design of Regional Cultural Tourism Souvenirs in Penang

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ABSTRACT

Regional culture souvenirs are the combination of regional culture and souvenirs, the purpose is to enhance the value of souvenirs and inherit the local traditional culture. Regional culture is the most important part of tourism and one of the key links in people's travel experience. The aim of this paper is to explore the problems and opportunities in the design of souvenirs in Penang. Observation was adopted to analyse the status quo of souvenir design in Penang. Meanwhile, case analysis is used to deeply study the design characteristics of the most popular souvenirs among tourists and understand the needs of tourists. The results show that tourists prefer souvenirs that are beautiful with practical value and reflect the local characteristics of the culture. However, souvenir design in Penang has some problems such as fewer types, lack of creativity and regional characteristics. Souvenir design is still in the initial stage of development in Penang, and there is a large market vacancy. This paper puts forward the innovative design suggestions for souvenirs in Penang and hopes to provide designers with new ideas for the combination of regional culture elements and modern tourism souvenirs and provide a better tourism experience for tourists.

Keywords: *Cultural Tourism souvenirs, Penang, Regional Cultural, Souvenirs Design*

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of the social economy, people's consumption levels and life quality continue to improve, tourism has gradually become one of the significant ways of leisure. Until 2020, tourism is one of the world's highest economic contributors (McCabe & Qiao, 2020). As we all know, Malaysia is a multicultural country, Penang is one of the thirteen federal states of Malaysia which is located in the northwest of Malaysia. In reality, Penang is well-known for its multicultural and harmonious development with the rapid development of tourism. It is worth mentioning that George Town of Penang is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site so that Penang's tourism industry has been more prosperous (Connolly, 2017). However, with the integrated development of culture and tourism industries, the development of cultural tourism consumption has gradually begun, and people gradually have a deeper pursuit of the content and form of tourism consumption. As an important link between tourism consumption and promoting tourism economic growth, tourism souvenirs have gradually become the key to tourism design and planning in various cities.

Penang has unique natural resources and culture resources with a strong competitiveness as a global tourism city (Dina Miza, 2024). Nevertheless, the development of tourist souvenirs in Penang is unchanged with very few types and lack of creativity. More importantly, most souvenirs do not reflect the distinct regional characteristics of the culture of Penang. As a result, these problems have led to the disconnect between local souvenirs and tourist needs that are unable to attract tourists and seriously affect the design and development of tourist souvenirs in Penang. Actually, combining the regional culture with souvenirs creativity is very helpful to enhance the regional tourism economy and competitiveness (Kunasekaran et.al., 2015). This study combines the exploration of regional culture elements in Penang with the development of tourist souvenirs to explore the innovative design methods of culture tourism souvenirs and bring breakthroughs to the tourist souvenir market in Penang.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous scholars have studied the definition of regional culture and tourist souvenirs, and some studies have deeply explored Penang's cultural resources. As a matter of fact, most of the literature on Penang culture tourism souvenirs focuses on the analysis of tourists' consumption motivations or travel motivations. On the basis of understanding the research conclusions of souvenir design, we shall try to collect and analyse tourists' consumption needs and design challenges from this various information.

Regional cultural tourism souvenirs and design

Regional culture is a cultural branch of a national culture that refers to a regional culture with local characteristics formed in a fixed area over a long historical period. Regional culture can be caused by differences in climate, food customs, living habits, and others, different places carry different cultures (Duan et al., 2023). In recent years, regional culture tourism has gradually become one of the important pillar industries in various countries.

Lots of literature shows that the development of the tourist souvenirs are an essential carrier of regional cultural dissemination and one of the significant sources of tourism economic income (Lacher, 2011). In general, culture tourism souvenirs should have the function of conveying regional culture. The integration of unique regional traditional culture and souvenir design not only promotes cultural exchange and inheritance but also drives the development of the local tourism economy (Chang, Hung & Tang,

2022). Therefore, to make souvenirs more valuable, designers must integrate them with local regional cultural elements and think about how to reflect local characteristics (Zeng, 2017).

Ardani et al. (2020) pointed out that product quality and process are the biggest factors affecting satisfaction. Masset & Decrop (2021) suggests that designers should focus their souvenir design on practicality and convenience, which can be used in various scenarios. Tourism souvenir design is a process of symbolising local cultural elements (Huang & Sun, 2006). Yang (2020) pointed out that the design of cultural souvenirs should not only fully consider the interaction, materials, structure and shape, but also pay attention to the communication and expression of culture. The stronger the cultural characteristics of souvenirs are more attractive to tourists to improve the purchase intention, with a higher market value.

Penang Tourism Souvenirs

Penang is a popular tourist destination in Malaysia due to its unique culture, architectural identity, and diversity of heritage arts and crafts (Connolly, 2020). In the tourism industry, Penang is known as 'The Pearl of the Orient' (Chai, 2011). A large amount of literature about Penang's tourism focuses on the study of tourist consumption motivation factors or tourist motivations for travelling. A study adopted in 2015 by Yousefi and Marzuki used the push and pull motivation theory as a conceptual framework to determine the travel motivations of international tourists to Penang. The results show that knowledge exploring and historical culture are regarded as the most important push factors and the most important pull factors respectively. At the same time, an analysis of tourists' consumption motivation factors at Penang night market found that the most significant motivating factor is the product itself, and the opportunity to interact with locals and understand local culture are also important factors among tourists (Som et al., 2010). A study showed that most international tourists visiting Penang tourist attractions are young people around the age of 20. The desire to explore knowledge and innovation is the driving factor attracting tourists to Penang, and the main attraction factor is the regional historical and cultural heritage possessed by each state (Hasnizam et al., 2022). According to many studies on Penang tourists' consumption motivations and tourism motivations, it is not difficult to find that tourists attach great importance to the uniqueness of regional culture.

Although most of the literature indicates that souvenir design should pay attention to cultural connotations, there are few studies focusing on Penang tourist souvenirs, especially the design. Some of the literature focuses on Malaysian tourism souvenirs. Ibrahim (2007) proposed that designers should strive to show Malaysian characteristics in product design, such as buildings, gates, statues, lamp posts, craft items such as pewter and jewellery. Razali et al. (2021) conducted research on the characteristics of product design that can represent Malaysian culture, aiming to find general keywords related to the components of culture, and the research conclusions are religion, fashion, food, festival, architecture, art and craft, etc as well as traditional sports and games. Rakhim and Vermol (2020) Preserving and promoting Malay folklore through memorabilia.

To sum up, the research on culture tourism souvenirs in Penang has not formed a system, and the academic content is relatively scattered. There are very few studies on Penang's regional culture elements from a design perspective. Therefore, further discussion and research are necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis of Penang's regional culture elements to explore innovative souvenirs design methods.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative method. In order to achieve the overall aim, this research was done by; (1) field observations on the current Penang souvenir design and tourists' demand for souvenirs, (2) verify the hypothesis through case studies. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argued that qualitative research researchers study things in their natural context in an attempt to give meaning to phenomena. For this project, observation is useful to acquire the characteristics and purchase intentions of tourists. What's more, the feel, texture and smell of products that cannot be captured by online data. In addition, the case study is an effective way to find the differences and commonalities of souvenirs from excellent cases. The entire corresponding steps are explained briefly (shown in Figure 1):

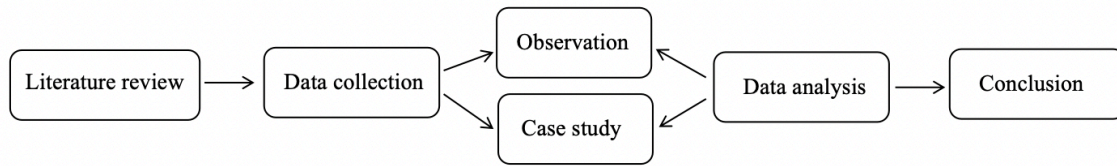


Figure 1. Procedure of methodology
(Source: Author)

Field observation

An initial observation of the current design of cultural tourism souvenirs in Penang was conducted by researchers. Firstly, The researchers looked for places in Penang that had a large number of souvenirs for sale. Then, select the popular shops to observe the souvenirs and consumption behaviours of tourists. Finally, chosen high-sales of souvenirs for design analysis from an appearance, function and cultural perspective (shown in Figure 2). Actually, field observation is a qualitative research method borrowed from anthropology, which refers to intuitive and partial investigation on the spot in order to understand the truth and development process of a thing (Mulhall, 2003).

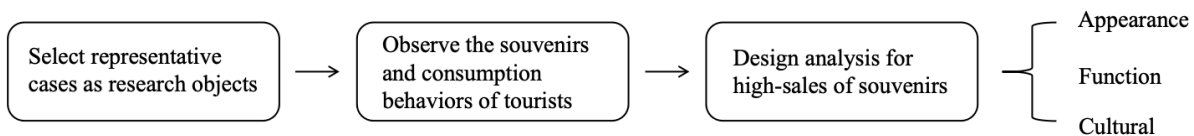


Figure 2. Procedure of observation
(Source: Author)

The researchers conducted third times of field observation to souvenir shops and tourist consumption behaviours near the art street in Penang from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. :

2023.11.20-2023.11.25: The first time to acquire the souvenir sales of souvenir shops in the form of non-participation observation; According to the initial observation, some popular shops were selected as the research samples, which is conducive to the accuracy of the conclusion.

2024.03.01-2024.03.03: The second time was to participate in the observation and interact with tourists and owners of souvenir shops, ask about relevant information and understand their views and experiences.

2024.03.10-2024.03.15: The third time is structured observation, which is revisited to verify the accuracy of the information collected in the previous two stages.

In the first non-participatory observation, more than 30 souvenir shops were visited, and 12 popular shops were selected. Specific stores are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Popular souvenir shops in Penang

Nala	Betterthanblouses	Shop Howard	Misbuyit	14 Living Story	Sukha
Reroran	Tropical Batik Collection	Paradise Craft	Artlane	Tai Keh Ho Trading	Love Lane

(Source: Author)

The author summarised the souvenirs sold in Penang shops into four categories by design: daily necessities (refrigerator magnets, postcards, notebooks, pens, bowls and other daily necessities); decorative souvenirs (pendants such as key chains, ornaments, jewellery, etc.); shoes and clothing (T-shirts, hats, canvas bags, clothing); food and local specialties. According to the analysis, 21 souvenirs with high sales were identified (shown in Table 2). It is not difficult to see that colourful souvenirs and regional patterns are the most popular.

Table 2. Souvenirs with high sales in Penang



(Source: Author)

The second observation adopts participatory observation and communicates with tourists to evaluate their views on the souvenirs design from the aspects of appearance, function and cultural. The results are shown in Table 3:

Table 3. Tourists feedback of souvenirs in Penang

Souvenir appearance:	Modeling:	Lack of creativity
	Color:	Colorful type is more popular
	Patterns:	Batikt patterns, Nyonya patterns and mural patterns are the most popular
	Material:	Most of the materials are mainly ceramic, metal and cloth
Souvenir function:	Just for decorations, lack of practicality, daily necessities are more popular	
Souvenir cultural:	Few types of regional culture and simple ways of cultural expression	

(Source: Author)

According to the first and second observations, tourists prefer souvenirs with regional cultural characteristics, such as Nyonya culture and products with local batik cultural patterns. This survey has further clarified the importance of regional culture in influencing tourists' consumption behaviour. From a design point of view, colourful patterns with local characteristics are more popular. Because of the rich local batik patterns, the sales of souvenirs made of cloth materials are higher. However, most tourists pointed out that the souvenirs lack innovation and practicality, and fewer categories to choose from.

In the third observation, researchers narrowed the sample range and selected the 3 most popular online and offline stores for observation (shown in Table 4). The products of these three shops are mainly based on local culture, with strong regional cultural characteristics such as batik and Penang Old Street architectural culture. The main forms of culture expression are characteristic regional patterns and rich colour design, and the materials are mainly cloth batik.

Table 4. Some of souvenirs in Nala, Rerotan and 14 Living story

Nala				
Rerotan				
14 Living Story				

(Source: Author's personal collection)

Case study

Starman (2013) pointed out that case study is a continuous investigation of an individual, a group or an organisation over a long period of time to study the process and characteristics of its behavioural development and change. In this project, researchers selected the two popular souvenir shops for in-depth analyze on characteristics and consumer needs from the perspective of product design.

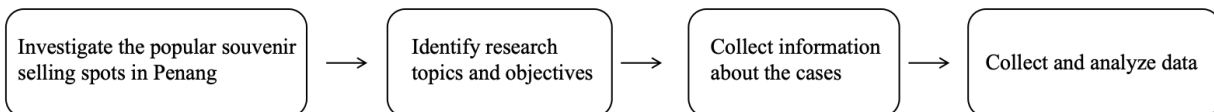


Figure 3. Procedure of case study

(Source: Author)

According to the author's market research, several brands in the Penang tourist product market integrate regional culture and souvenir design are very popular among tourists. The extremely popular one

by tourists must be “Nala Design” which is a chain brand in Malaysia. In fact, Nala is a relatively successful case of using Malaysian traditional cultural elements to design and produce related cultural and creative souvenirs. Nala is a lifestyle brand specialising in pattern design, everything is hand drawn and all designs and colours reflect the diverse style of Southeast Asia (shown in Figure 4). Nala's souvenirs are rich in colour, high saturation and high quality. Inspired by Asian culture and traditions, these patterns are translated into different products such as fabrics, wallpapers, handbags, clothing, accessories, homewares, and stationery with high practical value and suitable for daily life. It is worth mentioning that the mural in the Nala store in George Town, Penang is a hand-painted representative flower of the 13 states of Malaysia. It is full of a regional cultural atmosphere and provides a good introduction to Malaysian culture to tourists. Inspired by Malaysian creative culture and patterns, and using fabric design as a carrier, Nala designers have produced many excellent cultural creative products and tourism souvenirs. According to observations, some practical products such as passport holders, small wallets, and clothes have the highest sales volume. Nala integrates its textile patterns into the clothing and accessories in modern people's lives, allowing more people to wear the products, which has spread Malaysia's traditional culture well and spread beyond Southeast Asia, to the whole of China, and worldwide.

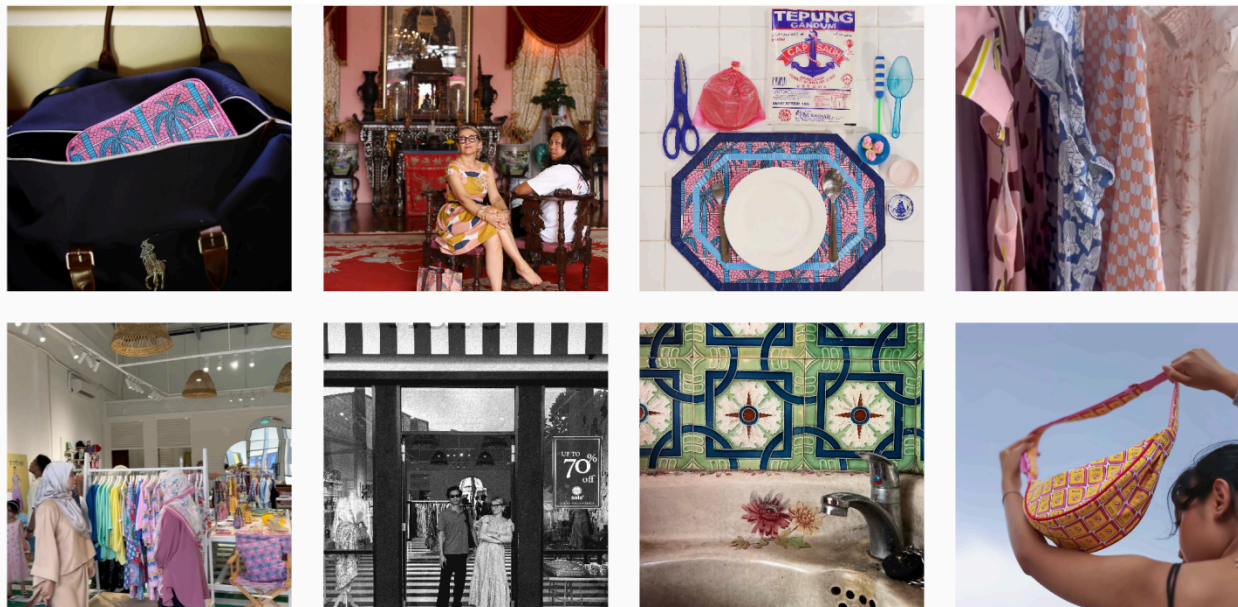


Figure 4. Products of Nala brand in Penang
(Source: <https://naladesigns.com/>)

As we all know, one of Malaysia's famous crafts is batik, a traditional technique of dyeing fabrics by hand that also references the decorative classic natural motifs, and is the most popular souvenir (Tourism Malaysia, 2017). There is a popular Batik Store named Misyalbuyit in Penang with a large number of tourists daily, the store is not big but has a rich variety of souvenirs with regional batik products (Figure 5). Refrigerator magnets (Figure 6), Nyonya bricks (Figure 7), clothes, ties, bags, accessories, backgammon and others, some of the tiles are made by local people with disabilities. Nyonya bricks and refrigerator magnets have very high sales. The Nyonya bricks sold in this store are combined with local Nyonya patterns, and the refrigerator magnets are combined with local architectural styles, which are full of cultural charm.



Figure 5. Batik products



Figure 6. Batik magnets
 (Source: Author's collection)



Figure 7. Nyonya bricks

Through the case analysis of Nala Design and Misyalbuyit, There is no doubt that if regional traditional cultural elements can be used properly and well combined with local special elements, excellent cultural tourism souvenirs can be created and popular with tourists. But the current problem is that there are few types with single cultural elements in Penang's souvenirs. Innovation is needed in terms of shape, materials and functionality, and cultural elements need to be explored, rather than staying in batik, Nyonya and architectural culture. If Penang's unique regional culture and souvenirs can be integrated better, cultural tourism souvenirs in Penang will have a very broad market prospect.

Analysis

Cultural space is the state and structure of a certain culture in a certain time, which will change the level of division of culture according to the different application fields. Leong and Clark (2003) proposed the concept of combining cultural product design with cultural space theory, and divided culture into three levels from low to high: external tangible layer, intermediate behavioural layer and internal intangible layer. The author applies it to the design field for souvenirs design analysis, as shown in Figure 8.

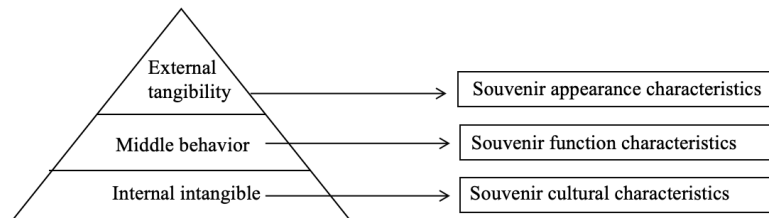


Figure 8. Theory of cultural space and transformation of design field
 (Source: Author)

Souvenir appearance design

It has to be said that the current appearance design of Penang souvenirs products lacks some innovation. Most of the souvenirs are traditional and dull, the only innovation is that some refrigerator magnets or postcards are modelled from architecture. In fact, Penang architecture combines the features of Western and Southeast Asian architectural styles and has a unique style, which is a veritable tourism business card (Dina Miza, 2024). However, in the shape design of souvenirs, some of the products related

to architectural culture are similar, these products can only be distinguished by material (shown in Figure 9, Figure 10 and Figure 11):



Figure 9 -11: Souvenirs with similar architectural shape

(Source: <https://xiaohongshu.com/>)

In addition, the element of colour is the main way to produce visual impact of cultural souvenirs. Colour can not only assist the overall presentation of the product, but also deepen the impression of consumers on the destination and improve the awareness of the product (Hsiao, 1995). At present, Souvenirs in Penang are coloured, but many souvenirs lack design and thinking. Manufacturers copied the batik or Nyonya related pattern into the product so that most souvenirs have similar patterns and colours (shown in Figure 12). Just like the Nala design, perhaps the design of colours and patterns can also bring more possibilities to the Penang souvenir market.



Figure 12. Souvenirs with similar colour and pattern

(Source: <https://xiaohongshu.com/>)

During the observation of souvenir materials in Penang, the researchers found that most souvenirs were made of cloth, ceramics and paper. In addition, there are also some wood products, but the sales are not ideal. Researchers believe that there can also be more innovation in material design, such as combining modern technology or local crafts, Eco-friendly materials are also a good choice. To sum up, whether in the design of colours, patterns, shapes or materials, there is still a lot of room for innovative design in the design of Penang tourist souvenirs.

Souvenir function design

Actually, there are fewer categories of souvenirs for consumers to choose from in Penang. What is more worth thinking about is that most souvenirs in Penang can only be used as decorations, lacking added value and practicality.

Nowadays, the concept of cultural products consumption is different from the past, and tourists are more willing to accept more participatory experiential consumption, that is, to meet certain realistic needs by using a cultural and creative product in real life. The reason why cultural souvenirs can be accepted by the consumer market is that these products are given cultural attributes, but also practical attributes (Masset & Decrop, 2021). In the design and development of cultural tourism souvenirs in Penang, the focus of product design should consider product types, processes and materials. Secondly, the direction of product design should also be in people's daily life. Taking the regional cultural elements as visual symbols into the design of daily products, let the product convey the cultural characteristics of the arcade through its own attributes, meet the cultural needs and practical needs of consumers, and improve the quality of life of consumers.

Souvenir cultural design

The most important characteristic of cultural tourism souvenirs is cultural value, excellent cultural tourism souvenirs must be rooted in culture and spread to the public. According to the observation of the consumption of tourists, some souvenirs containing unique regional cultural characteristics such as refrigerator stickers, Nyonya brick and batik clothing are the most popular. However, the extraction of Penang regional cultural elements from most tourist souvenirs still remains on the surface, lacking in-depth exploration and transformation of design creativity. Many of them are hand-drawn postcards, key chains, T-shirts, hats or fridge magnets with pictures of famous Penang attractions or the word "Penang" printed on them. The carrier of these tourist souvenirs is similar to other tourist cities in Malaysia such as Malacca and Kuala Lumpur (shown in Figure 13). Apart from the name of Penang, these souvenirs do not have any elements related to Penang. Tourism souvenir products with weakened cultural originality and local identity may indirectly lead to a decline in the attractiveness of tourist destinations, where tourists always pursue unique cultural subjects different from themselves (Nurbaidura Salim and et.al, 2021).



Figure 13. Souvenir in Penang
(Source: <https://xiaohongshu.com/>)

Excavation of more cultural elements of Penang

As we all know, Penang is known for its multicultural society which is formed by Malays, Chinese, Indians, and other people of different races with diverse traditions. Therefore, tourists can experience different cultures during their trip to Penang. In fact, Penang's diverse architectural landscape has become

one of Malaysia's most valuable assets. Walking on the narrow old streets in Penang, the inner city of GeorgeTown takes everyone back through time (Chai, 2011). Penang also has beautiful natural landscapes, such as the blue sea, lush green mountains, and forests, and the most famous one is Penang Hill. There are many local religious celebrations in Penang including Chinese Lunar New Year, Muslim Eid al-Fitr, Indian Deepavali, Tamil Thaipusam, Sikh Harvest Festival, Sri Lankan Vesak Day, and Thailand's Songkran Festival, and others. In addition, Penang also has special traditional handicrafts, such as batik, wood carving, ceramics, and others. The most worthy to mention is Penang's food culture which combines the flavours and practices of Malaysian, Chinese, Indian, Thai, and other countries and develops delicacies with unique local characteristics, so it is known as "Asian Food" (Austin, 2015).

McKechnie (2011) pointed out that the characteristic of Penang cuisine is the unique fusion of culture and culture. The flavour of local food is proof of the harmonious fusion of different races and has become an important symbol of local characteristics. At present, most food souvenirs in Penang are mainly food specialties. Combining local food culture with the design of tourism souvenirs with practicability in daily life, there will be breakthroughs for Penang's tourism economic income. The following cases shown in Figure 14-16:



Figure 14-16. Food pendant
(Source: <http://xiaohongshu.com/>)

In the design concept of food culture souvenirs, local food can also be integrated with other regional cultures, as shown in Figure 18 which is a typical case of the integration of food and local regional architectural shape. In addition, combine the special materials or spices of regional cuisine with the form of souvenirs as shown in Figure 19.

In fact, despite the regional food culture, Penang also has many cultural elements that are worth exploring in design. Similarly, Extract some classic elements from other regional traditional cultural elements as materials for pattern design, and apply these patterns to various graphic design souvenirs, such as USBs, headphones, desk calendars, mobile phone cases, mouse pads, playing cards, badges, and other cultural souvenirs to form the creative characteristics in cultural souvenirs in Penang. In addition, refining the characters, scenes, and other elements in folk festivals to design a set of souvenirs that are consistent with Penang's traditional culture is also a good design direction.

FINDINGS

At present, the categories of tourist souvenirs in Penang are relatively simple, and almost every souvenir shop sells popular products such as refrigerator magnets, postcards and clothing, which are more traditional in shape and lack innovation and added value. Besides, the most popular culture of local food

products still has a lot of room for improvement like packaging design and others. According to the survey, souvenirs with bright colours, local characteristics, high practical value and distinctive regional characteristics are more popular with tourists. I have to say, local batik souvenirs sell like crazy. In fact, there are many traditional crafts worth exploring in Penang, such as wood carving. Traditional craft materials can be combined with modern life to create innovative designs and broaden the variety of design carriers. More importantly, in order to arouse the emotional resonance of consumers, the design of tourist souvenirs must consider the cultural connotation and the emotional needs of consumers.

Through the above analysis and discussion, the innovative design methods of Penang regional cultural tourism souvenirs are summarised: Firstly, the rich regional cultural resources are screened to select the most representative and symbolic visual elements, which are appropriately simplified and subtly refined, so as to extract the most critical image elements to reflect the essential connotation of regional culture. Secondly, by refining the visual image elements of the representative tourist attractions, the transformable design points are sorted out and concretely applied in the design. Finally, by means of design, traditional materials and traditional handicrafts are extracted and applied to tourist souvenirs that can integrate into modern life, so as to rejuvenate the design of tourist souvenirs with new forms and ways of expression and give full play to its unique traditional charm.

The design of souvenirs should adhere to the harmonious unity of innovation and tradition, the principle of aesthetic and practical mutual benefit, in addition to the control of modelling function, design elements, materials and technology, but also to focus on regional cultural exchanges.

CONCLUSIONS

With the development of globalisation, many precious traditional cultures are being forgotten. Regional culture wants to integrate into global development as soon as possible and must pay attention to the combination of culture and tourism. Integrate regional culture into commemorative products and convey local culture to the world through souvenirs. Cultural souvenirs must have their characteristics instead of emphasising cultural differences. Therefore, they must reflect the national personality to be more competitive. Except for reflecting the core cultural connotation of the region, most importantly, the design of cultural souvenirs must be perfectly integrated with the needs of the target consumer group. In other words, the region meets the spiritual needs of consumers through souvenirs, and consumers increase the economic value of the region through their loyalty to souvenir purchases. The significance of this study is to provide design practice theoretical reference for souvenir designers and improve tourists' satisfaction with their tourism experience. The practical significance is to enhance the value of the regional cultural tourism economy and inherit excellent regional culture.

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