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Research on the Kylin Culture and the Kylin IP Image Design

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Abstract

The Beijing Central Axis is the most well-preserved traditional capital city central axis architectural complex in China. The Beijing Drum Tower marks the northern end of the Beijing Central Axis, featuring a little-known Kirin-facing wall. Kirin is an auspicious creature in Chinese mythology, symbolizing national prosperity and peace. Chinese people believe that it not only brings beautiful things but also brings children. The appearance of the Kirin symbolizes the prosperity of the country and the happiness and well-being of the people. This article attempts to study the auspicious beast image, which is full of beautiful meanings. On one hand, it organizes the historical descriptions and depictions of the Kirin. On the other hand, it creates an intellectual property (IP) image named 'Zhong Linglin' in an artistic style that aligns with the aesthetics of the modern era. This is done to promote the rich traditional culture associated with the Beijing Axis.

Keywords

Beijing Central Axis, Beijing Drum Tower, Kylin Culture, IP image design

1. The Kylin screen wall in Beijing Drum Tower on Beijing Central Axis

Beijing Central Axis, located in the center of Beijing City, is the largest existing urban central axis in the world. As the "backbone" of the city of Beijing, the central axis running through the north and south, starting from Yongding Gate in the south and ending at Drum and Bell Tower in the north, consists of fifteen heritage sites. It is 7.8 kilometers long, and the heritage area is approximately 5.9 square kilometers (Fulun Lv, 2018).

Beijing Bell and Drum Tower was a time center during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. It was first built in the Yuan Dynasty and has been renovated multiple times by later generations. The Drum Tower is bright red and the Bell Tower is gray in color, both buildings are two floors and face south, and back north. There are 25 remaining drums inside the Drum Tower, and there is an octagonal wooden frame clock frame in the center of the Bell Tower, with a large copper bell hanging from it.

In addition, there is also a White Marble Kylin Stele in the Drum Tower, named after the image of the Kylin carved on it. During the Republic of China, it was moved from the Kylin Stele Hutong to the Drum Tower. It's said that it is the screen wall in front of the military general Qiu Luan's residence in the Jiajing Dynasty of the Ming Dynasty. It is recorded in *Ming History - Qiu Ye Biography* that Qiu Ye's son Qiu Chang was abolished as a marquis due to his illness, and his grandson Qiu Luan succeeded to the title. During the reign of Emperor Shizong of the Ming Dynasty, Qiu Luan relied on the favor of the court and colluded with foreign forces at the border, and was executed, his title abolished, and his family copied. In front of the mansion symbolizes the power of the Kylin screen wall was also pushed down, and buried in the ground for nearly six hundred years. Later, Pocket Hutong was named 'the Kylin Stele Hutong' after the discovery of the buried Kylin Stele in the early years of the Republic of China (Haifeng Xu, 2023).

2. The Kylin Culture in Chinese History

2.1 The Legends About the Kylin

The earliest official record of the appearance of the Kylin is in 480 BC. According to *The Spring and Autumn Period—In the 14th year of Duke Ai's reign*, Duke Ai of Lu hunted and captured a Kirin during his Western Tour. When Kylin came to the world, no one knew what he was. Because of his strange appearance, people shot him with an arrow and killed him. When Confucius heard that, he was shocked and burst into tears.

The unicorn descended into the world and no one recognized it, and was killed because of its strange appearance, causing Confucius to be so shocked that he bawled his eyes out and was unconscious for seven days and seven nights. The disciples asked Confucius why he was so sad when the Kylin was killed, and Confucius replied that the Kylin's birth was an auspicious sign of peace and prosperity in the world, but it was killed just as it appeared, which he deplored and wrote an elegy on it. From then on, Confucius stopped writing, and no longer wrote books. In addition, legend has it that Confucius' birth and death were both related to the Kylin. The mother of Confucius, Ms. Yan, once gave birth to Confucius after dreaming of the Kylin delivering her son, and the stories of 'The Kylin Delivering a Child' and 'The Kylin Spitting out Jade Books' all came from the birth of Confucius. Later on, the ancient people often used the word 'the Kylin child' to describe a gifted child (Xiaoqian Wan, 2019). The Kylin combines all the good qualities in one, and its appearance indicates social harmony and national stability, it is the auspicious beast that symbolizes good fortune, harmony, and benevolence. At the same time, The Kylin is known as a symbol of Confucian culture.

2.2 The images of the Kylin

There are many theories about the image of Kylin and the image of Kylin in different periods with different characteristics. Some people think that the earliest description of Kylin's appearance comes from *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*. It is similar in size to a tiger, with nine heads, each with a face like a human, and stands on top of the Kunlun Mountain facing the east. However, the image of the nine-headed, human-faced beast described in T*he Classic of Mountains and Seas* is very different from the image of the Kylin that has been passed down in later generations.

The Kylin images on artifacts found during the Xia, Shang, and Zhou periods are mostly characterized by the shape of a deer. Typical images of the Kylin during Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties were mostly a diversified combination of a moose body, a cow's tail, a wolf's collar, a horn, a yellow color, and a horse's foot. At that time, the Kylin culture interacted with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, with further development, the Kylin image in this period began to appear the tendency of lion and tiger. In Song and Yuan dynasties, the unicorn's image evolved into a dragon-like shape. The head is dragon-like, the body is covered with dragon scales, and a flame pattern appears. From the Song Dynasty onwards, the classic image of the Kylin looking back, which is popular in later generations, also appeared. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties and later, Kylin inherited the characteristics of Song and Yuan Dynasties and became a stereotype (Yilin Liu, 2021).

3. Design Practice of the Kylin IP Image

3.1 The form of the Kylin IP Image

The Kylin, together with the dragon, the phoenix, and the tortoise, is a symbol of harmony, and peace in traditional Chinese culture of auspiciousness. However, among many mythological images, the understanding, dissemination, and popularization of the Kylin culture among the younger generation is still far less than that of the dragon and the phoenix. The author believes that one of the main reasons for this phenomenon is the integration and diversified development of the Kylin image. Depending on the time and social environment, the image of the Kylin changes, and the image of the Kylin in history has undergone a diversified development, which is an image that combines the good characteristics of the deer and the horse, the dragon, and the tiger, and so on, and keeps on developing and changing. Therefore, it is impossible to define the exact image of Kylin in one's mind. Kylin's five attributes lie in the center, which is similar to the formal significance of the Beijing Central Axis. Therefore, the Qilin Shadow Wall, located at the northern end of Beijing Central Axis and the Beijing Bell and Drum Tower, was chosen as the design prototype, adding some design elements that are popular with young people and have a sense of intimacy in the design can realize the popularization and dissemination of the cultural background of Beijing Central Axis while

making the Kylin leave a deep impression in the minds of the young public image.

The IP image design is based on the Kylin screen wall preserved in Beijing Drum Tower, and its original stylized image features are extracted. In the process of extracting the modeling elements, based on the background of the prototype screen wall, and the features of the modeling such as dragon head, lion tail, fish scales, antlers, etc., it is assumed that the original modeling of the screen wall unicorn is that of the Kylin in Tang, Song and Yuan Dynasties. Based on this, concerning the unicorn style and styling characteristics of Ming and Qing periods, the Kylin is extracted and generalized using simple and smooth lines to extract and generalize the recognizable movements and styling characteristics of the prototype. The overall design is a rounded and simple two-headed body, sitting with its head back, exaggerating the image of the Kylin under the premise of ensuring its majesty and uprightness. The face is rounded to enhance the affinity of the image. The eyes are enlarged, revealing the two lower rows of teeth, and the corners of the mouth are turned upward, making the expression both serious and cute. The eye-catching ‘Zhong’ character in the middle of the forehead symbolizes its mission of guarding the center. In addition, as the Kylin is said to spit fire, which is often associated with the fire pearl pattern in history, a refined and simplified design of the fire pearl pattern is added to the hind limbs of the Kylin.

3.2 The color of the Kylin IP image

Red, yellow, blue, and green are the most common colors of the Kylin in the literature and pictures. Based on the analysis and research on the intuitive colors along the central axis of Beijing, we chose the most classic colors of grey, red, yellow, blue, and green as the main color system of the IP image. The gray color is brick gray, which is extracted from the color of greenish-gray clay bricks used in traditional architecture. It fits the impression of Kylin's screen wall. The red color is the palace wall red, which is the impression of the red color of the wall of the imperial city and the gates and bars that run along the central axis of Beijing. Yellow, blue, and green are extracted from the classic glazed tile colors on the iconic buildings along Beijing Central Axis, using glazed yellow, glazed blue, and glazed green. In addition, green is a traditional Chinese color with the meaning of charity and good luck, which also coincides with the symbolism of the Kylin.

Figure 1. The main visual image and three views of the Kylin IP image.

Additionally, Storytelling can enhance the cultural value and recognition of IP images. Setting the character background story for the IP image can bring spiritual resonance to the target group while connecting culture. The Kylin is an earthy character, which is the center of the five elements. The name of the IP image is ‘Linglin Zhong’, which is based on the background of Beijing Central Axis. ‘Linglin Zhong’ is a guardian spirit of the Kylin in front of Qiu Luan's residence in the Ming Dynasty. Contrary to its fierce and serious appearance, it is gentle and amiable and loves young children. It has a magical attraction to animals and is often accompanied by the rain swallows under Zhengyang Gate. Since its transformation into a spirit, it has been guarding the center of the city for many years, and after moving to Beijing Drum Tower, it often stands at the highest point of Beijing Drum Tower to watch over the entire Beijing Central Axis, avoiding disasters and seeking blessings for Beijing (Yusu Xiong, Yi Zhang, & Ting Zhang, 2023).

3.3 The extension designs of the Kylin IP image

Enrich the storytelling of the IP image design combine it with the background of Beijing Central Axis culture, and draw illustration posters to extend the design. In the illustration scene, use Beijing Bell and Drum Tower, the classic

point where the IP image prototype is located, as the background for creation. The drumming action of the IP image is extended as the main element. The typical bell and drum and the architectural elements are chosen as secondary elements. The background is in red and green colors, and the auspicious cloud pattern, which often appears in the image of the Kylin, is added as a secondary decorative element. The text is individually designed in the current Chinese calligraphy style. The style of the image is unified and the color tone is similar, making the image rich and harmonious.

The extension of IP images as cultural and creative products, from stationery products to daily necessities, has both use value and collection value. Through the printing method and technology of different cultural and creative products, the IP image can be revitalized based on the original design. Below are the metal pins and vertical canvas bags that extend the IP image of 'Linglin Zhong'.

Figure 2. The extension designs of the Kylin IP image.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to trace the history of Kylin culture and integrate it with the aesthetics of contemporary youth for redesign, aiming to raise public awareness of the mythical auspicious beast, the Kylin. We hope to create a Kylin IP image that belongs to the Beijing Central Axis and aligns with the spirit of the new era to promote the culture of the Beijing Central Axis. I believe it is essential to excavate, collect, and refine traditional cultural resources and integrate them with contemporary fashion to enrich the depth and appeal of design works.

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