

The Charm of Chinese Treasures: Market Analysis and Consumer Preference Study of Giant Panda Cultural and Creative Products

Jinbo Li

Faculty of International Studies,
Takushoku University, Tokyo, Japan

Corresponding author: 215048@
st.takushoku-u.ac.jp

Abstract:

As China's national treasure, the world has always considered and loved the giant panda for its lovely appearance and unique rarity. In recent years, thousands of people in South Korea have bid farewell to the "princess" Fubao, who returned to the motherland from Everland. The fact that Japanese people of all ages traveled to Ya'an, Sichuan Province, to see Xiang Xiang, who was born in Japan and named by a Japanese but returned to her home country, illustrates the panda's popularity in the hearts of people worldwide. Based on the cultural and creative industry, this paper analyzes the cultural and creative products' market value and consumer groups around the giant panda. It suggests and studies the cultural and creative products around the giant panda. This paper mainly adopts offline interviews and questionnaires to collect consumers' attitudes toward giant panda products and conduct data analysis. This study's main research contents and results are as follows: consumers mainly focus on the price of panda products, the factors of panda products themselves (such as appearance or practicality, etc.), and what consumer products consumers want to buy in the future. Based on the investigation and analysis, the paper provides suggestions and strategies for the future development direction of panda products.

Keywords: Cultural and creative industry; Culture of giant panda; Giant panda products; Giant panda in Japan.

1. Introduction

The giant panda is a unique animal of China and one of the most important symbols of Chinese culture.

From the perspective of Chinese cultural inheritance, the image of pandas has important world significance and influence. As a symbol of Chinese culture, the panda represents peace and friendship, which are

traditional Chinese values. Panda's round face, black-and-white body, and docile character give people a sense of intimacy. These characteristics coincide with the "harmonious coexistence" concept emphasized in traditional Chinese culture. The panda image is also consistent with "Moderate" and "Tao" in traditional Chinese philosophy and conveys the core values of Chinese culture. Through active conservation measures, panda conservation has attracted global attention and provided opportunities for spreading Chinese culture. The image of pandas has played an essential role in the communication of Chinese culture, adding charm to the communication of Chinese culture.

The panda has also attracted the world's attention and love because of its rarity and conservation significance. In the process of spreading Chinese culture, the image of the panda often becomes the representative of various cultural products and activities, thus enhancing the international influence of Chinese culture. The Chinese government has made great efforts to protect and breed giant pandas through active conservation measures, effectively controlling and expanding the population of giant pandas. Panda protection has become the focus of global attention and a window for the spread of Chinese culture. More and more Chinese and foreigners have come to the Panda Protection Base to experience the charm of Pandas and the profound Chinese culture. This approach improves people's awareness and consciousness of Panda protection but also enhances people's understanding and recognition of traditional Chinese culture.

On November 8, 2023, the Panda Base in Bifengxia, Ya'an, Sichuan Province, welcomed a group of "special" visitors. They were all Japanese and were quietly and orderly visiting Xiang Xiang, a giant panda who returned to China from the Ueno Zoo in Japan in mid-February. One is a photographer named Takahiro Takashi, who runs a "Daily Panda" blog in Japan. Takashi has been photographing pandas and updating his blog since August 2011, almost daily, except for exceptional circumstances. Takashi uploaded more than 70 photos of Xiang Xiang on his blog after meeting her on the 8th, and the number of comments from netizens on that day reached 2.5 times the usual number. Takashi told Xinhua News that Japanese and Chinese people share the same love for pandas, and he hoped that Xiang Xiang would continue to play the role of "Panda Ambassador" as a bond of friendship between China and Japan [1].

In May 2024, the author visited the Panda Center in Dujiangyan, Sichuan Province, on Labor Day. Despite the crowds during the May Day holiday, the Panda Souvenir Store at the center's exit was virtually deserted. This phenomenon illustrates the lack of an audience for Panda

products. Therefore, this paper discusses the future development direction of panda-themed cultural and creative products, which is of great significance for promoting panda products at home and abroad and catering to consumer preferences.

This study focuses on the consumption attitudes of domestic and international consumer groups towards panda products and provides reference strategies for improving and designing panda products. This study focuses on both the current situation and the importance of the panda cultural and creative industries. Through interviews with tourists visiting the Ueno Zoo in Japan and the survey method of randomly distributing questionnaires, this study aims to understand the consumer groups of giant panda products. It mainly focuses on the consumer's outlook on the future of panda cultural and creative products.

2. Status and Importance of The Panda Cultural and Creative Industry

In the 1990s, the British Labor Party government integrated the film and game industries and introduced the emerging "cultural and creative industries," an industrial development policy targeting culture and creativity. The cultural and creative industry means adding the creativity of different countries, nationalities, and individuals to the existing culture to give the culture a new value. Cultural and creative industries have great significance in the new era, not only to develop unique cultures as a new economic chain but also to bring certain benefits to developing countries and economically underdeveloped regions. In a paper published in 2021, Croatian academic Daniela Angelina stressed that cultural and creative industries and cultural heritage play an essential role in sustainable development and regional resilience [2]. Daniela also cites data from the European Union, where culturally significant travel accounts for about 40% of all European travel [3]. In other words, at least 4 out of every 10 travelers will choose a destination based on its cultural identity. Moreover, Maryam Pourzakarya, a scholar at the University of Tehran, published a paper, "*Searching for possible potentials of cultural and creative industries in rural tourism development; a case of Rudkhan Castle rural areas*" also taking the city of Rudekhan in Gilan Province, Iran, as an example, the priority of whether there are cultural heritage and historical sites that directly affect the local tourism industry from the perspective of local communities, tourists, and government organizations, once again emphasizing the influence of culture on tourism [4]. Unique culture and cultural and creative industries greatly help local development.

Since 2008, the “Kung Fu Panda” series of animated films produced by the famous American film producer DreamWorks Animation has been released in various countries worldwide. So far, the four films have grossed around \$630 million, \$660 million, \$520 million, and \$530 million, respectively. The United States actively absorbs foreign excellent culture in film creation and has obtained positive benefits. However, in Sichuan province, one of the main cradles of panda culture, efforts have been made to build panda brands, but they need more effect. For example, the “China Ya’an Giant Panda · Animal and Nature Film Week” held in Ya’an since 2007 has promoted the development of animation works themed on giant pandas to a certain extent. However, there have been no panda animation works that can compete with the “Kung Fu Panda” series or even the well-known domestic animation works “Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf” [5]. So, generally speaking, the author believes that China’s giant panda cultural and creative industry is still in the initial stages.

The importance of the giant panda cultural and creative industry is mainly reflected in economic benefits. According to an estimate by Katsuhiko Miyamoto, an honorary professor at Kansai University in Japan, Xiang Xiang, a giant panda born in 2017, brought about 26.7 billion yen (about 1.3 billion yuan) in economic benefits to Ueno Zoo and surrounding shops in just one year [6]. In addition, China’s panda base, represented by the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding, has become an important tourist destination for domestic and foreign tourists, with an annual peak of more than 11 million tourists [7]. These bases allow visitors to observe pandas up close and enhance their understanding and interest in pandas and their conservation work by showing their living habits and conservation work. According to statistics, the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding attracts tens of thousands of tourists daily, especially during the peak season and holidays. This promoted local tourism development and led to the prosperity of transportation, catering, accommodation, and other related industry chains. Panda image is also widely used in stationery, clothing, toys, other commodities, and associated theme products, with its unique design concept and cute image in the market. The sale of these products has brought considerable profits to the enterprise, increased employment opportunities, and promoted the Development of related industries. For example, during the Universiade in Chengdu, the panda mascot “Rong Bao” became a hot-selling product, further boosting the spread of panda culture and enhancing its economic value. According to reports, Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding has applied for 109 invention patents, 36 utility models, and 3 designs and obtained 91 authorized patents, some of which have been

used in actual production work. In addition, according to the “*Analysis Report on the Development of the Sichuan Giant Panda Cultural and Creative Industry*”, 30.4% of domestic tourists are interested in giant panda-marked souvenirs. In comparison, 40% of inbound tourists are interested in giant panda-marked souvenirs. This shows that the giant panda cultural and creative industry has enormous potential [8].

The panda is a national treasure of China and an important representative of Chinese culture. China is in the wave of a new technological revolution and industrial transformation. It is urgent to solve the problem of how to take national interests as the guide, break the background, values, and consumer demand of different cultures, and build a national brand image with Chinese characteristics [9]. In recent years, China has tried to improve its brand image and reputation from the government and businesses. According to the “*China Corporate Image Global Survey Report 2022*” released by Kantar Group, a joint research institute of Contemporary China and the World, 73% of global respondents have a good impression of Chinese enterprises as a whole [10]. Promoting and selling pandas’ cultural and creative products enhances cultural exchanges and understanding among countries and China’s international image and influence. At the same time, panda diplomacy has also brought commercial benefits to China, as it has been renting pandas to other countries as a symbol of friendly exchanges and enhances friendship and cooperation between countries.

Moreover, promoting and selling creative products related to panda culture also promotes panda research and conservation. Due to the rarity and preciousness of the giant panda, domestic and foreign research institutions, zoos, and other units have invested a lot of money and workforce to research and protect the panda. The sales revenue of panda cultural and creative products is partly used to support panda protection and research, which promotes the development of related fields.

In short, the impact of panda cultural and creative products on the economy is multifaceted. The panda cultural and creative industry not only promotes tourism development and the prosperity of related industrial chains but also drives commodity sales and economic growth, cultural exchanges, and international influence, as well as the progress of panda research and protection work.

3. Advantages and Opportunities of Panda Products

In the paper “*Multiple Ways of Giant Panda Products Shaping National Brand Image*” published in 2024, Tang

Min, a teacher from the School of Marxism of Shenzhen Polytechnic University, analyzed giant panda products and general products with SWOT analysis [9]. Panda's cultural and creative products have advantaged that ordinary products do not. First of all, the giant panda is a national treasure of China; besides the Sichuan and Qinling regions, there is no other place in the world with the natural habitat of giant pandas, so when it comes to pandas, consumers will think of China. Secondly, the image of the giant panda is relatively fixed. When Chinese and foreign tourists mention the giant panda, they will think of the panda image. Third, the giant panda has been on the earth for about 8 million years and has high biological research and protection value. Finally, the giant panda has a close geographical relationship with China, Sichuan, and Shaanxi provinces. It also has a rich and diversified cultural transmission of animal and ecological protection. Compared with ordinary "made in China," Panda's cultural and creative products have significant cultural unique advantages.

From the perspective of opportunity, the panda is hailed as a world treasure, representing the fine traditions of Taoism, moderation, and peace in Chinese culture. Even the image of the giant panda is sometimes more representative of the image of China in the international community than the "Chinese dragon." Regarding ecological value, as shown in Figure 1, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has also adopted the panda as its logo. After the United Nations proposed the Sustainable Development Plan SDGs in 2015, people's awareness of environmental protection worldwide has gradually increased. Panda products can be perfectly embedded in this trend, making environmentally-related items, but also, to a certain extent, more subtly express China's contribution to the world's environmental protection. In addition, panda products have relatively low production costs. Pandas also have a huge fan base and great social attention overseas, such as the Winter Olympics mascot designed with giant pandas as a prototype, "Bing Dwen Dwen." The price of its products in Japan increased by about 10 times; even if the price rose, there was once a "price without market" out of stock. It can be seen that there are more trade opportunities for giant pandas' cultural and creative products overseas, and it is easier to obtain high returns.



Fig. 1 WWF Logo [11]

4. Research Method

4.1 Offline Interview Method

To get a more intuitive understanding of consumers' attitudes towards panda products, this study applied the offline interview model. The main advantage of offline interviews in this study is that by interviewing consumers who have just bought panda products in stores, we can better understand their thoughts when purchasing, which is conducive to the author's and readers' understanding and analysis of consumer psychology. The place selected for this interview is the merchandise store opposite the Panda House of Ueno Zoo in Japan, and the leading target group is consumers who have bought Panda products in the merchandise store. The reason for choosing Ueno Zoo is that Ueno Zoo is located in Ueno Park in the center of Tokyo, is convenient transportation, and is one of the leading travel destinations for Japanese and foreign tourists. Ueno Zoo is the first Japanese zoo to rent and raise giant pandas in Japan, so from the perspective of tourism and technology, the giant pandas rented from China to Japan are raised in Ueno Zoo. In addition, based on Professor Miyamoto's estimation and the history of giant pandas leasing in Japan, the author believes that Ueno Zoo and its surrounding stores are the biggest and most direct beneficiaries of the giant pandas' loan in Japan. The author believes that Ueno Zoo is the best place to conduct offline interviews for the above reasons.

The author mainly interviewed 4 groups of consumers in Ueno Zoo and summarized the interview content. In the interview, the author found that the four groups of consumers bought different items. Some Japanese families bought panda-themed blocks and puzzles with their children. Some Swiss couples have purchased clothing with panda images (such as T-shirts, hats, etc.). Some

Malaysian students bought stationery, and Taiwanese high school girls bought panda dolls and postcards.

In addition, after interviewing 4 consumers, the author concluded that more consumers are more inclined to buy panda products (such as zoos and panda bases) offline than online because consumers believe that offline purchase is a kind of witness to visiting pandas, making them feel meaningful and commemorative. This point is also reflected in the author’s questionnaire survey. As shown in Figure 2, 35.3% of respondents said they preferred to buy offline, and 20.69% said they were willing to purchase on official websites such as panda bases or zoos.

The distribution of consumer purchasing channels.

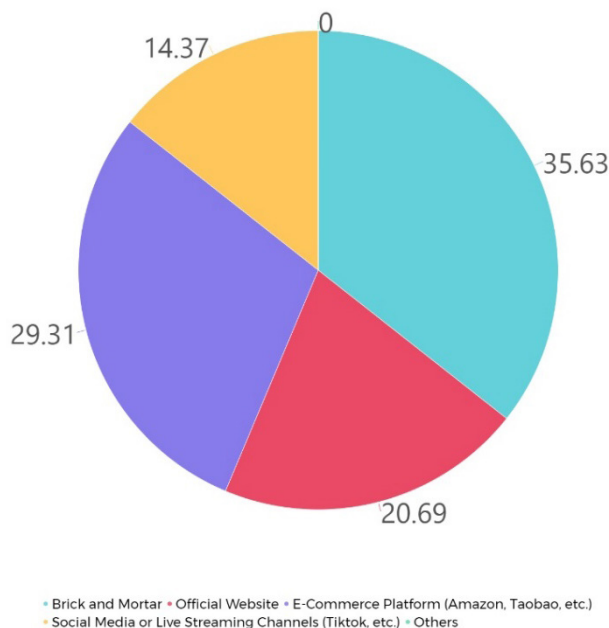


Fig. 2 The distribution of consumer purchasing channels (Picture Credit: Original)

4.2 Questionnaire Survey Method

After this field investigation and interview, the author conducted a two-week questionnaire survey, randomly released it on Google (Japanese version, English version) and Wenjuanxing (Chinese version), and received 174 valid responses. Because it is closely related to the future cultural and creative development of pandas, the author mainly focuses on the results of the following issues.

The determinants impacting consumer purchasing decisions

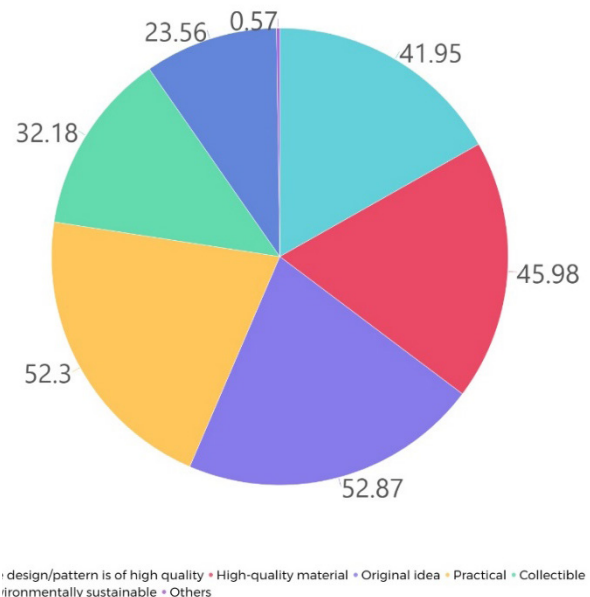


Fig. 3 The determinants impacting consumer purchasing decisions (Picture Credit: Original)

As shown in Figure 3, 41.95% of respondents said that the appearance of panda products is more important to them; 45.98% of respondents think that the use of high-quality materials is more critical; 52.87% of respondents said that panda products should have some original ideas; 52.3% of the respondents believe that panda products should have a certain degree of practicality. In addition, 32.18% and 23.56% of respondents said that panda products should have collectible value and be environmentally friendly and sustainable.

The price's acceptance by consumers. (Units: RMB Yuan)

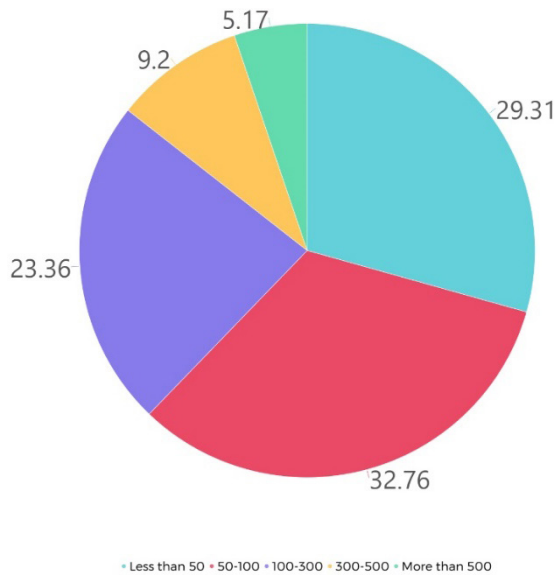


Fig. 4 The price's acceptance by consumers (Picture Credit: Original)

As shown in Figure 4, 29.31% of respondents hope that the price of panda products will be at most 50 yuan; 32.76% of respondents said they could accept panda products in the 50–100-yuan range. 23.36 percent of respondents said they would accept panda products priced between 100 and 300 yuan. In addition, 9.2 percent and 5.17 percent of respondents said they would accept panda products priced between 300 and 500 yuan and more than 500 yuan. In general, the vast majority, 85.43% of the respondents, can only accept panda products that are less than 300 yuan.

The practical features are highly valued by consumers

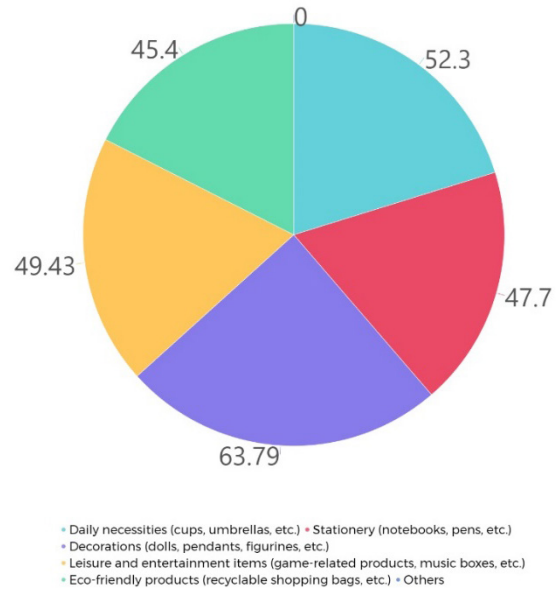


Fig. 5 The practical features are highly valued (Picture Credit: Original)

As shown in Figure 5, 52.3% of respondents hope that panda products have functions for daily use (such as umbrellas, water cups, etc.); 47.7% of the respondents said they would like to buy panda products related to stationery (such as pens or notebooks); 63.79% of respondents said that they hope that the panda products are similar to the traditional products, such as dolls, pendants, etc. 49.43 percent of respondents said they want panda products to be associated with cultural and entertainment products, such as games or music boxes. Another 45.4 percent of respondents hoped that panda products, such as reusable shopping bags or environmentally friendly garbage bags, would be environmentally friendly.

The anticipated demands of consumers for forthcoming panda products

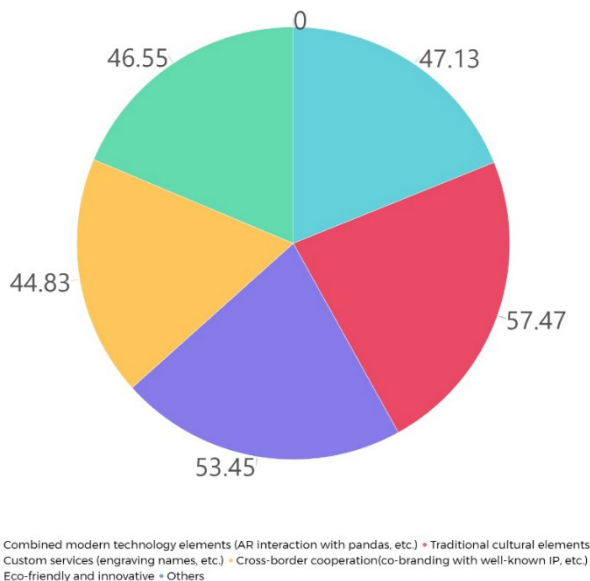


Fig. 6 The anticipated demands of consumers for forthcoming panda products (Picture Credit: Original)

As shown in Figure 6, 47.13% of respondents said that they are looking forward to the integration of future panda products with modern technologies, such as AR interaction so that the general public can have more opportunities to interact with pandas; 57.47% of the respondents said that panda is a representative animal of China, and future products should be more integrated into traditional Chinese cultural elements; 53.45% of the respondents believe that they would prefer to have a customizable panda product, on which their names can be written, more memorable; 44.83% of respondents believe that future panda products can cooperate with some well-known IP to attract more consumers to buy; And 46.55% of respondents said they hope to launch some panda environmentally friendly products in the future, such as recyclable shopping bags, and should also be innovative.

Through the analysis of the above data, the author found that consumers are more inclined to choose panda products with original ideas (52.87%), practicality (52.3%), the use of high-quality materials (45.98%), and better appearance design (41.95%). Most consumers can accept a price of less than 300 yuan, of which 50-100 yuan accounted for the most significant proportion, 32.76%.

In addition, in the survey of practical functions around pandas, 63.79% of consumers hope that panda products can be used as decorations, such as dolls, pendants, or figurines; 52.3% of consumers hope that panda products can meet daily use, such as water cups, umbrellas, etc., 49.43% of consumers hope that panda products can be

used for leisure and entertainment—for example, game consoles or music boxes. Moreover, 47.7% of consumers want pandas to be used as stationery.

In the survey of what kind of design consumers expect the panda products to have in the future, 57.47% of consumers hope that the panda products integrate traditional cultural elements, 53.45% of consumers choose to have more customized services, and 47.13% of consumers hope that the panda products can combine modern technology elements.

5. Suggestion

Through analyzing the above data, the manufacturers of panda products should consider the following points: First of all, the price of panda products cannot be very high (such as more than 300 yuan), which requires producers to consider production costs, logistics costs, and other factors. Secondly, original ideas and practicality are also factors that most consumers consider when purchasing, and manufacturers should consider these two points in the design. Thirdly, regarding practicality, most consumers think that the more traditional panda dolls are also widely accepted. However, the daily use function, stationery function, entertainment function, and environmental protection are also the directions that manufacturers should pay attention to and try to make the panda products with diversity. Finally, producers should consider integrating pandas with traditional Chinese elements, and businesses with conditions can consider producing products such as panda VR or AR interactive games so that more ordinary people can interact with pandas. Merchants can also make some jewelry, such as panda metal badges or panda pendants, and provide engraving services so that consumers feel the exclusive and memorable value of the product. Domestic producers in China can also consider cooperating with some famous games or anime, or even IP with the “Kung Fu Panda” series, to attract more consumer attention. In addition, with the development of The Times, people’s awareness of environmental protection is gradually increasing. With the launch of some environmentally friendly products, such as recyclable shopping bags, quickly degradable garbage bags, etc., printed on the cute panda pattern, the author believes it is also a good choice.

6. Conclusion

Concerning panda cultural and creative products, the results of this study show that consumers, in general, will consider the pricing, original ideas, and practicality of panda products more. Panda products should not only appear as traditional dolls but should be designed for various

aspects of daily use, entertainment, learning supplies, and environmental protection. In addition, businesses should also pay attention to integrating modern technology, traditional culture integration, customized services, and other aspects of multiple considerations. This study provides consumer perspective data and references significance for future research in this direction, which can positively influence the design and sales of panda products. However, this study also has some limitations. It must consider whether the manufacturer has enough technology to design a new product. Furthermore, whether the suggestions of this study will increase the design and production costs of manufacturers or even change the acceptance concept of consumers due to the changes of The Times in the future. This is the direction and topic worth studying and discussing in the future.

References

- [1] Jinlian K., et al. A group of Japanese giant panda fans came to Sichuan to visit Xiang Xiang, a photographer who made people cry, 2023.
- [2] Jelinčić D. A. Indicators for cultural and creative industries' impact assessment on cultural heritage and tourism. *Sustainability*, 2021, 13(14): 7732.
- [3] European Commission. Cultural tourism. https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/offer/cultural_en. Accessed on June 7, 2021.
- [4] Pourzakarya M. Searching for possible potentials of cultural and creative industries in rural tourism development: a case of Rudkhan Castle rural areas. *Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality*, 2022, 17(2): 180-196.
- [5] Yuewei M. Giant panda cultural creative industry and giant panda habitat protection and development. *Tourism Overview (The Second Half of the Month)*, 2013, (04): 161-162.
- [6] Katsuhiko M. Research activities "Economic effects of the birth of panda cubs at Ueno Zoo". *The Express of Kansai University*, 2017, (12).
- [7] Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding. Base Profile. <https://www.panda.org.cn/cn/about/introduction/>.
- [8] Fenglin Z. The giant panda brings the "cute" top stream. *China Brand*, 2023, (07): 72-75.
- [9] Min T. Giant panda products to the national brand image in multiple ways. *All-Media Explorations*, 2024, (04): 123-126.
- [10] China International Communications Group. China Corporate Image Global Survey Report 2022. Available: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ISE0gpjdNLhnj63tmVYWKQ>. Accessed on 2023.
- [11] WWF Logo, <https://www.wwf.or.jp/>