Kharkiv State Academy of Design
and Arts Graphic design department
Visual Communication Design

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Transformation of the Visual Identity of Traditional Brands under the Influence of Youth Subculture (Case Study of the "Hengshun" Brand)

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ISSUES AND RELEVANCE

Why is this topic important?

Generation-Z has emerged as key consumers, yet time-honored brands face outdated visuals. This study uses subcultural translation to enable intergenerational dialogue for heritage brands and offer practical design references for their youth-oriented renewal.

What do you want to research or create?

I aim to explore youth-subculture-driven visual renewal for heritage time-honored brands. I intend to develop feasible visual-identity strategies bridging traditional craftsmanship and Gen-Z aesthetic preferences through design practice.

How is it connected to culture, design, people, or history?

It connects historical craft heritage with contemporary youth culture. Design translates traditional intangible-heritage elements into modern visuals, reshaping how people perceive time-honored brands in daily life.

What is the cultural, historical, or social background of this theme?

Rising Gen-Z consumption fuels demand for fresh cultural expressions. Traditional time-honored brands struggle to adapt to modern tastes amid digital-driven cultural shifts in Chinese society.





Background of Hengshun Brand & Vinegar

Zhenjiang Balsamic Vinegar boasts a thousand-year brewing history. Made from glutinous rice via ancient solid-state fermentation using water and soil from the Yangtze River in Zhenjiang, it ranks among China's Four Famous Vinegars. Founded in 1840, Hengshun is the iconic time-honored brand of Zhenjiang Balsamic Vinegar, inheriting the national intangible cultural heritage vinegar-making craft. Rooted in Zhenjiang, the brand is deeply connected with local culture including Jinshan Temple and the Legend of the White Snake. This design upgrade explores the cultural link between vinegar and Yangtze River water, integrating Y2K trend aesthetics to break stereotypes of old-time brands. It allows Hengshun Vinegar, which carries thousands of years of craftsmanship, to reach Generation Z in a trendy new form.



Design Elements Adopted: The Legend of Flooding Jinshan Temple

This design adopts the folk tale of Flooding Jinshan Temple at Jinshan Temple in Zhenjiang. In the legend, Bai Suzhen the White Snake, together with Green Snake Xiaoqing, conjured floodwaters to besiege Jinshan Temple to save her husband detained by Fahai. Rooted in Zhenjiang, the story shares the same local culture as Hengshun Vinegar. Extracting imagery of waves, Jinshan and snakes, the design reimagines the two snakes as IP characters Cu Baibai and Cu Qingqing. Combining Y2K aesthetics and traditional costumes, it integrates the ancient legend with century-old vinegar culture to create youthful visuals for the time-honored brand.



Project Background

Against the shift of consumer markets, Generation-Z has grown into a core consumption group with distinctive subcultural aesthetics. Chinese time-honored brands including Hengshun face mismatches between their traditional visual identity and young people's tastes. This project sets out to address such practical gaps brought by intergenerational changes within new-consumption cultural surroundings.

Post-launch Support (if any)

This thesis intends to sort out Hengshun's cultural resources and analyze its existing communication drawbacks. It builds targeted design principles and practical schemes of "subcultural translation", and verifies design effects, so as to explore feasible youth-oriented transformation paths for heritage time-honored brands.

Work



Research Content and Methods

This paper covers research content and research methods. For research content, it sorts out Hengshun's folk-cultural and intangible-heritage resources, identifies gaps between its existing visuals and Gen-Z aesthetic demands, and carries out multi-faceted design work including IP creation, packaging and store-space upgrades, a stamp-collecting booklet and interactive zones. Expert and user tests are performed to summarize reusable visual-renewal strategies for heritage time-honored brands. For research methods, it adopts literature review, field investigation, questionnaires and case analysis. Theoretical insights are turned into practical visual-spatial solutions and iteratively refined based on collected feedback.

Survey results



01. Principles and Methods of Visual Information Visualization for Hengshun Brand under Subcultural Translation

Based on youth subculture theory and semiotics, this research selects and refines cultural materials including Zhenjiang vinegar intangible heritage and local legends. Core narrative information is extracted and text content streamlined. Adopting subcultural visual languages such as cyberpunk and pixel art, the study reconstructs symbols in colour, graphics, layout and interactive dynamics, building a visual system fitting Gen-Z aesthetics for stores and cultural derivatives.

02. Technical Route

First, define the goals of Hengshun's youth-oriented design and collect brand archives, intangible craft records and user aesthetic data. Conduct user research and demand analysis to establish subcultural translation design strategies. Process cultural materials to finish visual design for IP, store space and stamp booklet. Iterate the scheme through expert assessment and user tests, and finally produce store installations, cultural products and interactive digital works as final outputs.

Thesis Information

Master's Thesis Topic

Transformation of the Visual Identity of Traditional Brands under the Influence of Youth Subculture (Case Study of the "Hengshun" Brand)

Subject of Research

The internal logical relation between Gen-Z subcultural aesthetics and the youth-driven upgrade of time-honored-brand visuals. It explores how to translate Hengshun's intangible-heritage symbols via "subcultural translation" and strike a balance between cultural solemnity and playful modern expression.

Object of Research

Youth-oriented visual renewal practices of Chinese time-honored brands represented by Hengshun Aged Vinegar. It focuses on the disconnection between traditional brand imagery and young audiences, alongside the whole visual-identity transformation process guided by youth-subculture theories.

Territorial and Chronological Scope

Geographically centered on Zhenjiang, Jiangsu, home of Hengshun and Zhenjiang aromatic vinegar. The time frame covers Hengshun's 180-year-long history, focusing especially on China's Gen-Z-dominated new-consumption market context from 2020 to 2026.

Research Source

1.Yu ,Ah J ,Kim , et al.A Study of Makgeolli Container and Label Design Elements Utilized Eye Tracker for Promotion of 2030 Generation Consumers - Focused on the Case Study of Major Alcoholic Beverage Brand in Korea.

2.YE Weiwei, LIU Qiang. On the Development Strategy of China’s Time-honored Brand "Hengshun".

3.Li Mingliang, Xu Tian. Research on Chinese Time-honored Brands: Current Situation, Dilemmas and Activation Paths.

4.An X .Generation and Value of Subculture Rethinking Subculture: the Meaning of Style[J].Journal of Sociology and Ethnology.

5.Chen ,Qinchuan,첸친취안 , et al.Nature in Retail Store: Enhancing Brand Image Through Biophilic Elements - A Case Study of Innisfree.

6.Chen M ,Ding J .Research on Cultural and Creative Product Design under the Integration of Culture and Tourism.

Key Reference Projects

Visual outcome(s):

1.Visual Translation of Subculture-oriented IP for Time-honored Brands

2.Immersive Offline Spatial Narrative Design

Digital Visualization and Interaction of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Brand Upgrade Design of Other Time-honored Brands





Design [historical figure]using software such as PS,AI,XD,AE,etc



Key Reference Projects

Visual outcome(s):

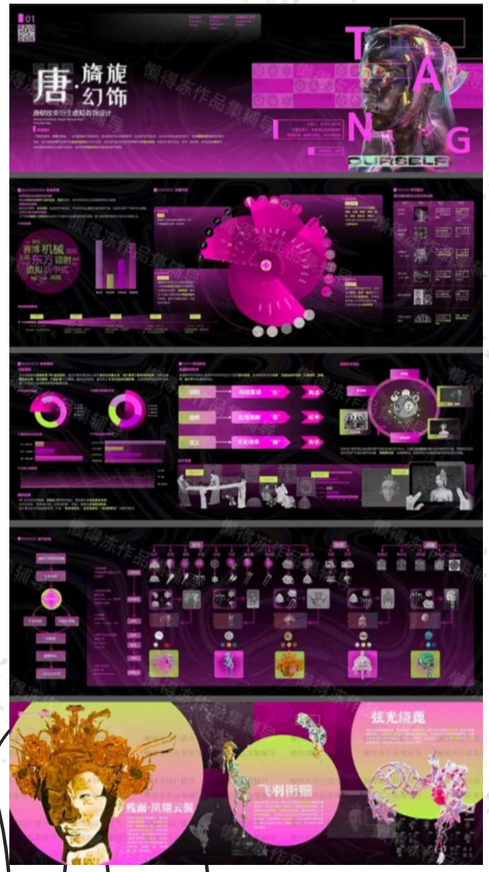
1.Visual Translation of Subculture-oriented IP for Time-honored Brands

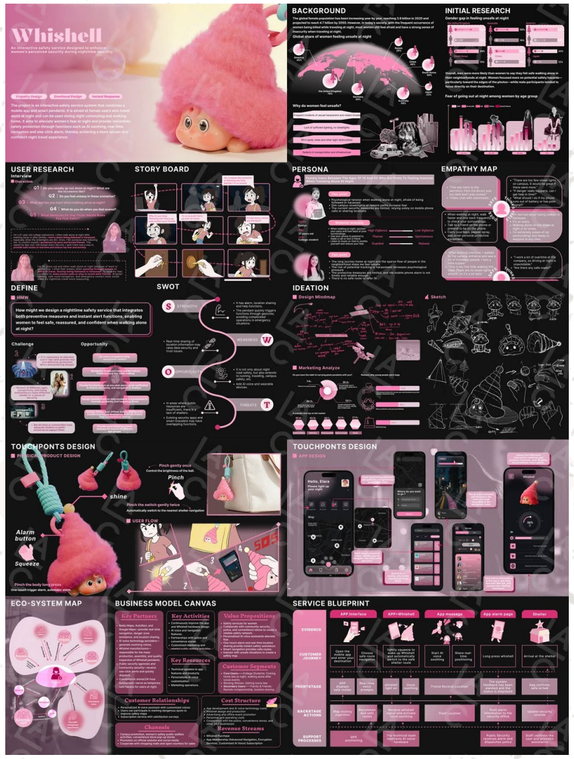
2.Immersive Offline Spatial Narrative Design

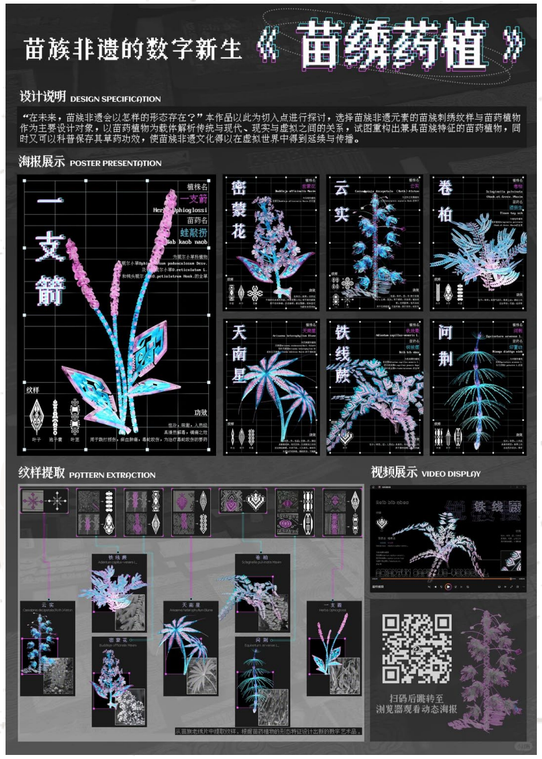
Digital Visualization and Interaction of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Interactive Design of Intangible

Cultural Heritage Brands









Key Reference Projects

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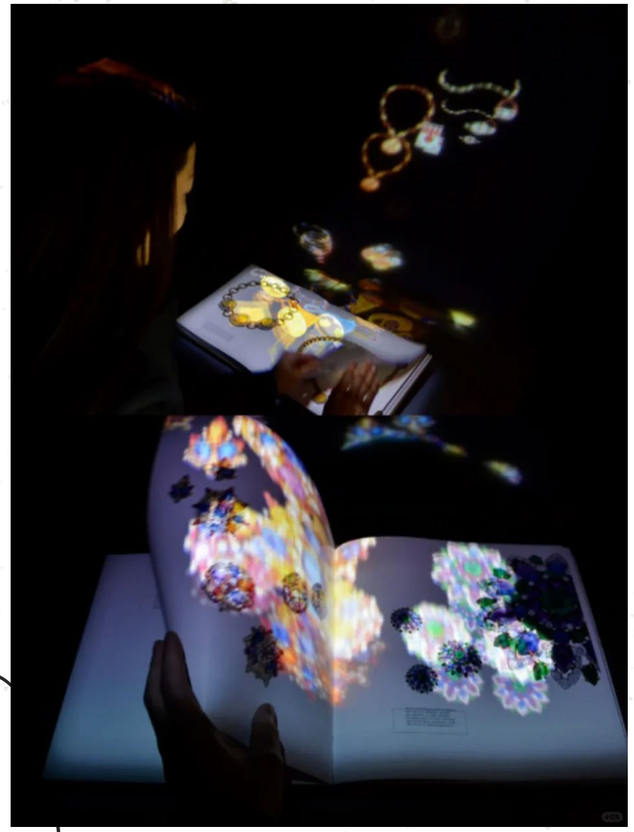
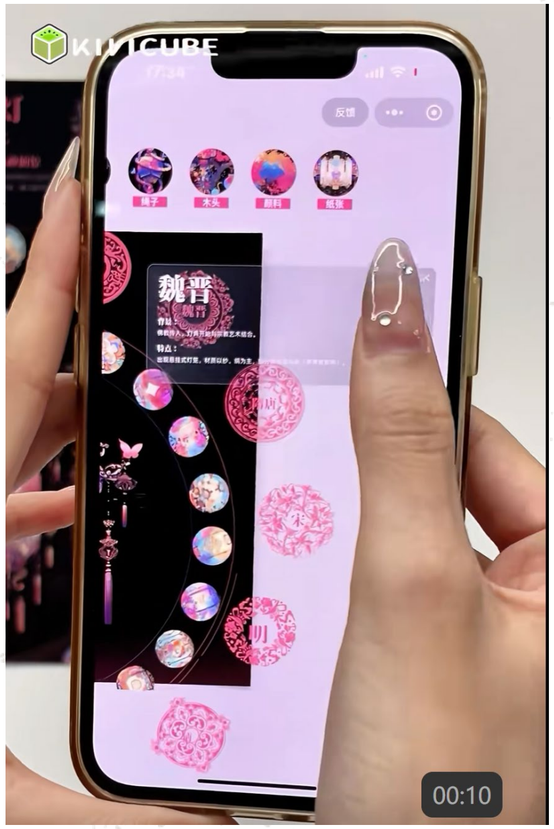
Digital Visualization and Interaction of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Physical Display









Concept sketch

The conceptual sketches illustrate the subcultural renovation of Hengshun vinegar store, integrating Zhenjiang vinegar intangible heritage and cyberpunk aesthetics. The drawings feature glowing vinegar jar walls, holographic check-in spots and the “Vinegar Workshop Fairy” IP inspired by the legend of Flooding Jinshan Mountain with pixel styling. Layout sketches of the stamp booklet are drafted with brewing timeline illustrations and custom stamps. The store is divided into four functional zones, marking positions of VR interactive devices. Balancing the solemnity of brewing heritage and Gen Z trendy aesthetics, the sketches verify color schemes, visitor circulation and IP application, laying a visual foundation for further design development.







Initial Design Sketches

- Collection, collation and contemporary analysis of historical and cultural allusions
- Research on Principles and Methods of Brand Design Upgrade
- Visual Content Design and Initial Sketch Drafting
- Visual Design Testing and Optimization Strategy
- Summary and Refinement of Time-honored Brand Upgrade Design

IP Emoji & Blindbox Design Sketches












Initial Design Sketches

Yangtze River water

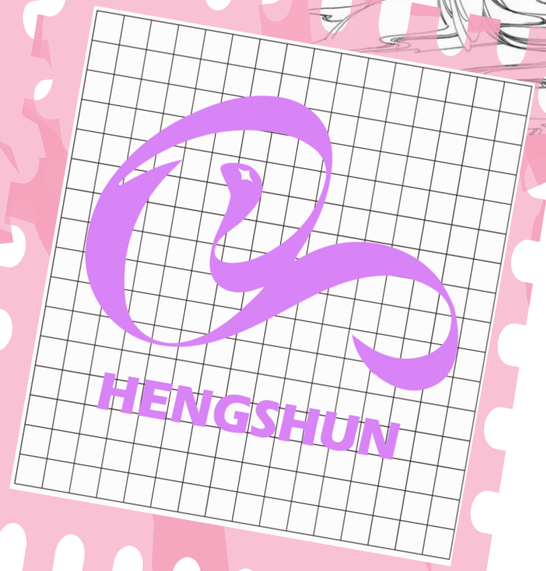


Pouring flowing vinegar





Final draft



Original Logo



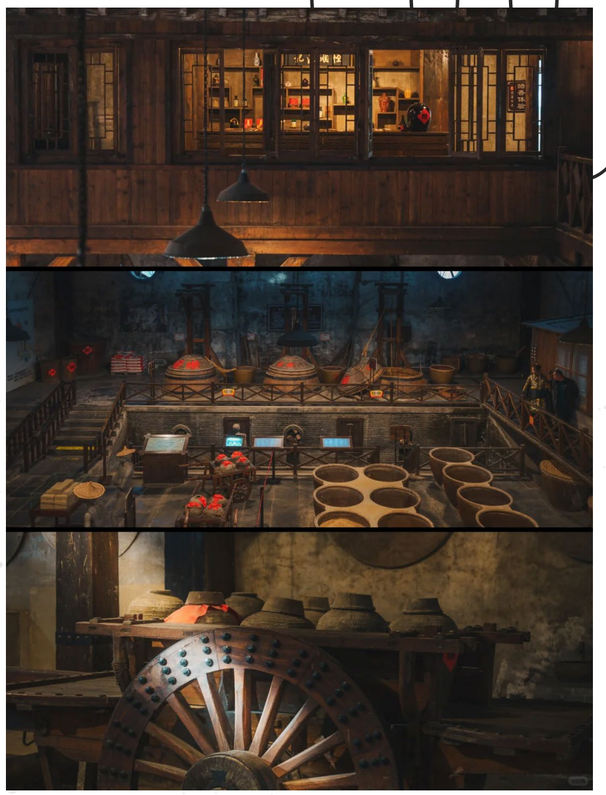
The Legend of the White Snake and its Zhenjiang legend

In Legend of the White Snake, Bai Suzhen summoned the Yangtze River flood at Zhenjiang to submerge Jinshan Temple and rescue Xu Xian imprisoned there by Fahai. Rooted in Zhenjiang, this folk tale weaves Jinshan Temple into the snake legend, a beloved romantic story across the Jiangnan region.

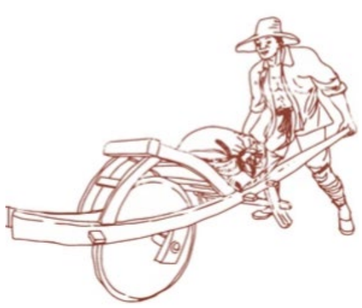
Packaging Design Draft

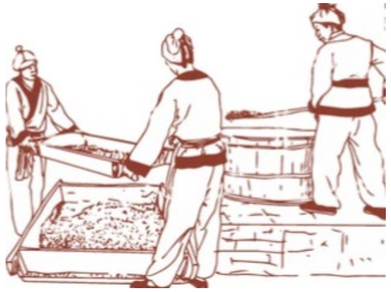






Draft of Balsamic Vinegar Production Process











IP Design Showcase



Name: Cu Baibai
Gender: Female
True Form: White Snake
Skill: Flooding Jinshan Temple
Combined Elements: Snake motifs, traditional Chinese cheongsam, Y2K-style clothing and hairstyle, vinegar-brewing cook’s apron



Name: Cu Qingqing
Gender: Female
True Identity: Green Snake
Signature Skill: Water Manipulation
Design Elements: Snake motifs, traditional Chinese cheongsam, Y2K-style clothing and hairstyle, vinegar-brewing chef apron
Personality: Very obedient to her elder sister; the two sisters share an extremely close bond

IP Design Showcase

3D Model Design



Sticker Design Showcase

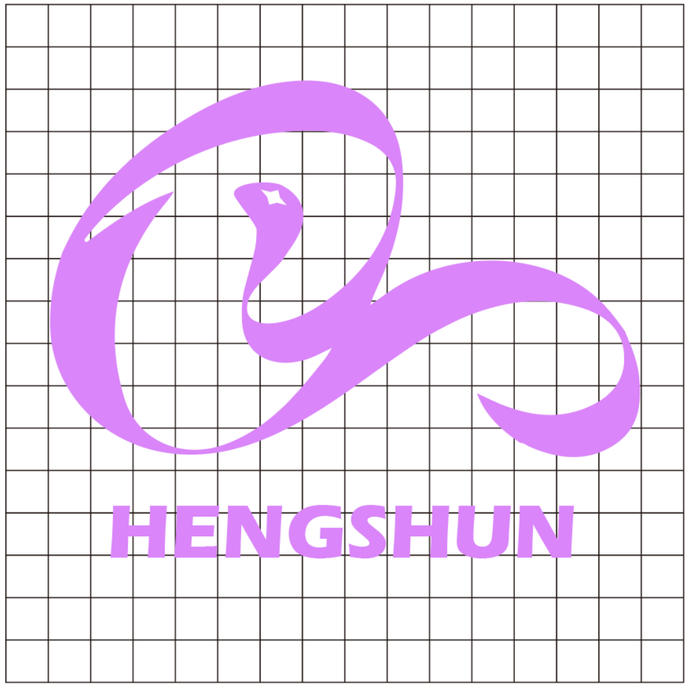


3D Blind Box Design Showcase





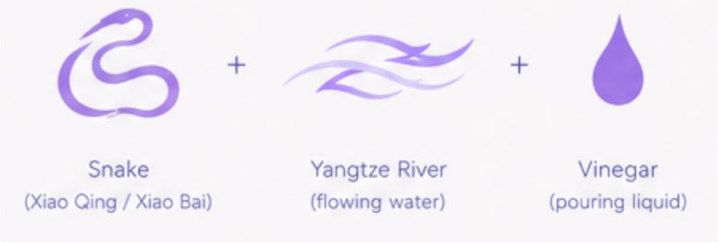
LOGO Redesign Showcase



This redesigned Hengshun Logo draws imagery of white snake, green snake and river water from the folk tale Flooding Jinshan Temple, combined with vinegar drop shape to echo IP characters Cu Baibai and Cu Qingqing. The logo is formed by continuous and smooth curves, showing the agility of snakes and the grace of flowing river, integrating myth legend and vinegar-brewing culture. Dreamy purple is selected as the main color with trendy Y2K style, and a black-and-white version is created for packaging, cultural products and other scenarios. Breaking the traditional solemn visual of time-honored brands, it combines Zhenjiang local legend, century-old vinegar culture and contemporary youth aesthetics, endowing the brand mark with youthful temperament and expressing the brand’s innovation.







APPLICATION

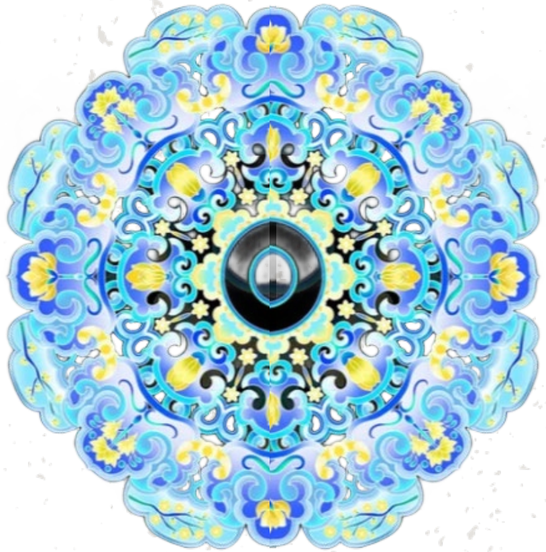






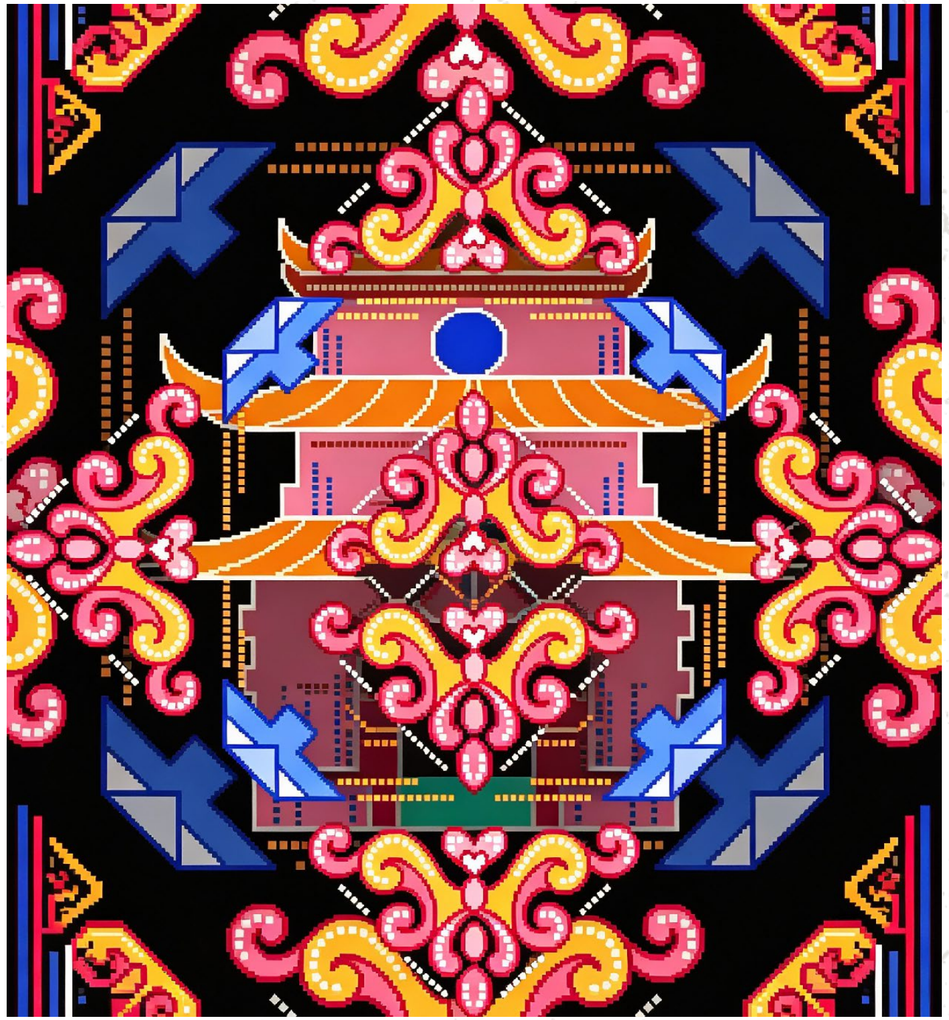


Pattern Design Showcase









Packaging Design Showcase



This packaging set for Hengshun aromatic vinegar adopts Y2K subculture style, featuring dual IP characters Cu Baibai and Cu Qingqing. It integrates traditional vinegar culture with trendy aesthetics. The black background sets off purple and blue florals with striking color contrast, adaptable to gift boxes, bottles and portable bags. While retaining the brand's historical logo, the cute-cool IP images shorten the distance with Gen Z, realizing the visual rejuvenation of the time-honored brand.

Derivative Product Design Showcase

Puzzle





Badge



Makeup bag and Polaroid





Stickers



THANK YOU