**WORLD WIDE JOURNAL OF
MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND
DEVELOPMENT**

Zhu Yingfang
City Graduate School, City
University, Malaysia.

Mustaffa Halabi Azahari
City Graduate School, City
University, Malaysia.

Symbolizing Tianjin: A Study in Urban Mascot Design and City Branding

Zhu Yingfang, Mustaffa Halabi Azahari

Abstract
This paper explores the strategic design of city mascots, using Tianjin as a case study to illustrate how local cultural elements can be transformed into an effective mascot design. The research highlights the evolution of the concept of mascots from ancient totems to modern branding tools, emphasizing their role in urban branding and cultural representation. The study adopts a qualitative approach, focusing on Tianjin's cultural heritage such as the Tianjin dialect and crosstalk, and how these elements are integrated into the design of the city mascot, Huo Xiang. The paper discusses the external, intermediate, and internal design elements of Huo Xiang, representing key aspects of Tianjin's culture, including its martial arts heritage and vibrant local dialect. Through this mascot, Tianjin's unique cultural identity is showcased, contributing to city branding and forming an emotional connection with the audience.

Keywords: Design, Mascot, City branding.

1.0 Introduction
In an era where cities increasingly compete for global recognition, the design of a city mascot becomes a strategic endeavor, intertwining cultural identity with urban branding. This paper focuses on Tianjin, a city rich in cultural heritage and distinctive traditions, exploring the potential of a mascot to encapsulate and promote its unique identity. Tianjin, with its harmonious blend of historical architecture and vibrant folk arts, presents an ideal case for examining how local cultural elements can be transformed into a compelling mascot design. This study aims not only to propose a conceptual design for Tianjin's mascot but also to underscore the role such mascots play in enhancing city branding, fostering community pride, and positioning the city in the global landscape. By analyzing existing design paradigms and integrating Tianjin's cultural narratives, this research contributes to the broader discourse on urban marketing and cultural representation, offering insights into how traditional elements can be innovatively leveraged in contemporary branding strategies.

2.0 Literature review
The term "mascot" originates from the French "mascotte," meaning "lucky charm." Initially signifying good luck, its earliest forms date back to ancient totems and religious symbols, like Egyptian deity figures and Greek statues for guardianship and luck (YAN, 2003). Popularized by Edmond Audran's 1880 opera "*La mascotte*," it entered English in 1881, evolving from a slang term among French gamblers. Initially linked to inanimate objects for luck, the 19th and 20th centuries saw its expansion to animals, objects, and later, cartoon characters and sports team logos.
From ancient times through the Renaissance, mascots in civilizations like Egypt, Greece, and Rome, were deeply intertwined with religious beliefs, serving as symbols of protection and luck (Gardner, 2007; Hamilton, 1998). In the Medieval and Renaissance periods, they evolved into heraldic symbols for knights and nobility, signifying honor and lineage (Woodcock & Robinson, 1988). The 18th and 19th centuries saw mascots adopted by military units for morale, evolving further in the 20th century as sports and entertainment symbols. The 1968 Winter Olympics introduced "Schuss," the first Olympic mascot,

Correspondence:
Zhu Yingfang
City Graduate School, City
University, Malaysia.

marking the beginning of mascot culture in modern sports. Since then, Olympic mascots have symbolized the culture and spirit of the host countries, playing a crucial role in conveying Olympic values and enhancing global cultural exchanges.

In the late 20th century and beyond, mascots have become pivotal in branding and marketing, evolving from logo extensions to key elements in advertising campaigns and brand promotion (Schmitt, 2012; Yoon & Lee, 2016). They act as commercial spokespersons, forming a more relatable connection with consumers. This trend extended to city branding, with mascots used by governments and non-profits for public engagement. In the 21st century, the rise of social media and digital communication has further expanded mascot usage into interactive storytelling for social causes and cultural events (Yan, 2019; Zhou & Zheng, 2020).

In China, mascots have transformed into cultural IPs (Intellectual Properties), blending artistic creation with cross-media production. This shift reflects a broader trend in cultural globalization and digitization, where mascots transcend traditional roles, weaving narratives and emotions across various media platforms ("*China Cultural IP Industry Development Report*," 2018). This evolution exemplifies the dynamic interplay between cultural development and contemporary entertainment paradigms, highlighting the importance of cultural symbols in connecting people and shaping collective identities.

In the digital era, technology is revolutionizing city mascot design, making processes more intelligent and networked. Digital tools, including AI and VR/AR, are enhancing design efficiency and user engagement, allowing mascots to interact more dynamically with audiences through various formats. This shift is expanding city mascot IPs beyond aesthetics to content creation, focusing on high-quality narratives that intertwine with a city's history and culture.

City mascots are evolving into crucial storytellers of urban tales, playing a significant role in depicting a city's heritage and future vision. The advancement of digital technologies bolsters the efficiency of cultural industries, fostering a seamless integration between city mascots and diverse digital platforms. This convergence paves the way for mascots to become integral components of the broader entertainment ecosystem, creating value through cross-sector collaboration and enhancing city branding in the digital landscape.

3.0 Methodology

Utilizing a qualitative case-study methodology, this research analyzes the incorporation of Tianjin's cultural motifs into mascot design, with data gathered from interviews, surveys, and historical documentation. Inspired by the Kyushu Shinkansen launch in 2011, Kumamoto Prefecture introduced "Kumamon," a mascot reflecting the region's cultural identity, to promote tourism. The designer, Mizuno Manabu, capitalized on Kumamoto's colors and cultural symbols, such as its volcanic landscape, to craft Kumamon's look and persona, which includes dynamic gestures, adding to its charm (Collins, 2015). （Figure 1）
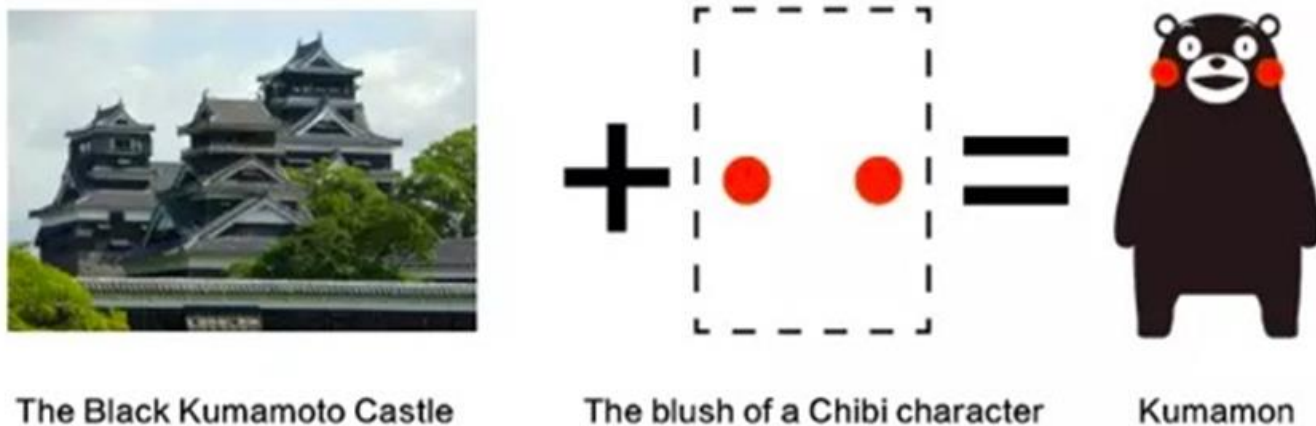

Fig. 1: Design Inspiration of Kumamon

Note：https://www.kumamon-sq.jp/en/

Kumamon's role extended beyond marketing, becoming the first virtual mascot to hold a governmental title, bridging the gap between the digital and the real world and fostering community engagement. Campaigns like "Find Kumamon" significantly boosted regional economic gains (Thompson & Lee, 2018). The mascot's transition into various merchandises like emojis and toys expanded its reach, solidifying its cultural and commercial impact. （Fig. 2）

Fig. 2: The campaign of Kumamon Loses its Blush

Note: Source https://www.prweek.com/article/1332949/bears-missing-cheeks-helped-agricultural-region

Kumamon's success illustrates the evolution of mascot design from static symbols to dynamic characters integrated into digital and physical spaces. The case underscores the need for continuous innovation in design and marketing strategies to adapt to changing consumer interactions and preferences.

4.0 Tianjin Cultural Elements Analysis

The rise of Tianjin is rooted in its "dock culture," which, since the mid-Tang Dynasty, has served as a vital hub for north-south freight transportation. Due to its unique and significant geographical location, Tianjin was officially founded in 1404, making it the only city in China with a clearly established date of construction. The diversity of Tianjin's tourism culture stems from its rich cultural resources. Its natural geographical location, complex historical background, unique humanistic sentiments, and dazzling folk arts have shaped a rich and diverse regional culture, making Tianjin a city of multifaceted inclusiveness. Through extensive data collection, including literature review, online resources, and field studies, the author categorized Tianjin's cultural elements into five types (Table 1). A survey was conducted among 200 respondents (100 locals and 100 non-locals) to research the cultural awareness of Tianjin using an online questionnaire. The survey, employing the Likert scale, scored each cultural element for its representation of Tianjin. Among these, Huo Yuanjia, Tianjin dialect, and crosstalk ranked as the top three representative elements of Tianjin's culture.

Table 1: The characteristic elements of Tianjin in five catagolery.

No	Catagolery	Characteristic Elements
1	Architecture and Natural Landscapes	Western-style houses, "Five Avenues", Hai He River, The Ferris wheel—The Eye of Tianjin, Porcelain House, The Ancient Culture Street
2	Cuisine	Pancake rolled with crisp fritter, Tianjin Breakfast, Steamed Bun, Tianjin twisted fried dough
3	Human Stories	Tianjin Uncle, Auntie with hair pinned up, Huo Yuanjia, A boy holding a fish
4	Folk Art	Crosstalk, Tianjin Dialect, Yangliuqing New Years Painting, Clay Figurine Zhang, Tianjin Clapper Talk
5	Experiences and Impressions	Humor City, Optimistic, A Leisure and Relaxed City , Worth going

Noted：Made by the author

Huo Yuanjia is a famous patriotic martial artist of modern China. He inherited the unique skill of "Mizong Fist" from his family and was rated as one of the ten martial arts celebrities of Cangzhou. He holds an important position in the history of modern Chinese martial arts development and has had a positive impact on modern Chinese history and cultural development. Huo Yuanjia's "Mizong Fist" technique has been widely praised by later generations, and he is known for his superb Kung fu and outstanding combat skills. He saw martial arts as a symbol of national spirit, demonstrating the bravery and resilience of the Chinese nation through it. His patriotic spirit and national pride

have had a positive impact on modern Chinese history and cultural development, inspiring later patriots and martial arts inheritors. As a martial artist, he has showcased and passed down Chinese culture worldwide through the performance and practice of traditional martial arts. （Figure 3）

Fig. 3: Protrait of Huo Yuanjia.

The Tianjin dialect, a variant of Mandarin influenced by the local environment, reflects the city's culture through its crisp, lively nature, seen in popular short videos on social media. This dialect, embodying the straightforward and humorous character of Tianjin's people, has gained online popularity, broke regional barriers and becoming key to Tianjin's cultural identity (Zeng, 2018).

Crosstalk, originating in Beijing but flourishing in Tianjin, is integral to the city's cultural scene. After a surge in the 1940s, it experienced a revival recently. Tianjin's crosstalk culture, enjoyed in teahouses and theaters, is a vital part of the city's identity, with over a dozen teahouses like Mingliu and Qianxiangyi Wen Garden hosting daily performances by about a hundred professional artists. This rich tradition of crosstalk has become a hallmark of Tianjin's cultural tourism.

5.0 HuoXiang—Mascot Proposal for Tianjin City

Leon and his colleagues (2003) proposed a three-level cultural framework when studying cultural product design. This framework divides the cultural space of products into external, intermediate, and internal levels and aligns them with design elements. In the study of mascot design, this theory is applied to the elements of mascot design and can be categorized as follows:

- **External Level Design Elements:** This includes form, proportion, expression, color, and representation style.
- **Intermediate Level Design Elements:** This encompasses functionality, usage scenarios, and sensory experience.
- **Internal Level Design Elements:** This relates to cultural characteristics, story-telling, emotional aspects, and playfulness.

Based on preliminary research into Tianjin's culture, the author identified three key impressions of Tianjin through a questionnaire survey: Huo Yuanjia, Tianjin dialect, and crosstalk. According to Leon's framework, these three keywords represent Tianjin's urban image and character traits from the internal, intermediate, and external aspects of a mascot, leading to the creation of Tianjin's city mascot, Huo Xiang. （Table 2）

Table 2: Cultural Attribute Elements of Mascot Huo Xiang.

Cultural framework	Design attribute	Cultural Attribute Element Analysis
External level	Shape	Restore the morphological features of traditional cultural archetypes.
	Proportion	Cartoonish proportions.
	Expression	Anthropomorphic and lively.
	Color	"Utilizing traditional color combinations."
	Style	wide range of practicality
Intermediate level	Functionality	Applicable to multiple scenarios with high adaptability
	Usage Scenario	wide range of practicality
	Sensory Experience	Awakening memories of traditional culture.
Internal level	Cultural Characteristics	Reflects the style of historical eras.
		The cultural characteristics evoke a sense of familiarity.
		The cultural features are easily recognizable and memorable.
		Reflects traditional cultural aesthetic tastes.
	Storytelling	Descendant of Huo Yuanjia
	Emotion	Has emotional resonance.
	Playfulness	Humorous and witty

Noted: Summarized by the author from Leon's theory

- **External Level Design Elements of Huo Xiang**

The name of Tianjin's city mascot is Huo Xiang, and she is characterized as a descendant of Huo Yuanjia, a setting designed to garner public recognition of her identity as a "Tianjinese."

In the design of Huo Xiang's appearance,The mascot blends key cultural elements: Chinese Kung Fu, medicinal heritage, and Huo Yuanjia's lineage, represented by a lively traditional Chinese girl aged ten. Her design, with purple 'buns' adorned with gourd ornaments, reflects medicinal

roots and traditional aesthetics. The attire, a modern twist on traditional Chinese clothing like the cheongsam, marries classic motifs with sleekness, echoing martial arts themes. This mascot embodies youthful energy and charm, offering a visually engaging narrative and an interactive experience that captures the essence of its cultural heritage. （Fig. 4 ）

Fig. 4: Design Inspiration of Mascot Huo Xiang.

Note: drawn by the author

In mascot design , the standardized design of the mascot's head-to-body ratio and orthographic views is an indispensable component of the entire character development process. It not only provides designers with creative direction and boundaries but also lays a solid foundation for the mascot's brand communication and market promotion (Moore, R. E. ,2003). Through strict design standards, the mascot can maintain consistency across various media and platforms, providing audiences with a cohesive and memorable brand experience. （Fig. 5-8）
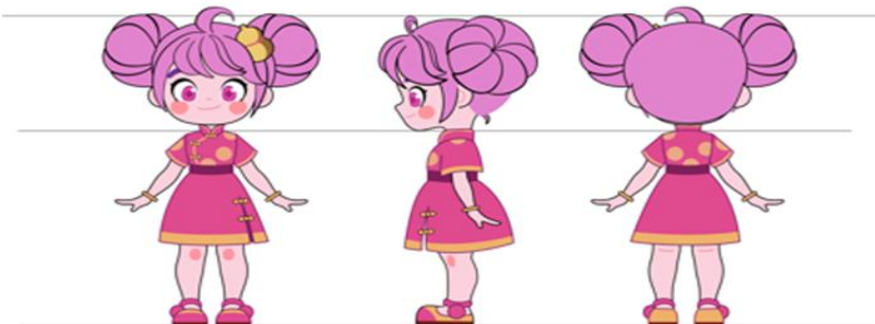

Fig. 5: Three views display of Huo Xiang.
Note：drawn by the author.

Fig. 6: The head-to-body ratio for Huo Xiang.
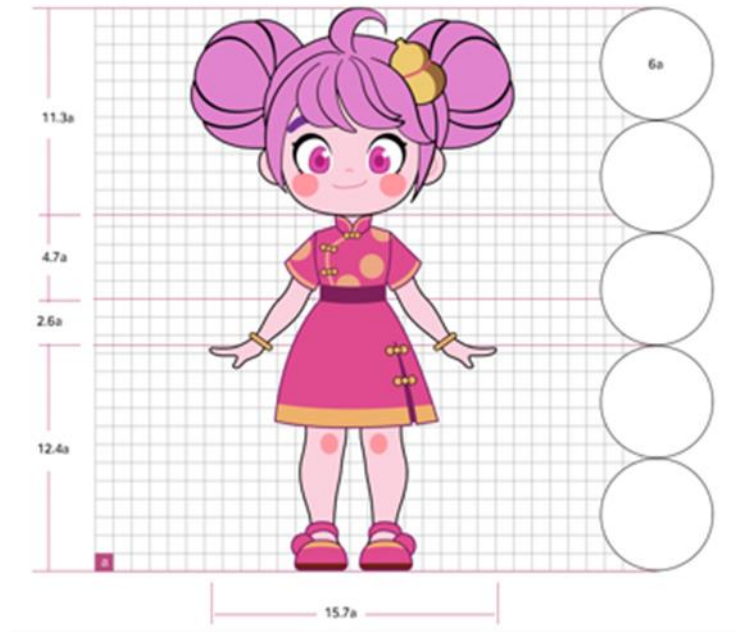Note：drawn by the author

Fig. 7: Standard Drawing of Huo Xiang.

Note：drawn by the author

Fig. 8: 3D Vision of Huo Xiang.
Note：drawn by the author

• **Intermediate Level Design Elements of Huo Xiang**

The intermediate layer refers to the internal system in the mascot development process, aiming to elicit a sense of pleasure in the audience during use, thereby narrowing the psychological distance between the audience and the mascot (Fowles, 2013). This is mainly manifested in three aspects: the functionality, usage scenario, and sensory experience of mascot derivatives. For the Tianjin mascot Huo Xiang, the development of its derivatives emphasizes functionality while incorporating elements of participation and interaction. Audience research indicated a high familiarity and affection towards the Tianjin dialect. Therefore, the development strategy for Huo Xiang's merchandise involves integrating the mascot's image with elements of the local dialect. This approach is applied to create a range of products, such as adhesive tapes, pins, fridge magnets, and other similar items that are not only affordable but also engaging, thereby attracting a wide consumer base. Their affordability and whimsical nature make these items particularly appealing, and their small size and lightweight nature render them ideal for widespread distribution, especially in the realm of e-commerce. This strategic approach in merchandise development not only caters to the immediate commercial goals but also aids in the broader objective of promoting the city's brand image through these mascot derivatives. By

leveraging the unique cultural aspects of Tianjin, these products serve as ambassadors of the local culture and identity, enhancing the city's visibility and appeal on a larger scale. (Figure 9-11)

Fig. 9: Mascot Huo Xiang Merchandise — Tianjin Dialect Tape.
Note：Designed by the author
Mascot Huo Xiang Merchandise — Tianjin Dialect Tape.

Fig. 10: Mascot Huo Xiang Merchandise — Tianjin Dialect Tape.
Note：Designed by the author

Fig. 11: Mascot Huo Xiang Merchandise — Pin.
Note：Designed by the author

- **Internal Level Design Elements of Huo Xiang:**

The inner layer of mascot design, regarded as its essence, includes vital elements like cultural characteristics, narrative quality, emotional connection, and a sense of fun. This layer significantly influences how audiences perceive and engage with the mascot. The storytelling aspect, imbued with cultural nuances, particularly resonates with the audience（Wang&Yan, 2019）. For a mascot like Tianjin's, this inner layer should reflect the city's unique cultural identity. Tianjin's crosstalk themes are derived from the refinement of life, infused with the city's character. It reflects the positive and optimistic attitude of Tianjin's people and their open-hearted nature. These traits are also embodied in the mascot Huo Xiang's character. In content creation and promotion, through narrative storytelling, an emotional connection with the audience is established. For instance, updating dialect comics on Huo Xiang's social media accounts, launching a Huo Xiang Tianjin treasure hunt board game, allows users to learn about Tianjin's art, cuisine, customs, and other cultural aspects through gameplay, thereby promoting Tianjin's brand culture.

Fig. 12: Board game of " Huo Xiang Tianjin treasure hunt "

Note: Designed by the author

6.0 Conclusion

The creation of Tianjin's mascot, Huo Xiang, represents a successful integration of the city's rich cultural heritage into a modern branding tool. The mascot's design, informed by historical figures, local dialect, and traditional arts, effectively conveys the spirit of Tianjin. The research demonstrates how mascots can serve as crucial tools in urban branding, enhancing city image and fostering community pride. Huo Xiang stands as a testament to the power of mascots in cultural representation and marketing, bridging traditional elements with contemporary media. This study contributes to the understanding of city branding and cultural marketing, suggesting a framework for other cities to leverage their unique cultural assets in creating compelling mascots. The case of Tianjin and Huo Xiang highlights the importance of culturally resonant design in the increasingly digital and globalized landscape of city branding.

References
1. Cheng, H. (2021). Literature review of cultural and creative product design method research in China. Packaging Engineering, 42(14), 64-76. https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/50.1094.tb.20210428.1824.018.html
2. Fowles, J. (2013). Advertising and popular culture. Sage.
3. Gardner, J. (2007). Ancient Egyptian mythology and the origins of mascots. Journal of Historical Studies, 22(3), 45-60.
4. Ge, C. (2018). Demand Analysis and Transformation in the Process of Cultural and Creative Product Design. Zhuangshi, (2), 142-143. http://doi:10.16272/j.cnki.cn11-1392/j.2018.02.038
5. Hamilton, D. (1998). Greek and Roman religious symbols in modern mascot design. Classical Symbolism Journal, 15(1), 30-48.
6. Moore, R. E. (2003). From genericide to viral marketing: On 'brand.' Language & Communication, 23(3–4), 331–357. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0271-5309(03)00017-x
7. Norman, D. A. (2015). Human-centered design considered harmful. Interactions, 12(4), 14–19. https://doi.org/10.1145/1070960.1070976
8. Schmitt, B. H. (2012). The Role of Mascots in Branding and Marketing. Journal of Marketing Research, 49(4), 520-532.
9. Wang Chaoxia, Yan Zexue.（2019）.Research on cultural and creative Product design based on User empathy [J]. Packaging Engineering, 40(16):249-253.
10. Woodcock, T., & Robinson, J. M. (1988). Heraldry in medieval Europe: Symbols of nobility and chivalry. History and Heraldry, 11(2), 75-89.
11. YAN, X. (2003). The Cultural Evolution of Mascots: A Global Perspective. Global Culture Journal, 10(1), 22-35.
12. Yan, G. (2019). Social media and the evolution of mascot branding. Digital Marketing Trends, 18(3), 165-180.
13. Yoon, S., & Lee, J. (2016). The impact of mascots on brand marketing. Contemporary Marketing Review, 31(4), 310-325.
14. Zeng, X. (2018). A case study of dialect contacts of early Mandarin. Lingua, 208, 31–43. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2018.03.004
15. Zhou, Y., & Zheng, L. (2020). The integration of mascots in digital communication strategies. Journal of Digital Media & Policy, 11(2), 123-138.