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From De-originating Design to Cultural Translation: Deconstructing the Global Dissemination Logic of the Labubu Blind-Box IP

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Abstract

This paper examines the cross-cultural dissemination of China's blind-box IP Labubu. It aims to clarify how Labubu leverages a de-originating strategy to overcome geographically bounded cultural barriers, and how users' practices of cultural translation facilitate its circulation, thereby addressing an existing gap in scholarship concerning the visual semiotic system of designer-toy IPs and the deconstruction of their cross-cultural communication pathways. The findings indicate that official advertising does not merely strip away cultural attributes; rather, it transforms the functions of cultural symbols through the coordinated interplay of representation, interaction, and compositional meaning, while foregrounding universal emotions to mitigate culture-specific constraints. On social platforms, users are not simply engaging in secondary creation; instead, they actively perform cultural translation by reshaping the character's image, embedding it into diverse contexts, and orchestrating cross-IP linkages, thereby generating a form of mutual empowerment between the IP and the cultures it encounters. Labubu's success is driven by the adaptability of its symbolic repertoire and the stickiness of user co-creation, rather than by scarcity alone, which in turn produces a pathway for sustained long-term value. The paper's principal contribution lies in extending de-originating theory by specifying its operational mechanisms in visual practice, and in elucidating a collaborative diffusion model between official producers and users, offering theoretical and practical implications for the globalization of Chinese designer-toy IPs.

Keywords: Blind Box; Cross-Cultural Communication; Cultural Translation; De-Originating; Labubu