

# **Purchasing Museum Merchandise Online: An Analysis of the Effects of E-commerce on Tourists' Consumption Behaviours and Perception of Souvenirs in the Chinese Context**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The Internet has changed the way people purchase tourist souvenirs. In China, buying museum merchandise online has become a new trend. Nowadays, tourists can purchase museum merchandise online before and after physically visiting sites, whereas previously they were only able to do so in the museum's retail shop (i.e., offline). However, little is known about how such a change in consumption behaviour has influenced people's perception of tourist souvenirs. What motivates people to purchase museum merchandise online rather than, or in addition to, buying it immediately after visiting sites? Do souvenirs purchased online and purchased offline have different meanings? The present study takes a semi-structured interview approach to address these and other questions. Ten young Chinese museum e-shop purchasers participated. The results show that people mainly purchase museum merchandise online, both before and after their embodied visit to the site. The study introduces two new concepts to describe online museum merchandise purchase behaviour: pre-travel purchase and post-travel purchase. Satisfying cultural needs was one of the primary motivations for the participants' online museum merchandise purchases. Another motivation was the consequence of the long-lasting influence of the previous travel experience. The regret they felt from not having purchased souvenirs during their visit led them to buy online in the post-travel phase. Pleasant memories of their visit encouraged them to pay attention to product updates after returning home. Another finding was that people bought hardly any postcards online, but they always did so offline and regarded them as tourist souvenirs. They also tended to consider utilitarian and aesthetic values more when they bought museum merchandise online. The souvenir purchased in the post-travel phase does not entirely traverse the boundary between the sacred place and the profane place, which makes its evocative power weaker than that of the souvenir purchased at the destination itself. In addition, the pre-travel souvenir can be regarded as a catalyst of desire and a constant reminder to visit a location. Finally, according to the theory of the tourist gaze, museum merchandise can act as a symbolic medium; for example, photos elaborately designed by the supplier side construct purchasers' impressions and imaginings of museums in distant locations.*

**KEYWORDS:** *cultural products, e-commerce, museum merchandise, tourist souvenir museum*



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## 1. Introduction

Shopping in a museum gift shop to select a souvenir has long been a significant part of the tourist experience (Kong & Chang, 2016). With the development of e-commerce, many museums have opened online retail outlets to sell their merchandise. Previously, people could only purchase items in the museum's physical store. There is currently a boom in online sales of museum merchandise in China. The Palace Museum and the Chinese National Museum opened online shops in 2010 and 2015, respectively (Beijing Night, 2015; The Palace Museum, 2010). Also, the world's top three museums, the British Museum, the Louvre Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum, have launched their online stores on the Chinese largest online shopping platform Tmall (CGTN News, 2018). The souvenir has been traditionally understood to be a crucial component of the travel experience, playing the role of memory reminder and travel testimony (Kuhn, 2020; Sthapit, Coudounaris, & Björk, 2018). Today, anybody who can afford to do so can buy museum merchandise online. In other words, even though consumers may have never visited a particular museum, they can still buy its products. For instance, a cup with the logo of the British Museum could previously only be purchased in the offline gift shop, but now everyone can order it online and use it at home, even though they have never been to the United Kingdom. This new phenomenon bypasses the previous restrictions of space and time on souvenir purchases. Therefore, it is worth exploring what might be called *non-experience purchase behaviour*, the motivations behind it, and its meaning.

Non-experience purchase behaviour is a phenomenon that is closely related to China's creative industries (China Daily, 2019; Xinhua International News, 2019), which participates in the museum merchandise business in the design of products based on museums' cultural resources. Museum merchandise is no longer simply a replication of collections or items. The popularity of the *cultural and creative product* (CCP, or *Wenchuang*) is associated with the experience economy. The term CCP has its origin in the creative industry and refers to the fact that such merchandise is a combination of cultural elements and creative ideas (Song & Li, 2018). Consumers enjoy a richer experience by acquiring, discovering, and using products that can speak to their senses (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). For example, Hunan Provincial Museum developed the *Archaeological Mystery Box* (Figures 1–3), which is extremely popular amongst younger people. Purchasers are supplied with professional archaeological tools with which they excavate random relics hidden in the soil. All the items are representative of the collections of different dynasties in the museum (Henan Provincial Government, 2021). More and more museums have begun to present items from their collections in innovative

ways (China Daily, 2019). A great number of influential domestic and international museums have combined forces to develop the CCP business in China. These include the worlds' top three institutions mentioned above (Alibaba Data, 2021). Unlike traditional tourist souvenirs, purchases of CCPs are not limited by physical location. A CCP may be bought offline (i.e., in a museum shop), but it tends more and more to be purchased online.



Figures 1–3. “Lost treasure”: *Archaeological Mystery Box* (Henan Provincial Museum E-shop in Tmall, 2021)

The many implications of this new phenomenon are awaiting further investigation. As the Internet has eliminated the limitations of time and space for buying souvenirs, tourists' consumption behaviours have undergone a radical transformation. As has been noted, purchases no longer occur just during visits to a museum—the *sacred environment*—but can take place at any point during people's daily lives – the *normal environment* (D. Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Turner, 1973). The connection between the tourist experience and the souvenir is not as tight as it used to be, and this has arguably changed tourists' perception of the objects they purchase. What do those products bought online, which are still regarded as souvenirs, mean to them? How will these new purchase methods and channels change our understanding of souvenirs? Scholars in different subdisciplines have studied souvenirs from the perspectives of tourist sociology, consumer behaviour, commercialization, and commoditization. Souvenirs are associated with different values, and they can have educational, utilitarian, and spiritual functions (Kuhn, 2020; Kurniawan, 2019; Paraskevaidis & Andriotis, 2015). The self-display implications of souvenirs are another frequently researched topic. Love and Kohn (2001) and Kim and Littrell (2001) have studied the performative potential and the function of self-display of souvenirs. However, whether and how previous conclusions about the nature of the souvenir can be applied to museum merchandise purchased online is still in doubt. The environment of museum merchandise purchased online is entirely different from that of the physical location. Tourists today can purchase before and after a visit through the Internet, which completely overturns the previous premise that souvenirs could only be obtained at the museum. In addition, no attention has been paid to the Chinese context, and the focus

has been on levels of motivation and not on the meaning of souvenirs. Nowadays, the Internet and museum merchandise are very closely integrated in China, so it would be interesting to examine this relationship.

The present study addresses the following questions: what motivates Chinese young people to buy museum merchandise through the Internet from domestic and foreign museums? What are the values and meaning of museum merchandise for them before and after they travel? How can we realize and outline the new relationship between the Internet and tourist souvenirs? The study applies a semi-structured interview approach to the underlying motivations, meanings, and influence of museum merchandise practices to answer these questions. Ten customers of online museum shops were interviewed to investigate their experiences with the museum merchandise they purchase online and how these objects are associated with their feelings towards the museums. Before analyzing the data and drawing out their implications, it was necessary to examine the findings of existing studies so that a theoretical framework for this new phenomenon could be constructed.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Cultural Globalization, Mediatization, and Digitalization

Almost the entire world is experiencing globalization, mediatization, and digitalization. These concepts have become central to cultural studies. The prosperity of China's outbound tourists is a result of globalization, and the tourism industry has grown rapidly in the last few decades. Statistics show that the number of Chinese outbound tourists reached 155 million in 2019 (China National Tourism Administration [CNTA], 2020). As the World Tourism Organization reported, China has been the largest source of tourists in the world since 2012. The number of outbound travel departures increased from 4.5 million in 2000 to 150 million in 2018 (The World Tourism Organization, 2019).

Previous studies have investigated how media have a significant impact on people's understanding and imagination imaginings of the world around them. Various types of media—including newspapers, books, maps, museums, and television, not to mention the Internet—contribute to the construction of people's understanding and imaginings of national identity and bond them culturally and politically across and within different spaces (Anderson, 2006). Meanwhile, the media are constantly transmitting content worldwide to build and preserve regional and global culture. The consumption of mass digital media has strengthened the transnational imagination (Appadurai, 1996). It has had multiple effects on the receiver side, improving acceptance of and familiarity towards different cultures (Crane, 2002). With the boom in communication

technology, the media have become increasingly powerful and influential (Hjarvard, 2013). Huge amounts of information about far-off destinations have made people more internationally conscious. Imagining other places then leads to action, because people then want to visit them. Similarly, the development of technology has promoted the worldwide distribution of cultural products and artifacts. In the context of the present study, Chinese people's perception and imagining of the world has led to the exponential growth in sales of museum souvenirs.

The trend of mediatization has therefore been keenly felt in the tourism industry and is reflected in the theory of the *tourist gaze* (Urry, 2002). This explains how ways of seeing places are socially constructed and organized by the media. The tourist gaze is not formed spontaneously but is externally shaped by various media, particularly photography and film. The signs of the tourist gaze have been elaborately designed and created and are highlighted and exaggerated by the destinations themselves. In Urry's view, the photograph is a significant form of media that tries to make what it portrays—namely, the destination—unforgettable at a glance. It can even provide guidance for visitors to take it themselves. Today, various cultural products construct places in people's imagination and encourage them to experience them in reality. Reijnders (2011) proposed a model *Place of Imagination*, to explain this process. Studies on media tourism have shown that cultural mediation in the form of films, drama, and TV series, motivates Chinese people to travel abroad and influences their choice of destination. The food, lifestyle, traditions, and other aspects of places depicted in movies and on television all have a great influence on them (Wen, Josiam, Spears, & Yang, 2018).

Under these circumstances, the traditional relationship between objects, places, and persons has tended to be defined. The globalization, mediatization, and digitization of the museum (Rectanus, 2006; Rudloff, 2013) has allowed them to be accessed beyond traditional boundaries, for example, people who live in remote areas who therefore have at best a limited possibility of visiting (or revisiting) them in person. As the British Museum states on its Tmall shop front page, it is "a museum of the world, for the world" (The British Museum Online Shop in China, 2021b). Its merchandise can now be delivered to thousands of households across the world via the Internet and other delivery services. Meanwhile, because museum merchandise is a kind of cultural product conveying specific cultural signs, it can also function as a means of disseminating information on a global scale. The theory of cultural mediatization argues that cultural products have the capacity to connect people and places. At this level, museum merchandise can also shape the image of the museum and its collections in the mind of the purchaser. As a sign of the place, it acts as an intermediary between the

purchaser and the museum, arousing a place of imagination that stimulates their future travel intentions.

## **2.2 Cultural Consumption and the Creative Industry**

China's continuous economic development has led to rapid growth in cultural consumption in the last decade, especially in television and film (Institute of Cultural Industry of the People University of China, 2019). Buying museum merchandise is an important aspect of cultural consumption. Unlike ordinary products, the physical form of museum merchandise establishes it as a carrier of culture. Because of its special features, it represents the owner's subjective understandings and feelings. This form can vary, but its intrinsic artistic and cultural context remains unchanged. The theory of value and the motivations of the cultural commodity can be applied to research into museum merchandise. Cultural consumers need cultural products to meet their emotional, cognitive, and social needs (Manolika & Baltzis, 2020). Meanwhile, as the case of Hunan Provincial Museum illustrates, museum merchandise can provide users with a richer experience. Consumers today are more independent and individualized; they are more interested in buying products that can touch their spirit. They are no longer satisfied with their utility value; spiritual value has become equally important in their purchase decisions (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2019; Poulsson & Kale, 2004). The process of experience consumption should build up a sense of connection with the products or service in the individual mind and generate feelings of novelty, surprise, learning, and engagement, amongst others. Museum merchandise is a product of the development of the experience economy, which aims to create and multiply layers of enjoyment for consumers by integrating culture into objects (Tu, Liu, & Cui, 2019; Zhang, 2019).

In economic market theory, which is used to indicate the value of a commodity in terms of its price, evaluating the worth of cultural commodities has long presented difficulties. Throsby (2001) suggested that those cultural goods and services that are replete with humanist and subjective views have a significant role to play in the assessment of cultural values. However, overemphasizing customers' preferences and ignoring influential external factors such as social context can lead to biased perspectives. Individuals may consider that something has artistic value and as a result purchase it, but such valuations are often determined by a series of social conventions. Therefore, the cultural value should consist of aesthetic value, spiritual value, social value, historical value, symbolic value, and authenticity value (Throsby, 2001). In previous studies, scholars have found that learning has a significant impact on cultural consumption behaviour. Information-processing capacity plays a decisive role in the choice of cultural consumption (Adler (2006) Ganzeboom (1982). It may be argued that the more consumers know about art, and the more possible they can appreciate

it. Cultural consumption is first and foremost limited by the accessibility of available content (Navarrete & Villaespesa, 2020). Whether people can acquire and be attracted by related information influences their ability to become future purchasers of culture. The theory of cultural consumption highlights an object's intangible value and indicates the influential factors in cultural consumption that can enable an understanding of the motivations and meanings of museum merchandise. Customers might consider the subjective value of museum merchandise, but other considerations such as practical use and collective value cannot be ignored. Theories concerning the relationship between cultural consumption and information capacity help in the analysis of relevant customer information and can act to locate the starting point of museum merchandise purchasing behaviour.

As has been noted, museum merchandise is closely linked with creative industries. As an important part of the culture industry, the museum has a close relationship with creative industries, perhaps above all in respect of its merchandise. Creative industries are an economic form that relies heavily on knowledge. (Paraskevaidis & Andriotis, 2015; UNESCO, 2005). With their rich knowledge, museums form a perfect partnership with the creative industries (International Online, 2019). These days, increasing numbers of museums are actively engaged with the creative industries, particularly in souvenir design and production. The most important motivation for the Western museums to implement a gift selling strategy is the decline in governmental funding. This has meant that they have had to develop faster-flowing income streams, for example more lucrative museum merchandise businesses (Toepler, 2006). The potential benefits for education and cultural preservation of their engagement with the creative industries is another motivation, though the financial advantages these bring are more opaque. Milman (2015) found that heritage preservation can benefit from education, marketing promotion, government recognition, and marketing strategies. It has been suggested that, unlike the West, where economic gain is prioritized, the social effects of merchandise are the first consideration for Chinese museums. Chinese curators believe that merchandise is one of the ways museums can become part of people's daily lives (China Daily, 2019). In China, the CCP tends to have a more comprehensive range of uses, while at the same time contributing to cultural enrichment.

### **2.3 Tourist Souvenirs: Experiences, Motivations, and the Internet**

#### **2.3.1 *Souvenirs and Travel Experiences***

The topic of tourist souvenirs is a significant element of tourism studies. First, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between museum merchandise, tourist souvenirs, and the CCP. Museum merchandise is a

form of tourist merchandise (Healy, 1994), and refers mainly to objects designed and produced using museum resources. The CCP is a unique concept that was conceived in China. The museum CCP is a new type of museum merchandise (Song & Li, 2018; Tu et al., 2019) and is the main item sold in online museum stores (Xinhua International News, 2019). The idea of the souvenir has several general connotations in the literature; these include supplier side tourist commodities and symbolic reminders and evidence of travel on the demand side. The tourist souvenir is subjectively defined. Every object that stands as a memento of people's travel experience can be regarded as a souvenir. It can be a visa sticker, a restaurant receipt, or even a stone picked up while hiking (Swanson & Timothy, 2012). Museum merchandise is always sold in the museum gift shop on site and features the museum's signs or its collections. Tourists always purchase them as souvenirs to remind them of their trip to the museum. However, whether museum merchandise can be regarded as a souvenir is subjective. If it has no special meaning for the buyer, it is just a commodity.

There are two main research paths in souvenir studies: one analyses the functions and subjective meaning of the souvenir, while the other focuses on the commercialization of the souvenir and examines every aspect of the supply and demand chain, from production characteristics to consumer behaviour. In the first path, the souvenir is always considered an object that can link people with their travel memories and represents the owner's thoughts. Hollenbeck, Peters, and Zinkhan (2008) suggested that buying a product from a museum that customers have visited can frame the brand as a cultural artifact, and this makes it more important than a product sold in a grocery store. The current literature focuses on tourists' on-site purchases to investigate motivations and behaviours. The Internet provides greater possibilities for the purchase of museum goods and tourist souvenirs. The travel experience plays such a significant role in the consumption of tourist merchandise, but how the museum's brand influences people who do not have experience of travel without tourist experience and connects with them emotionally is an under-researched subject. It is therefore worth considering how the Internet comes into play to spread the brand and cultural power of the museum and leads people to buy merchandise online.

The relationship between souvenirs and travel memories has been widely discussed in the literature. An on-site souvenir purchase is an evidence of visiting, a reminder, and a substitute and refraction of places that can help the customer solidify and signify their experience at a later date (Hollenbeck et al., 2008; Love & Kohn, 2001; Ramsay, 2009). At the same time, the souvenir goes beyond just being a reminder; some scholars have argued it is not only an interactive intermediary between place and the owners but also an indication of

the performance and narrative of the owners (Kim & Littrell, 2001). Kuhn (2020) suggested that souvenirs contain the self-expression of the owners as they display their souvenirs to others. Souvenirs have a social communication function; they represent personal character traits and social affiliation to in-groups and neo-tribes and demonstrate individual travel histories. The theme of the place-object-person relationship has also been considered. Closely linked with the cultural characteristics of destinations, a souvenir can be a means to construct city images and branding (Trabskaia, Shuliateva, Abushena, Gordin, & Dedova, 2019) because museum merchandise sold online blurs the boundary between the embodied travel experience and the souvenir. People might purchase souvenirs online during, after, and even before the journey. How will changes in shopping channels affect the relationship between souvenirs and memories? Can the souvenir purchase online replace the one bought at the site? Without the tourist memory, what role does the souvenir play in its owner's life? Although museum merchandise bought on-site is directly linked to the location, its implications and characteristics might be *inherited* by what is purchased online. That said, the former is arguably entirely different because of the influence of personal narratives and experience.

### **2.3.2 Motivations for Buying Tourist Souvenirs**

Another central theme in the literature concerns the motivations for buying souvenirs. There are a great number of these (Fairhurst, Costello, & Fogle Holmes, 2007). A survey conducted by Swanson and Horridge (2004) indicated that the souvenir is intimately tied with the tourist experience. The retailer needs to sell souvenirs with the attributes of the location in an environment that is directly related to tourist activities. Consumption habits and tendencies and motivations vary according to the cultural context. However, Chinese tourist souvenir consumption is a field that remains underexplored, as has been pointed out already. Western researchers have concentrated on the significance of souvenirs as repositories of meaning, whereas they are seen more as commodities in the case of Chinese tourists. Some scholars have begun to study the influencing factors and motivations for Chinese tourists' purchases of souvenirs (Jin, Moscardo, & Murphy, 2020; Li & Ryan, 2018). Materials, competencies, meanings, and the desire to maintain social connections are four interconnected indicators that have influenced Chinese souvenir purchase decisions (Jin et al., 2020). In particular, Chinese tourists will consider the practicality of products more and purchase utilitarian products in large quantities.

Fairhurst et al. (2007) found that different types of tourists have various purchase behaviours. Individuals in cities spent the most time and money shopping, while active individuals who enjoy the outdoors spent the

least. These findings can enlighten our understanding of how specific cultural backgrounds and patterns of consumption affect online purchases of museum merchandise. Moreover, some scholars have found that tourists who travel frequently have less desire to buy souvenirs, and their attention is focused more on daily necessities such as food (Collins-Kreiner & Zins, 2011; D. J. Timothy, 2005). This observation might help reveal the motivations and values underpinning the consumption of museum merchandise online. Because the memorial values of online museum products for non-travel experienced consumers are limited, they tend to be bought for practical use. The unique Chinese context of the boom in CCPs and Chinese consumers' preferences also have to be taken into account.

#### **2.3.4 Souvenirs and the Internet**

The Internet has interrupted the way museum merchandise is purchased. In the past, tourists would simply buy it in on-site museum gift shops. Today, anybody can purchase museum merchandise online, even they have never been to the museum. The boom in Chinese museum merchandise in the past few years has been attributed principally to the country's advanced e-commerce system, which has offered consumers a new means of buying products (Xinhua International News, 2019). From a global perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed e-commerce to grow exponentially. Sales in the British Museum online shops surged (Apollo, 2020). Institutions began selling face masks with unique designs online to help them tackle the shortfall in visitors and income during the lockdown (Mashell, 2020). The pandemic may have accidentally provided a future direction for the development of museums. The boom in Chinese online museum merchandise started in 2010, when the Palace Museum shop entered the public consciousness, and more and more museums have since opened their virtual doors. COVID-19 has increased online museum shop sales in other countries.

The relationship between souvenirs and the Internet needs closer attention; there is little literature on this topic (Swanson and Timothy (2012). Current findings have shown that the Internet provides more ways and means for people to purchase tourist souvenirs. It was in 2009 that Huang, Lee, and Lee (2009) proposed an interesting business model using e-commerce for placing souvenir orders at a destination for home delivery for the benefit of persons who could not visit. The presence of retail websites has removed the limitations of only being able to buy merchandise on-site. Previously, the tourist souvenir was an example of *temporary scarcity* (Abendroth, 2011). If tourists were informed that the product was unavailable to buy online, the purchase limitation would possibly raise reminder values and increase buying intention. The higher the level

of the sentimental value of tourist souvenirs, the greater the sense of regret at its absence or loss (Abendroth & Diehl, 2006). This indicated that post-travel purchase intention did exist, but advancements in technology have vastly improved the availability of tourist souvenirs. Swanson and Timothy (2012) suggested that souvenirs and their online providers function as a “pre-trip information source” (p. 497). The digital revolution has changed every aspect of tourism, from the stimulation of the desire to travel to the return home and beyond. The Internet deconstructs the entire tourist experience (Sharpley, 2018) and has had massive implications and ramifications for the souvenir trade.

### **3. Data Collection and Methodology**

The present study aimed to explore the new relationship between place, object, and people that has been promulgated by the Internet; in particular, how and in what ways do young Chinese people engage with foreign and domestic online museum merchandise, and what role do embodied and non-embodied experiences play in this? The question was answered in several stages. The first focused on Chinese young people’s motives in buying museum merchandise from domestic and foreign museums that they have never been to through the internet. The second explored the extent to which museum merchandise can be defined as a tourist souvenir from the perspective of the consumer. If the power of souvenirs is often connected to the experience, what value does museum merchandise hold when such an experience does not precede it? When the souvenir purchased during the tourist’s travels—*the sacred experience*—is compared with the one purchased in *normal life*, what are the differences in tourists’ perception of the two? The final stage involved the analysis of the participants’ reflections on using museum merchandise they purchased online. What effect do these objects have on them? Can such purchases encourage their travel intention in the future? How can we realize and outline the new relationship between the Internet and museum souvenirs?

The semi-structured interview method has significant advantages in exploratory research. Ordinarily, it makes it possible to find explicit answers supported by a wealth of pertinent information. The aims of structured and unstructured interviewing are different: the former aims to collect precise data of a codable nature to explain behaviour within pre-established categories. The structured interview method is more suitable for studies that incorporate the conclusions of previous findings and thereby help in formulating a formal structure based on specific questions. The semi-structured interview method attempts to understand society’s complex behaviour without imposing any *a priori* categorizations that may limit the field of inquiry (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Most importantly, the goal and the aim of the present study was to examine people’s

experiences and perceptions of objects and places. The theoretical framework of the study emphasized the strong humanist and subjective views of these two aspects. The concept of the souvenir involves active meaning-making and imaginings that the owner has constructed in their own mind. The participants were encouraged to share their experiences and explain the meaning of a specific object as they understood it through their personal descriptions and expressions. These were accessed through dialogue and interaction, so their thoughts and feelings could be examined in more detail. Therefore, the semi-structured interview method was chosen as the best approach. For each interview, a series of questions similar to the kind that would have been used had a structured approach been adopted, were prepared (Appendix B), but the author gave themselves the freedom to vary the sequence of the questions (Bryman, 2016). This gave them more latitude to ask supplementary questions when and where this was deemed appropriate. This method allows for the collection of more underlying data than would otherwise be the case, and so made it more suitable for the present study (Gillham, 2000).

Ten hours in total of semi-structured interview data was gathered from 31 March to 2 May, 2021. The Tencent Meeting software package (Version 2.13.4) was used. The interviewees were aged between 21 and 24 (six males and four females) and comprised students, a teacher, a police officer, and a marketer (Appendix A). All had at least a bachelor's degree, and one had a master's. The interviews were conducted online face-to-face and lasted between 40 min and 1½ hr. Everybody agreed to have their real names used when being referred to in the study. All respondents had bought foreign or domestic museum merchandise through e-commerce platforms, and they had also bought museum merchandise in museum gift shops after visits. Potential respondents were found within the author's social circle and on social media platforms (e.g., Weibo and Bilibili). If a potential interviewee published and shared information about museum merchandise on social media, contact was made to ask them about what they had posted and to request an interview. All the respondents were younger and be educated to a high formal level. They were also asked to share a short story about the tourist souvenirs they had bought and provide screenshots of their online shopping records as proof of their purchase(s). The age bias of the sample was relatively reasonable. The Alibaba e-commerce platform (where the museum retail online shops were based) showed statistics on online CCP sales in 2018; customers born after 1990 accounted for more than half of the online CCP consumers, and those born after 1995 accounted for 30%. The financial contribution of the latter group was the highest. This shows that the younger generation had a greater willingness to purchase museum merchandise (Alibaba Data, 2018).

A thematic analysis was applied to search and summarize the research themes and to outline the participants' experiences and behaviours from a comparative perspective. Through description, explanation, and connection, a narrative analysis or theory can be established that accurately explains the phenomenon (Flick, 2018; Hammersley, 2007). One of the most significant advantages of thematic analysis is that it is not limited to a particular theory or epistemological position; it can be applied flexibly in a broader context (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). An exploratory study needs an environment that can provide essential clues for answering the research questions, and thematic analysis offers this. In the present study, it was discovered after transcription of the interviews that the answers on which the participants elaborated comprised three main topics: motivations behind their online purchases, the meanings to them of the products, and reflections on their experiences. The transcriptions were read several times, and this was followed by the *open coding* stage (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Particular attention was given to how the participants described their experiences and feelings towards *sensitizing concepts* (Bowen, 2006). Parts of these passages were labelled to illustrate the participant's motivation, experience, and reflections on their use of the e-commerce platform. The preliminary coding results were then compared before the data were analyzed.

#### 4. Motivations

##### 4.1 Interest as Motivation: The Museum is the Carrier of Culture and Collections

Each interviewee varied in behaviours and their views regarding museum merchandise. Their motivations and feelings had a good deal in common. All respondents visited local museums when travelling and employed various strategies to memorize their journey, including purchasing museum merchandise and taking photos. Nowadays, e-commerce removes time and space restrictions in the purchase of museum merchandise. They can do this anywhere and anytime (if they have the necessary technology and the financial resources) just by clicking a button. The respondents mentioned three different ways they have bought museum memorabilia (Figure 4). Buying museum merchandise as a tourist souvenir after an on-site visit to the museum gift shop was the most common. The second involved buying goods in the museum gift shop, but for special reasons, asking for them to be mailed rather than taking them home by themselves. The third comprised selecting and ordering the merchandise before and after visiting the museum (i.e., pre- and post-travel). A fourth possibility was to select and order the merchandise using the museum e-shop while in the physical store.



Purchase Before Visit    Purchase During Visit    Purchase After Visit

Figure 4. Three museum merchandise online purchase scenarios

The most direct motivating factor amongst respondents was their interest in collections, culture, museums, and travel experiences. Significantly, their motivations were separated into motivation from collections or culture and motivations from museums and travel experience. Some of the respondents purchased museum merchandise as a result of the collections and the culture that the objects represented, while the others said that the objects linked to their previous embodied experience and their desire to visit the museum.

The first motivation originated from sentiments regarding collections and cultures rather than interest in the museums and their embodied experience. The respondents' educational background and personal interest in the history of humanity influence their interest in museum merchandise. Of the 10 participants, seven had studied the humanities and two had studied social sciences. The other had studied science and engineering. The latter said that he was also interested in the humanities and described himself as an "atypical engineering learner" (Yingqi, male, 24). In the present study, purchasing museum merchandise on the Internet was closely related to learning ability, which was in line with previous studies showing that cultural consumption was first and foremost limited by the accessibility of content. The more people know about the related cultural content, the greater the possibility that they would become purchasers of cultural items in the future (Adler, 2006; Ganzeboom, 1982). People who possess related knowledge know how to search for more information through search engines, and this makes them more likely to consume digital culture (Jarness, 2015; Stiller, 2012). Thus, consumption motivation has a specific relationship with the way customers acquire information. Their education and personal interests are closely correlated with their purchases of CCPs. Possessing basic knowledge of the humanities makes it more likely that people will become online consumers of museum merchandise.

The participants' interest in such goods was aroused principally by books, documentaries, and lived performance, and the marketing of online museum shops led them to search for associated products. Items that were purchased as a result may be described as *museum derivatives* rather than souvenirs. Guiyong (female, 23) bought a bag inspired by the bronze figure of an Egyptian Crouching Anubis cat as a consequence of her interest in ancient cultures (Figures 5–6):

I read a novel and learnt about Egyptian culture. Have you read *Pharaoh's Beloved*? It is a romantic

novel. The story is gorgeous and complex. I wondered whether it was based on historical events. Then I read a history of Egypt and I realized that Egyptian culture was very mysterious and exciting. Then, I saw some advertisements for the British Museum's series of Egyptian products when I was surfing the Internet. I bought a bag with an Egyptian cultural theme because of its cute appearance and utility [Figures 2–3]. However, I have not been to the British Museum. So, I do not have any direct feelings for the museum itself, but I am interested in its Egyptian collections. If its products meet my aesthetic or utilitarian needs, I will buy them.

The marketing of the museum retail shop is a crucial stage in the process of consumption. A combination of interest in particular cultures and effective advertising of the museum's products led several of the participants towards the museum's e-shop. They tended to focus on the cultures from which the museum collections derived rather than the place itself. None of them had a preference for particular museums, which seemed to militate against them wanting to visit any.



Figures 5–6. “Crouching Anubis” products (The British Museum Online Shop in Tamll, 2021)

Emotion was the key for customers to begin to search for content regarding their areas of interest. It had a direct effect on the entire consumption process (Figure 7). Plutchik (2001) proposed a theory to explain how a stimulus gradually evolves into an outcome. The initial stimulus triggers the emotions. The nature of the stimulus can drive an emotion that would correspondingly lead to a certain behaviour. The outcome then revives the initial stimulus. The preliminary stimulus can be aroused by other cultural products, such as fiction, films, performances, and exhibitions. Advertisements are particularly important in informing people about e-shops and encouraging them to investigate further. All of the respondents had seen and read marketing content from online museum shops via various digital channels. The online museum shop is an emerging industry. Few people yet know that museum merchandise can be bought online, and not all museums develop CCP

businesses online. Only the more well-known museums have sufficient resources and capital to develop these (Alibaba Data, 2018).

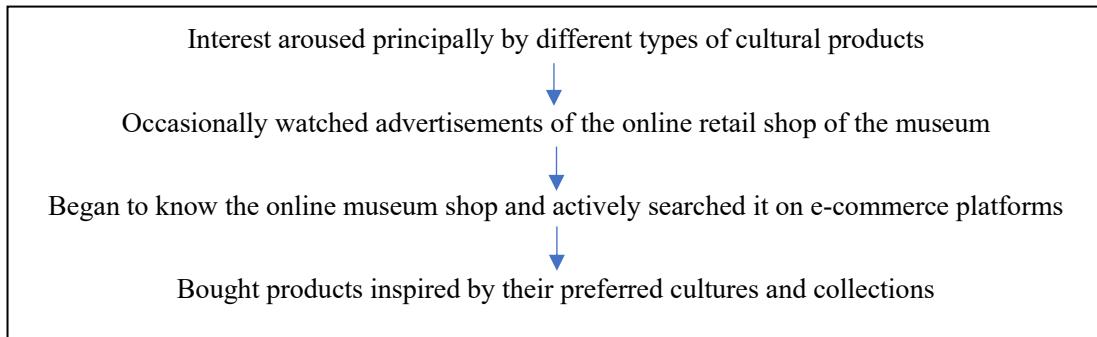


Figure 7. Motivation based on interest in culture and museum collections

This motivation is partially similar to fandom, but there are differences. Buying toys related to works is the prominent motivation behind fandom consumption. Although not every respondent called or agreed to describe themselves as fans or lovers of a particular culture, even though purchasing licensed products is an essential part of fandom (Duffy, 2014). Surrounding oneself with objects that relate to the culture one admires is one of the most prominent ways to express fandom. However, according to the respondents' answers, purchasing museum merchandise could not be regarded as fandom collecting. Fandom involves the construction of *shrines* and going on *pilgrimages* and building a collective identity through buying and displaying collectibles (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2017; Rehak, 2014). By contrast, consumers of museum merchandise take into account aesthetics and utilitarian value when deciding what they want to buy. "Anyway, online museum merchandise just gives you one more choice in your daily life" (Fengling Cao, female, 23). The participants' interest in culture was one of the determinants in their museum merchandise purchases but did not as obsessive as it is in fandom. The participants were not interested in collecting licensed corporate products (Duffy, 2014) to assert and prove their identity in the way that fandom communities are (Geraghty, 2014). They said that they considered and valued many other dimensions of the product in decision-making, such as practical needs and visual appeal.

Moreover, all interviewees placed great stress on the latter. Indeed, it was a decisive factor in their consumption decisions, whether they intended to buy off- or online. The product must integrate the elements of the respective collection into the overall design (Song & Li, 2018; Tu et al., 2019). Such a consumption preference amongst the participants was reflected in the data from the e-commerce platform (Alibaba Data, 2021). With the interrelated development of the economy and art and culture in China, young people have

more and more consumption choices, and with this come higher spiritual and aesthetic pursuits. Since the beginning of 2021, average daily searches using keywords such as *design sense*, *design style*, and *national tide* has risen sharply on Tmall. Whether the product has a unique design is becoming a consumption priority for young people in pursuit of what they consider to be subtle beauty on a daily basis.

However, when the participants made offline purchases, the product's appearance was not the most critical factor. When they were travelling, they bought things based primarily on their emotional attachment to the places they visited and their desire to memorialize it rather than what the item looked like. Baoyi (female, 23) explained: "I have purchased really ugly souvenirs to memorialize my multiple trips to the Great Wall in Nanjing City because there weren't any better products available. I bought them to commemorate my enjoyable memories." In comparison, buying museum goods online was more akin to conventional cultural or fandom consumption. The participants were seeking to satisfy their emotional, cognitive, and social needs (Manolika & Baltzis, 2020) and a desire for a higher quality of life. As has been noted, though the merchandise originated from the museums, consumers were less interested in the institutions than the cultures they were preserving and their respective collections.

#### **4.2 The Effects of Post-travel: "I Lost All My British Museum Souvenirs, So I Bought Them Online**

##### **After I Returned to China"**

Jianbin (male, 23) had an unfortunate experience. He had not originally intended to buy anything from the British Museum's online shop. He had visited the British Museum in 2020 but lost all his souvenirs while returning to China. To make up for this "regret," he ordered some merchandise on the British Museum's online shop in China. He emphasized that he saw no reason for buying anything without an embodied trip unless he had not bought it previously or had lost it. This representative example leads to the second motivation, and it links with the embodied travel experience. A typical situation in the online purchase process was when respondents bought a product online from a museum they had visited; this may be referred to as a *post-travel purchase*. The motivation for doing so is attributable to *scarcity* and the close relationship between regret and tourist souvenirs (Abendroth, 2011; Abendroth & Diehl, 2006). Before the Internet creating unlimited purchasing channels for buying tourist souvenirs, scarcity would have been common. The distribution of an item is restricted in specific places, creating temporal scarcity. A limit on souvenir purchases would increase reminder value which would in turn increase non-purchase regret. However, although e-commerce limits the scarcity of tourist souvenirs to a certain extent by breaking this limitation, the heightened sentimental value

of tourist souvenirs means that their subsequent loss generates regret (Abendroth, 2011). Therefore, out of scarcity and the special role of the meaning of possession (Swanson & Timothy, 2012) of the souvenir, its absence leads tourists to acquire it via another channel in an attempt to compensate for their remorse. The Internet provides such a channel, and this is a significant motivator.

It is evident that the actual travel experience still plays a significant role in the consumption of online museum merchandise (Swanson & Horridge, 2004). Interestingly, two respondents, Jiayi (female, 22) and Sibin (female, 23), had already visited the overseas exhibition held by the British Museums in Hong Kong in 2018. Although they had never been to the British Museum, they had already “visited half of the British Museum through the exhibition” (Jiayi, female, 22), where they saw a number of its collections. In a sense, they had experienced the museum. Sibin (female, 23) became interested in the history of the Vikings after seeing the Lewis Chessmen collection (Figure 8) displayed in that exhibition. She bought the associated merchandise online when the British Museum online shop launched its Viking product series (Figures 9–10). Jiayi (female, 23) did not buy anything at the exhibition because of the high prices, and the designs did not appeal to her anyway, but when she returned home, she ordered a product based on the Egyptian figure Anderson Grayer Cat as a souvenir of her trip.



Figures 8–10. Daily necessities inspired by the Lewis Chessmen (The British Museum Online Shop in China, 2021a)

Embodied experiences therefore had different consequences in these two cases. In the former, the travel experience stimulated the participant’s interest in a certain culture. After Sibin (female, 23) learnt more about the history of the Vikings, she purchased the related products online to satisfy her need to process further the information she had acquired, which is in line with the motivation illustrated in Section 4.1. In the latter situation, tourists who were similarly motivated as Jianbin (male, 24) bought merchandise online

as tourist souvenirs. There were two major influences on online shopping behaviour in relation to travel experience (Figure 11). First, it acted as an intermediary in arousing the interviewee's interest in culture, and the interviewee then bought goods out of enthusiasm. Second, after an on-site visit, the tourist returned home and selected online products as mementos of their trip. Both situations highlighted the significance of the travel experience. The influence of the offline experience extended to their intention to purchase items online in the post-travel phase.

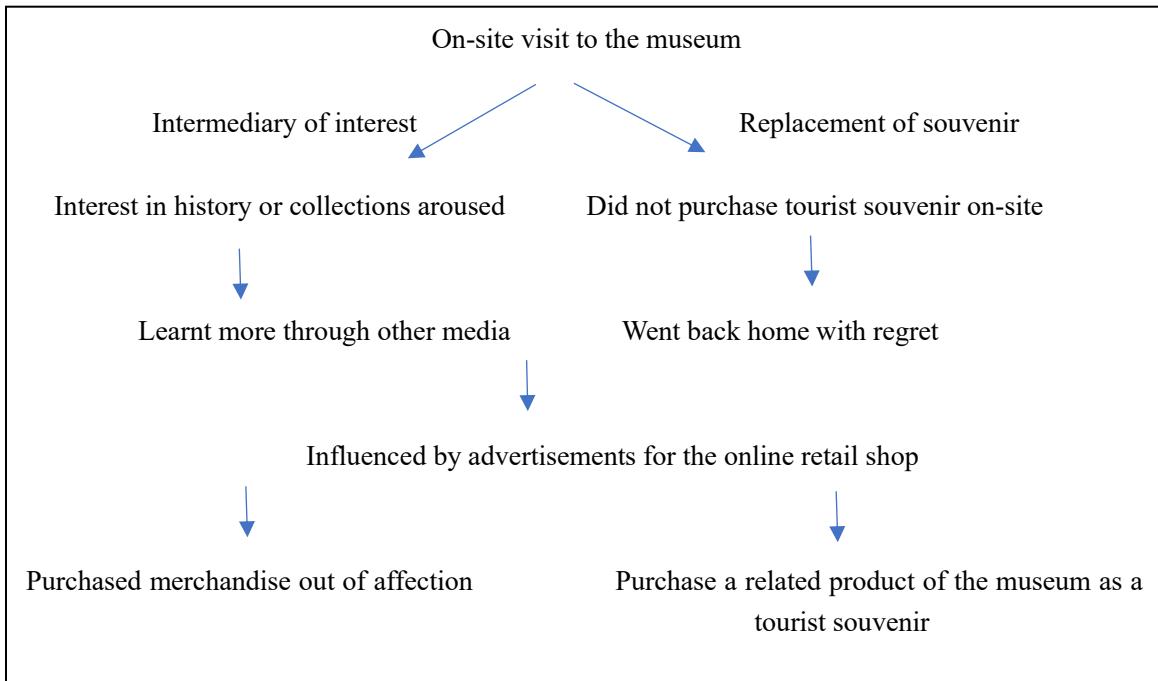


Figure 11. The two roles played by embodied experience in the consumption of online museum shop products

The impact of embodied travel experience on future online museum merchandise consumption was lasting and far-reaching. Four of the participants purchased museum merchandise online two to four years after they travelled to the respective sites. As Jinyue (female, 21) described:

Regardless of the time, I think the memory will always follow you. You have a good impression of the Palace Museum from your previous travels, and the museum exhibits a culture that makes you interested in it. Even if you do not feel like buying the related products instantly, the excellent impression affects you for a long time. This effect lasts longer than you think it would. It will encourage you to choose these kinds of goods online in the future.

Acting as a reminder of a trip was one of the most prominent functions of the tourist souvenir (Love & Kohn, 2001; Ramsay, 2009). The tourist souvenir can be a bridge between tourists' daily lives and their travel experiences by causing them to recall their experience when they look at it. The memory of the holiday can

also act as a reminder to buy a post-travel souvenir. The reminding influence of the object and the memory is a two-way process. In the post-travel stage, the memory of the experience can stay in people's minds for a long time and unconsciously influence their consumption behaviour. Enjoyable experiences cause them to pay closer attention to the marketing content produced by the museums, and they fall under its influence.

In the pre-Internet era, souvenir consumption was simply a matter of *now-or-never*; in other words, tourists could only buy souvenirs on-site. The decision not to buy one at the time was equivalent to forfeiting something desirable forever. Because of the symbolic and spiritual meaning of souvenirs, non-purchase would trigger a sense of regret (Abendroth & Diehl, 2006). After the Internet became accessible to a mass of people, museum visitors began to be availed of the opportunity to buy a souvenir online in the post-travel phase and thereby assuage their remorse. The accretion of museum e-shops has made such post-travel consumption much more common. Buying products at destinations therefore helps visitors to avoid non-purchase regret. When this option is not available, consumers are more inclined to purchase on-site (Abendroth, 2011). By contrast, if the item is available online, tourists do not need to buy the product on-site to avert such a loss as has been described above. The availability of products online allows the tourist to bypass the physical limits that are imposed when products are only available offline, and what is more, they can freely purchase them in both the pre-travel and post-travel phases. The ease with which they can purchase online has enabled customers to consider a greater number of product dimensions, for example the relative quality and prices of products that are available online and those that are available offline (Gilly & Wolfenbarger, 2000). This arguably makes purchasing decisions more rational.

In all, whether online or offline, the previous embodied travel experience plays a significant role in museum merchandise consumption because it gives products a heightened sentimental value. The travel experience can be one of the ways that tourists' interest in culture is stimulated. It also can be a direct cause of online museum merchandise consumption. In terms of motivation, the special sentimental role of the tourist souvenir is heightened yet further. The loss or absence of the souvenir can lead to a sense of regret, which prompts the visitor to purchase the product online after they have visited a particular place. Buying tourist souvenirs as reminders is still an indispensable part of the visitor experience. In brief, memory now encourages visitors to buy souvenirs after the fact; this new relationship between object, place, and person has been forged by developments in e-commerce. The existence of the online museum store makes post-travel purchases possible, and the effect of the previous travel experience on post-travel consumption can last for

several years. Positive previous travel experiences tend to leave a positive impression of the museum in question in the minds of tourists, and this often encourages them to take note of museum news and of updates to their online shops. This might then lead to online post-travel purchases.

It has to be noted that gift-giving for relatives and friends is also an essential motivation in Chinese tourist souvenir consumption (Li & Ryan, 2018). Respondents had usually considered and bought museum merchandise online as presents because of its cultural symbolism and appearance. Jinyue (female, 21) believed that the online museum shop provided various choices for the buyer, especially if they needed something for people interested in museums and culture. However, this kind of motivation was beyond the scope of the present study, where the focus is on online purchase behaviour that is based on the subject's purpose; thus, gift-giving motivation is only briefly mentioned.

## 5. Meanings

### 5.1 The “I Would Not Buy Postcards Online” Phenomenon

It should be noted from the outset of this section that the feelings of each respondent were not uniform. There was a substantial difference in the categories of museum merchandise they bought, both online and offline. Respondents would consider the products that represented and recorded their feeling about their trips when they were in the museum's physical shops, but when they were shopping online, they tended to choose to purchase daily necessities. Postcard and fridge magnets were words that were used with high frequency in the interviews. However, the respondents confirmed that they would not buy these two products online. In Guiyong's (female, 23) opinion, only postcards she bought during her travels had any meaning for her. It was the words written on the card that recorded her feelings and which she could access after the visit, and the postmark and the process of mailing it from the museum made it memorable and meaningful. Similarly, Baoyi (female, 23) was enthusiastic about collecting fridge magnets as a tourist souvenir, but she has never bought them online. The value of souvenirs is highly subjective (Swanson & Timothy, 2012). Items such as postcards and fridge magnets are products with no practical use value in daily life but travelling is a process that can inject subjective meanings into such objects. The travel experience adds symbolic value for the individual to the postcards, and this exceeds the other aspects of their value. Thus, the key to turning an object the respondents bought online into a real souvenir was whether or not it was associated with the experience of travel:

I don't think museum merchandise has any extra value and meaning to me if I can't relate it to travel

experiences. The criterion is whether you have been there. If you have been there, even if you bought it before you go, I think it can be regarded as a souvenir [i.e., after travelling]. Of course, it cannot be said that you are not connected with the journey, but you can recall that you were or connected to the scene when you visited it at that time; it's just that it is not connected with the travel experience as a whole. Just like the Palace Museum cat ornament that I mentioned before; it does not necessarily bring back any memories of my being in the Palace Museum, but you know that the Palace Museum is related to those ornaments because the cute cats lived in the Palace itself. (Xiyu, male, 22)

Respondents' attitudes towards the tourist souvenir and museum merchandise they bought online varied. For Fengling (female, 23), the online museum merchandise that she purchased after her visits could not be regarded as souvenirs: "The objects can only represent my affection for a particular museum, but it is not a testimony of my trip." Jiayi (female, 22) said that her feelings towards the products she purchased online and offline were different because advances in e-commerce made the repurchase of them too easy these days. As a result, the *sacredness* of the souvenirs tended to diminish (Abendroth, 2011):

My *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains* painting canvas bag<sup>1</sup> [Figures 12–14] is my favourite CCP launched by the Palace Museum. But in fact, the canvas bag is a consumable commodity. You wear it every day, and then you need to replace it with a new one with a new cultural element. I would not say I feel like cherishing things like the things I took from the Palace Museum after the visit. Now that online shopping is convenient, if the last one bought online is broken, I just repurchase another online. However, I took the souvenirs I bought offline back home from a far-off place, and they contain my memories of the time.

The notion of the scarcity of tourist souvenirs is highlighted here. Previous studies have pointed out that the availability of souvenirs is the determinant of scarcity (Abendroth, 2011; Abendroth & Diehl, 2006). Scarcity exists not only in terms of consumption but also in perception. The different attitudes to souvenirs purchased online and offline were indicated in the *sentimental scarcity* of those purchased offline.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains*, which was painted by Wang Ximeng during the Northern Song Dynasty in China, and is part of the Palace Museum collection, is one of the country's ten most famous paintings. It represents a milestone in the development of Chinese art because it integrates the outstanding achievements of Chinese painting technology during that period.



Figures 12–14. Merchandise inspired by the painting *A thousand miles of rivers and mountains* (The Palace Museum Online Shop, 2021)

While e-commerce vastly decreased the scarcity of the tourist souvenir purchased online, the tourist souvenir purchased offline was subjectively valuable and sacred because of the “common experiences” (Baoyi, female, 23) that it represented. In the post-travel phase, some of the participants purchased online because they wanted a “temporal tourist souvenir” (Jianbin, male, 24). However, buying merchandise online to replace the “real tourist souvenir” (Jianbin, male, 24; Yingqi, male, 24) was not the same as the tourist souvenir they bought and brought home from their trip. Sibin (female, 23) felt that the souvenirs she bought online after visiting the museum did not remind her of her travel experiences as those she purchased offline: “I have experienced a lot with the object in the process of travelling. I selected it from the gift shop and got on the plane with it.” Because museum merchandise purchased online conveyed some sense of the place with which it was associated, whether it was bought before or after the trip, it still helped to build a connection between the buyer and the museum. However, since the post-travel souvenir was not part of the direct experience of the trip, it could not form part of the visitor’s embodied experience from a psychological perspective. Without the travel experience, museum merchandise is simply an everyday object that satisfies the purchase need or demand for cultural consumption or an expression of fandom: “a normal object needs to be directly associated with the experience of travel to make it special” (Baoyi, female, 23).

This phenomenon can be explained by discussing the *normal-profaneness* and the *extraordinary-sacred* existence (D. Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Turner, 1973). Tourists take a break from their ordinary lives in pursuit of pleasure and go on a vacation. When they return home, which is a profane environment, the souvenir taken from the extraordinary-sacred place becomes a symbol of their entire experience of it (Baker, Kleine, & Bowen, 2006). Thus, the objects themselves taken from the destination break the boundaries of space and time and are associated with tourists’ experience of other places and other times after they go back to their

everyday lives (Baker et al., 2006; Smith, 1996). At that moment, a postcard or a tiny fridge magnet can be unique as they convey more than their mere physical form; they are a recording of and witness to the owner's travel experience. Although post-travel museum merchandise can be a sign of a particular place, it is not part of the tourist's direct experience of travel. In brief, it does not break the boundaries of time and space between the sacred and profane, which means that it cannot be treated as an authentic tourist souvenir. Thus, when the participants bought museum merchandise online, they did not usually items such as postcards but instead focused on considering the utilitarian value of what they were acquiring, since these items did not break the boundaries between the sacred and ordinary. A postcard purchased online had no personal spiritual and symbolic value for them. They therefore had no reason to buy postcards online.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that some of the participants believed that objects could not be a witness to their travel. Mingxuan (male, 23) thought there was no significant difference between merchandise bought online or offline. For him, neither were tourist souvenirs. It is even more convenient to purchase online after travelling because of the limitations of luggage space. The essence of the object does not change just because it was purchased in a particular way. Therefore, generally, museum merchandise bought online comprises cultural elements and symbolic information relating to its place of origin, and this can replace the tourist souvenir to a certain extent. However, it is not the same as the memorial value that derives from the tourist having personally selected a product at the site and taking it home with them. Meanwhile, for those participants who did not believe that the objects could evoke within them memories of travelling, there was little difference between online and offline purchases.

## **5.2 Why Materialization? “I am Full of a Sense of Cultural Confidence When I Use it.”**

Purchasing museum merchandise online to satisfy their aesthetic and spiritual demands was the most valuable thing for the participants. All the respondents said that looking at or using the museum merchandise gave them great pleasure. Nowadays, most of the Chinese museum merchandise that is sold online has utilitarian day-to-day functions. The curator of the Palace Museum has suggested that the museum's CCPs aim to bond culture and people (China Daily, 2019). They also manage to combine cultural elements and creative ideas (Bai & Zhou, 2019). When popular cultural elements and innovative ideas are integrated into objects that have a practical use, consumers enjoy them all the more, as Jiayi (female, 22) explained: “I feel that when I use a canvas bag that has as its theme the painting *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains*, my heart is full of a sense of cultural confidence.” Tourist souvenirs can therefore perform a role that is far

beyond simply being a reminder of a holiday (Hollenbeck et al., 2008). They can be used by people to express their individuality, seek identification with a group, and display their aesthetic taste (Kim & Littrell, 2001; Kuhn, 2020). Using licensed corporate products to assert and recreate one's identity is also a phenomenon of fandom (Geraghty, 2014). In the present study, using museum merchandise in daily life was a way for the owner to express themselves, conform to a certain culture, and identify with a particular museum:

It is pretty cool if someone finds out that you like museums in your daily life. If you meet someone who is holding the same object, you feel that you are friends because you have common tastes, which is like being recognized as belonging to a certain group. (Fengling, female, 23)

Although museum merchandise purchased online cannot be compared exactly with fandom, nor can it play the role of reminder (see 4.1 and 5.1), it partly inherits the functions of the souvenir as an expression of people's interest in culture and the museum from which it was sourced and can help them express in a physical form their sense of aesthetics, their interests, and their identity to the outside world.

Nevertheless, there was a wide gap between the respondents regarding whether people's sentiments and memory were materialized. Museum merchandise represents the materialization of specific cultural information. It can be regarded as a group of objects that are formed after the extraction and re-creation of specific elements of a culture, information about which is highly concentrated within them (Jiang, Yao, & Sun, 2019; Song & Li, 2018; Zhang, 2019). For instance, as Figures 5–6 illustrate, the museum used the original image of Anubis to create a new cartoon-like image, which meets the aesthetics taste of the younger person. The most direct message of this product is that is a representation of Anubis. It does not contain within it as much information about Anubis's symbolic significance in Egyptian culture as a non-physical medium could. Xiyu (male, 22) thought that the intangible form of cultural products can provide more information than an object. People can learn more by watching a live show, exhibition, or documentary. Although the design of museum goods is based on specific cultural knowledge, the information that can be disseminated is relatively and necessarily limited. Those who value information usually tend to buy more tourist souvenirs or online merchandise than those who do not. Both Mingxuan (male, 23) and Jinyue (female, 21) believed that abundant information was much more significant to them, so they would not usually buy museum merchandise for themselves because it could not provide rich content. Unlike the other interviewees, they did not share any detailed background stories about the merchandise they had purchased and whether they associated it with their travels.

Conversely, the limited information that souvenirs provide was a great advantage for some respondents. When compared with other cultural products such as books, documentaries, and films, the materialization of culture in the form of a physical object that represents it allows people to connect with it anywhere and anytime, and with no extra effort. Non-physical cultural products such as documentaries require more time and energy to be explored. They require consumers to open them and actively search if they want specific information, while books need to be stored, opened, then read. (Guoyong, female, 23). In contrast, the souvenirs Guoyong (female, 23) had purchased were always by her side, and only needed to be looked at and felt. This required no great effort. “Repeatedly watching a documentary would take too much time. It only takes one to two seconds for me to glance at an object” (Baoyi, female, 23). Further, more content may mean that its creators have more influence on the recipient, as Yingqi (male, 24) illustrated:

I think the physical form has less influence on me than the non-physical. I have my thoughts about this object [i.e., the souvenir], but some of the other forms of culture, such as books, documentaries, are representations of the creative world that the writer, the filmmaker, and so on want us to see. There is the feeling that we then become relatively passive. I prefer to take the initiative to understand the world.

According to the theory of fandom, collecting is a mode of behaviour that sustains the narrative behind the cultural products the fans are passionate about (Duffy, 2014; Rehak, 2014). By consuming the toys and merchandise related to a particular cultural phenomenon, they can continue exploring and deepening their understanding of it. Collectibles are a kind of *paratext* that can help the fans connect with the original text and enrich the content of the original. Comparatively speaking, buying museum merchandise is not for purposes of collecting per se or to meet the demand for deepening knowledge of a certain cultural product (as it is in the case of fandom) but consuming and using souvenirs can enrich the owner’s experience of what they portray or represent. Interestingly, the museum merchandise that is sold online nowadays is primarily utilitarian. Purchasers can surround themselves with products that are inspired by or reflect the cultures they are interested in. Such merchandise provides them with a richer experience because it combines practicality and cultural and artistic enjoyment. It also enables them to create their own paratexts based on the basic signs and information of the products without the undue influence of other people’s imposed narratives.

In all, using the physical forms of culture in daily life is not only a way of satisfying the owner’s need for cultural consumption but also a way of expressing themselves to the outside world and seeking a social identity. Further, the tangible cultural product has less information compared with the intangible cultural

product as perceived by the respondents. The materialization of cultural information is advantageous for those people who want to be able to access cultural signs that they prefer or who want to surround themselves with attractively designed products. Souvenirs can be available to them all the time. They are much easier to see and touch without restrictions of time and place. In addition, they stand as a paratext of the original version of the work or culture and can continue and enrich the experience of that work or culture. The limited information contained within the merchandise allows the owner greater space to create their own personal narratives and access their own feelings concerning the stories that the objects represent.

### **5.3 Souvenirs as Carriers and Reminders of the Desire to Visit or Revisit**

The meanings and values of museum merchandise purchased before and after a trip are different. With the development of e-commerce, the new concepts of the pre-travel souvenir and the post-travel souvenir have emerged. Scholars have yet to investigate the meanings of tourist souvenirs bought before the purchasers have visited the respective sites. The ability to buy such products has become much easier in the age of e-commerce. When Xiyu (male, 22) became aware of the Alhambra Palace in Spain he was immediately fascinated. He searched online to see whether there were any Alhambra Palace-themed products on an e-commerce platform, and he bought a bookmark inspired by the palace's architecture. A year later, his dream to visit the palace came true. He believed that museum merchandise purchased at different times had entirely different meanings for him. The products he purchased online after his visit became souvenirs, while the museum merchandise he bought before the trip symbolized his future travel desires.

Buying related products in the pre-travel phase mirrored the purchasers' interest and desire to visit the museum. They expressed a wish to visit certain museums, and this subtly influenced their decision to purchase the products from that museum before the visit. Sibin Chen (female, 23) and Yingqi (male, 24) had looked forwards to visiting the British Museum for a long time, so they followed and were influenced by the information supplied by the British Museum: "if I see something I like (in the e-shop), I will want to buy it, because it will sustain me. The purchase is silently affected by my wish to visit" (Sibin, female, 23). The relationship between information accessibility and cultural consumption means that the people who possess basic cultural knowledge are more likely to become consumers of culture (Jarness, 2015; Stiller, 2012). Having equipped themselves with cultural knowledge, they are able to search more relevant content online to gain further understanding of the subjects they are interested in, and this leads them to buy more things (Adler, 2006; Ganzeboom, 1982).

Urry (2002) proposed the concept of *everyday tourists*. People today can travel virtually to remote places by watching various kinds of cultural products (e.g., films) that depict them. Such media break down the boundaries between tourism and everyday life. The postmodern tourist can partake in the embodied appreciation of places by proxy. Urry argued that the photograph can replace the real scene and become the object of the viewer's desire and/or memory. Buying museum merchandise before the journey can also help to satisfy people's wish to experience the museum in person if they are "temporarily unable to travel there" (Jinyue, female, 21 and Xiyu, male, 22). When people cannot travel freely (as is the case for most during the pandemic) they switch to purchasing related products online in an attempt to compensate. An object—such as the symbolic media purchased from the museum shop—can at least provide them with a sense of travel. Jianbin (male, 24) was filled with regret when his studies in the United Kingdom were interrupted because of the pandemic. This became a determining factor in his purchase of museum merchandise from the British Museum e-shop.

Previous studies have shown how the tourist souvenir functions to provoke memories of travel in its owner in the post-travel phase. The tourist souvenir can also act as a substitute for people who are unable to visit a place again by helping them to recall what it was like when they went there before (Cameron, 2007). While the post-travel souvenir can help its owner in this respect (Swanson & Timothy, 2012), pre-travel museum merchandise reminds them that they should visit the museum in question in the future. With no embodied experience, museum merchandise bought before visiting could be regarded as a *carrier of desire* in that it reminds them that they should go there in the future (Xiyu, male, 22):

What it can bring to me is a kind of connection, that is, I want to go to the British Museum, and then I see some photos of the British Museum or some articles. Museum merchandise can be regarded as my wish carrier. If you have not been there, it reminds you that you will have the chance to go there in the future. You can also build up a connection by reading articles on it. Also, if you own a physical product that you associate with the place, you can keep it by your side.

Museum merchandise purchased before they visit a museum can remind people of its existence. It can provide a connection with it. Further, pre-travel museum merchandise can trigger in owners a sense of regret (Abendroth & Diehl, 2006) as the non-purchase of the tourist souvenir that they have not visited that place yet, and then strengthen their desire to visit.

I also feel that even if I buy it (museum merchandise) online, it is not a holistic experience. It feels

like I have never been to that place, and I only own one of its items, so I would also say that I want to go there really, that is, be there on the spot and in real-time. (Sibin, female, 23)

It has to be noted that museum merchandise can temporarily fulfil the need to travel. The owner looks at the object and sets off on a virtual journey. When the participants looked at pre-travel museum merchandise, they felt that the object reminded them to visit and even strengthened their desire to see the “real thing” (Yingqi, male, 24). Buying the merchandise from the museum that they wanted to visit enhanced their desire to go there if they had not before. In other words, pre-travel museum merchandise acts as a significant step in increasing the possibility that they would see the place they wanted to (Figure 15).

However, in some exceptional cases, museum merchandise can act as a replacement for embodied travel. Mingxuan (male, 23) bought a one-to-one replica of the Lewis Chessmen collection in the British Museum. According to him, this artefact is so exquisite that he does not need to visit the British Museum: “The real collection in the museum is behind glass. The artefact is in my hand; I can not only see it but also touch it without the barrier of a glass showcase.”

Therefore, museum merchandise can even obviate their need to visit if it is of sufficient quality. However, although other respondents expressed a similar point of view (e.g., Jiayi [female, 22] said “I can see the details of the collection via the products”), they still had a strong desire to visit the collections in the museum because merchandise does not provide them a holistic and complete travel experience.

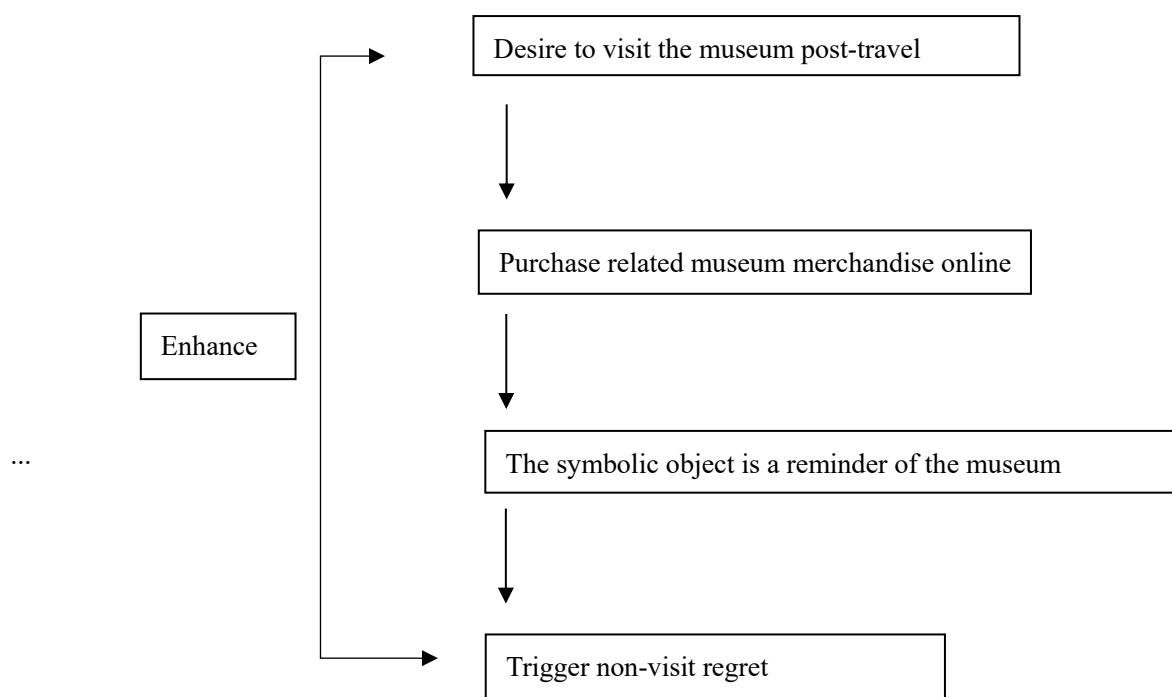


Figure 15. The enhancement of travel desire through the purchase of post-travel museum merchandise

The phenomenon of materializing the desire to travel can be connected to the role the tourist souvenir plays in the owner's daily life. The post-travel souvenir is the intersection between people's home environment, ordinary life, and sacred travel experiences. As a materialization of culture, tourist souvenirs can be displayed on shelves and refrigerator doors and allow people to re-memorize their experiences (Tolia-Kelly, 2004), bringing them back to the sacred environment. Museum merchandise can become daily necessities, standing by their owners' side and continuously exerting re-memory. Hence, souvenirs performing a "magic" role (Digby, 2006) in bringing distant places into the orbit of people's ordinary lives. Conversely, before the journey, people consider destinations as sacred, distant places. Their worship of them drives their expectation of travelling there, and this takes on the meaning of a belief (Turner, 1973). When people are unable to visit a place, objects from a museum can connect them with it and stimulate their emotions and imagination from a distance. The pre-travel souvenir cannot always satisfy the wish to travel. An object that originated from a particular destination can only be a substitute. A sense of regret can easily be aroused, and this might intensify the desire to visit.

## 6. The Influence of Online Museum Merchandise Purchases on Owners and Museums

### 6.1 Learning More Before and After Purchase

Education is one of the primary responsibilities of the museum (Kent, 2010). Visitors can learn about cultures and the collections during their trip (Kurniawan, 2019). As cultural products in physical form, museum merchandise is usually designed to incorporate historical and cultural elements, which is the most significant difference between it and ordinary commodities (Guo & Sun, 2019). The characteristic of conveying extra cultural information (Song & Li, 2018) means that it has a significant influence on learning. Museum merchandise consumption has a close relationship with learning in terms of motivation (see 4.1 and 4.2). People who have learnt about the content of a museum and culture are more likely to become museum merchandise consumers. Post-travel merchandise purchasers will have acquired more information about the products, but the influence of such learning will not necessarily be evident.

By contrast, customers usually have a basic knowledge of the museum's collection and the cultures from which they derive when they make pre-travel purchases. In the pre-travel stage, museum merchandise can lead owners to learn more before and after its consumption. Before or after purchasing merchandise online,

the participants had actively learnt about the inspiration behind the product designs. As the materialization of culture, museum merchandise can sometimes appear in people's imaginations, so they do not have to search for it deliberately. This is especially so in the case of goods that have a practical use. It encourages people to explore the background of products, having interpreted the cultural signs they project. However, learning before and after is not demarcated. The influence of learning runs through every stage, from pre-purchase to post-purchase. For instance, Sibin (female, 23) and Guiyong (female, 23) said they "would not pay for museum merchandise if I do not know anything about its background story." This implies that they already know something about the goods that they have purchased previously and that the museum merchandise might provide them with extra information that would encourage them to learn even more. Guiyong (female, 23) purchased her Anubis figure because of its Egyptian theme but she did not know what the cat represented in Egyptian history. She searched online and read about the special religious symbolism of the black cat in ancient Egyptian culture.

When the participants purchased museum merchandise that was both attractive and useful, they searched online to find out more about its historical context. Yingqi (male, 24) bought a Rosetta Stone-themed cover case for his Kindle on the British Museum e-shop. Not only did it have a practical use, but it also led him to discover more about the history of the Rosetta Stone. After learning more about the background stories of the products, the participants felt that they became more meaningful. They were transformed into cultural products containing sacred symbols. In addition to the buyers taking the initiative to learn more acquire more knowledge, the museums themselves emphasized the cultural value of the goods. Some museums would explain the design inspiration on their web pages and in the packaging. For instance, Fengling (female, 23) mentioned that she bought some cosmetics from the Palace Museum e-shop, and there was a card inside that provided information about the queen's Phoenix dress and its symbolic meaning in the Qing Dynasty. This had inspired the design of the products. Such details help buyers to learn more about the museum's collections.

Nevertheless, the level of learning that can be acquired through buying museum merchandise is not extensive. The participants admitted that their understanding of the context of the product designs was rudimentary. They did not carry out extensive research. However, museum merchandise reflects the educational function of the institution from which it originates. Its cultural signs can appear in people's lives frequently and lead them to continue to explore the background of their souvenirs on an ongoing basis through various channels (e.g., the museum website).

## 6.2 The Tourist Gaze as Construed by Museum Merchandise

Purchasing museum merchandise online before the embodied visit can play a role in representing and reminding the owner's desire to visit in the future and can even strengthen this wish by stimulating a sense of regret (see 5.3). Additionally, museum merchandise can increase purchasers' desire to visit the museum by creating a good impression and stimulating their imagination. Trabskaia et al. (2019) and Nyffenegger and Steffen (2010) found that the tourist souvenir can help in constructing the destination's image (including its branding). The messages conveyed by museum merchandise are usually elaborately designed (Zhang, 2019). As a cultural product imagined by the designer in accordance with the museum's resources, merchandise can arouse purchasers' imaginings of the museum and its collections.

The physical form of the souvenir allows me to hold it in my hand every day to see its details. I buy not only its culture but also its design. For example, I can see each detail in the laser postcard of the Grand View Garden of the Chinese National Museum. The design is very good, and you can imagine the *Grand View Garden in A Dream of Red Mansions*<sup>2</sup> in your mind when you look at it frequently. (Baoyi, female, 23)

From the description of the respondents, museum merchandise arouses the owner's imaginings of places, and these can subsequently turn into actual tourist behaviour. Jinyue (female, 21) felt that "It would be cool to search the real reference that inspired the product's design." Such a thought was in line with Reijnders' theory of the place of imagination, which explained the significance of intangible cultural products (Reijnders, 2011). After fans consume imaginary places constructed by artists, they imagine them and become inspired to visit them in reality. Reijnders concluded that the cultural product is the starting point. By extension, pre-travel museum merchandise can play a role in directing the imagination of its owner towards the museum and its collections (particularly those that inspired the designs of the products they had purchased beforehand).

From a sociological perspective, museum merchandise can be regarded as a new kind of media that has been created by the museum under the tourist gaze (Urry, 2002). The gazed-upon objects and signs of tourist destinations have to be different from those experienced in the tourist's daily life. To attract regular attention regularly, they must have obvious meanings, and they must also be profitable for the tourism industry. As a

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<sup>2</sup> *A Dream of Red Mansions* is one of the four great ancient Chinese classics, and the Grand View Garden is the central plot location.

result, a batch of symbols have to be produced by the supply side (Urry, 2002). These premised images of the destination are reconstructed in the tourist's imagination. Similarly, the design of museum merchandise involves the extraction of particular elements and symbols that shape the image of the scenic spot, and in turn shapes the buyer's perception. Since merchandise represents the museum itself and the cultures of which it is part-custodian, its quality also directly affects people's impression of it, though this seems to apply mainly to pre-travel merchandise, which is likely to be the starting point of the tourist's journey to the destination.

Additionally, the quality of the products helps to establish the fame of the producer. The present study has shown that high-quality pre-travel museum merchandise can positively stimulate people's emotions in the pre-travel stage and encourage them to visit the museum in person in the future. From the point of view of influencing others, objects may play a role through word-to-mouth promotion (Nyffenegger & Steffen, 2010). For instance, Jiayi's (female, 22) first thought about visiting the Suzhou Museum<sup>3</sup> when she saw a keychain inspired by the museum's architecture in the possession of a stranger on the subway: "I was amazed at the time; I thought, is the Suzhou Museum really so beautiful?" When respondents used souvenirs in their daily lives, other people would ask them for more information.

Other than the impact on others, the primary influence of the high-quality pre-travel souvenir is on the purchasers themselves. It can further increase their desire to visit the museum in the future. "This product is good-looking, and its history is interesting. The actual product must be worthy of my visit" (Fengling, female, 23). Moreover, some respondents believed that the way the museum merchandise business was conducted possibly mirrored the museum's management. "If it performs well in every single product, it must perform well in the business generally" (Sibin, female, 23). In the Chinese context, the museum's online store is an indication of its innovativeness (Jiang et al., 2019).

My CCP purchases have changed my impression of these museums. I think developing a CCP business shows that the museum is trying to engage with young people and popular culture. It can show that this museum is very enterprising. Even though it is a museum with a long history, it still insists on innovating. Furthermore, if it does an excellent job in the museum merchandise business, it makes it more interesting, as it can work hard developing its CCPs and work harder on other parts of the business. I now feel that this museum is not as rigid as I thought (Yingqi, female, 24).

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<sup>3</sup> Suzhou Museum is located in Suzhou City, China. It is renowned for its architecture. It was designed by Ieoh Ming Pei, who also designed the pyramid glass entrance of the Musée du Louvre.

Poor-quality museum merchandise will create a negative impression in potential visitors' minds. However, it may not necessarily decrease their desire to visit. By contrast, high-quality museum merchandise can increase visitor traffic. For instance, Fengling (female, 23) repeatedly complained about the mystery boxes she bought from the Henan Provincial Museum online shop. She was upset because she did not receive any of the special versions after buying three. Similar unfortunate experiences led pre-travel tourists to believe that "the museum is not serious about its CCP business." However, this negative impression may not impact future travel desire, especially in the case of well-known museums. Even if a museum does an unsatisfactory job in museum merchandise, visitors would still visit because the essence of the museum is its exhibitions and collections.

In conclusion, museum merchandise both receives and constructs the tourist gaze of its owners, especially pre-travel tourists. Museum merchandise can be considered a new form of symbolic media, whether 3D or 2D. Using the institution's cultural resources, designers merge original elements into signs and images that construct and organize the gaze of its visitors. In other words, museum merchandise is similar to photos that direct the tourists' view, but some products take a 3D form and have utilitarian functions and can be incorporated into people's daily lives. They therefore have an even greater influence on tourists.

## **7. Conclusion and Implications**

The results indicate that the study of tourist souvenirs should be divided into online and offline purchases. E-commerce has broken the spatial and temporal limitations on how tourists consume souvenirs. In China, museum merchandise has stepped into the online *Wenchuang* era (China Daily, 2019; Xinhua International News, 2019). Its designs combine cultural elements, aesthetic taste, and practical use, providing richer experiences for purchasers. Museum merchandise in China gives people yet another option to consume in their daily lives. An analysis of the data revealed that online purchases were made during pre- and post-travel phases. The motivations, meanings, and influences of pre-travel and post-travel online purchases were entirely different. The essential difference was that some tourists had direct experience of the museum from which they purchased and some did not.

In the pre-travel phase, there were two main motivational paths. The first was based on purchasers' interest in particular collections. They sought to satisfy their aesthetic and spiritual need for cultural consumption according to their preferred cultures. People who are interested in the humanities are more likely to become museum merchandise consumers. This result confirms previous findings (Jarness, 2015; Stiller,

2012). Such a motivation is similar to the fan who collects licensed products connected to cultural products and media they are passionate about (Hoebink, Reijnders, & Waysdorf, 2014) and which they use to sustain their personal narratives of the text, film, and so on (Geraghty, 2014) and to find recognition in the fandom group (Gray et al., 2017). By contrast, consumers who buy museum merchandise online have no strong feelings towards the culture they are interested in. According to the respondents, items that purchased as a result of such motivation might be called “museum derivatives” (Guizyong, female, 23; Fengling, female, 23) rather than souvenirs. Nevertheless, the common points of museum merchandise and fandom collection collections merit further exploration. The inferior mass object collections of popular fan culture have become a part of the temple of high culture in recent years (Hoebink et al., 2014). At the same time, popular culture has gradually integrated museums; indeed, the latter have actively embraced the surge in the former. The CCP in China is paradigmatic of this emerging trend: everyone can take museum culture home now (China Daily, 2019). Moreover, the discussion on pre-travel products has shown that museum merchandise has a new role – as a reminder to visit. In other words, pre-travel museum merchandise reflects the desire of tourists. As a reminder of a memory that has not yet been formed, such objects arouse a sense of regret that can even strengthen purchasers’ desire to visit that place, because the object purchased pre-travel is not in fact the result of a travel experience.

According to the tourist gaze and place of imagination theories, museum merchandise can be interpreted as a new form of highly symbolic cultural product that can construct people’s imaginings of museums and similar institutions. Pre-travel museum merchandise is a new form of media that allows people to travel virtually in their everyday lives. Museum merchandise in general has the power to organize people’s gaze. The simplified and symbolic cultural product with practical usage enables the owner to move closer to collections and cultures. It presents them with signs in their daily lives that are different from those that they normally perceive. It can provide guidance in the way that photos do, directing them towards particular destinations (Urry, 2002). Museum resources inspire designers to create products that create new images and give new meanings to ancient collections. The CCP can arouse the purchaser to imagine the collections and the museums as if they were physically present (Reijnders, 2011) and encourage them to visit the real-life versions. The quality of its merchandise can change buyers’ impression of the museum. A positive image will, again, encourage them to visit. A satisfying pre-travel museum merchandise purchase can be a starting point.

The second path reflects the far-reaching impact of travel experiences. It also has implications for the

sacredness of the tourist souvenir (Abendroth & Diehl, 2006). The loss or absence of souvenirs, combined with their sentimental value (Swanson & Timothy, 2012) can arouse a strong sense of regret (Abendroth, 2011). This often leads tourists to purchase something online by way of compensation when they return home. Additionally, they now buy CCPs online after they visit the museum, even years later. Before the emergence of the online museum store, memory in the form of souvenir purchases was relatively invisible because people could not buy CCPs related to their visit after they had returned home. Now, with the help of e-commerce, such barriers have been removed. This two-way reminding relationship between memory and souvenir has developed apace and will continue to do so as online museum shops become more advanced.

The present study's analysis of meanings and motivations behind post-travel museum merchandise highlights tourist souvenirs as a component of the holistic travel experience (Kong & Chang, 2016; Larkin, 2016; Swanson & Horridge, 2004). Post-travel museum merchandise can replace the symbolic meanings (Baker et al., 2006; Smith, 1996) of tourist souvenirs because it is imbued with the same symbolic signs. People can purchase museum merchandise online after visiting as their tourist souvenirs, but the post-travel souvenir has less effect on their memory of the visit. The post-travel souvenir purchased online cannot entirely replace the tourist souvenir bought immediately after the visit, because it does not dissolve the boundary between the sacred and the profane life (Digby, 2006; Turner, 1973). Moreover, the widespread availability of post-travel souvenirs purchased online also decreases their scarcity (Abendroth, 2011) (Abendroth & Diehl, 2006). Compared with the post-travel souvenir, the sentimental scarcity of the authentic tourist souvenir that the owner takes home is significantly greater. As a result, tourists tend to have particular preferences and hold different attitudes between online and offline souvenirs. When consumers purchase tourist souvenirs online, they consider the practical and aesthetic value of the products rather than being governed by their emotions, as they tend to do when they buy items during their visit.

Finally, the present study opens up possibilities for future research. It would be worth examining the impact of the Internet on tourist souvenirs from an interdisciplinary perspective. A study of gift-giving from the viewpoint of the receiver in the Chinese context would be a possibility. The motivation behind and meaning of purchasing museum merchandise for gift-giving could also be investigated (Jin et al., 2020; Li & Ryan, 2018). How do souvenirs arouse people's imagination? This is another question that could be addressed by researchers. The present study has shown that museum merchandise can be used to encourage future visits by purchasers, but the process by which this can be achieved needs further exploration. The notion of film-

introduced tourism has been widely applied in scholarly studies (Beeton, 2016); museum merchandise-introduced tourism merits closer examination. It would help us understand further the nature of souvenirs and the relationship between post-travel museum merchandise and tourism in particular.

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## Appendix A - An overview of the respondents

*Note: All interviewees are of Chinese nationality. Interview in Chinese. Details can be found in the separated transcript files.*

	Name	Interview Date	Duration	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation
1	Guigong Huang/ 黃桂泳	2021/3/31	1h01m04 s	F	23	Master	Student
2	Baoyi Wen/ 溫宝怡	2021/4/4	44m07s	F	23	Bachelor	Employee-Government
3	Jiayi Wu/ 吴嘉怡	2021/4/11	1h07m03 s	F	22	Master	Teacher-Primary School
4	Xiyu Li/ 李习喻	2021/4/16	1h12m08 s	M	22	Bachelor	Student
5	Jingyue Li/ 李婧越	2021/4/17	1h10m04 s	F	21	Bachelor	Student
6	Mingxuan Hu/ 胡铭轩	2021/4/17	48m55s	M	23	Bachelor	Police Officer
7	Sibing Chen/ 陈思斌	2021/4/17	1h01m16 s	F	23	Master	Student
8	Lingfeng Cao/ 曹灵凤	2021/4/20	1h02m17 s	F	23	Bachelor	Employee-Electricity Plant
9	Yingqi Gao/ 高英淇	2021/4/23	59m02s	M	24	Master	Student
10	Jianbing Zhang/ 张健斌	2021/5/2	1h16m52 s	M	24	Master	Employee-Marketing Company

## **Appendix B -The measuring instrument**

### **Interview outline**

**Research Question:** The thesis aims to explore the new relationship reconstructed by the Internet amongst place, object, and people. How and in what ways do Chinese youngsters engage with foreign and domestic online museum merchandise, and what role do embodied experience and non-embodied experience play in this?

#### **Part 1: Motivations**

Can you recommend your favorite museum online shop and online platform to me? Why do you like it?

What are the decisive factors that motivate you to pay for museum merchandise?

Do you like visiting museum in daily life? It is your hobby/interest to buy museum merchandise, or you buy them occasionally?

How/ where did you know the online shop of the museum?

Why you choose to buy the material cultural product to satisfy your demand? Can documentary and movie replace that?

#### **Part 2: Experience**

Can you share few products you like, or you think special to me? Share the reason why you like and stories behind.

Where do you put the merchandise in your house? (if they said they buy for decoration) Why you put it there?

How does it influence you in your daily life?

What is the difference between other normal products? (if they said they buy for daily use) How it influences you in your daily life? Have you considered other same kind of product in another museum shop?

Would you feel differently towards the museum merchandise buying online and the tourist product you bought after visiting? What are the differences between them?

#### **Part 3: Reflections**

Can you always think of the museum when you see/use it? Do you think that products bond you and the museum?

Do you feel you know more about the museum through the merchandise? What new things do you know about the museum after buying the merchandise?

How does it reshape/change the previous impression/understanding?

Does this merchandise increase/decrease your desire to visit them? Have you ever thought about you will visit the museum in person in the future? How likely?

If you cannot visit that place in the future, can this merchandise become the emotional carrier of the desire?

Can it be a replacement for a tourist souvenir?

If you bought the merchandise after the embodied visiting online, can that product is similar to the meanings of souvenir?