



Photos: Christian Rommel

The world in your hand

Special editions of cigarette brands reflect the cultures and traditions of countries where they are marketed. TJI takes a look at the cultural differences in cigarette pack designs and the developments this field has experienced.

Looking at special edition cigarette packs is like taking an exciting journey of discovery around the world. These special packs are not only fascinating examples of traditional and modern packaging design but are also an inimitable reflection of the cultures and mentalities of the countries where they are marketed. Like a micro-cosmos, the special packs are very effective in reflecting the character of a particular country, what moves its people and how tobacco companies absorb these pictures and thoughts to transform them into a small work of art on carton-board.

Not only are manifold differences in conception, choice of motif and design of pack identifiable, but it is also possible to draw conclusions about technological development, the professionalism of the designer and the demands on quality of the tobacco manufacturer. According to provenance and year of production of an edition, it is possible to

identify priorities of a political system or how the structure of the society influenced the development of the pack.

Take Albania in the 1960s and 1970s for example. At that time, Albania was considered the most isolated country in the world and a stronghold of Stalinism. The

special editions then were made exclusively to commemorate important political events, for example the founding of a labour party, trade union congresses, the anniversary of a revolution and national holidays. Similar themes are to be found across eastern Europe, in Russia



and also in China. However, western countries have also used cigarette packs as an effective political propaganda tool. During World War II the Americans, for example, printed dozens of rallying slogans on the front of hinge-lid packs of the 'Regent' brand.

The design and printing quality of all these 'socialistic' packs are typical of the cheap style of the time. An overwhelming number of them were produced either in drab colours that have no recognisable design concept if judged by today's criteria or carried dominant emblems, such as the Red Star, for example. Either way, the papers and board were of similarly poor quality as the letterpress printing that was commonly used.

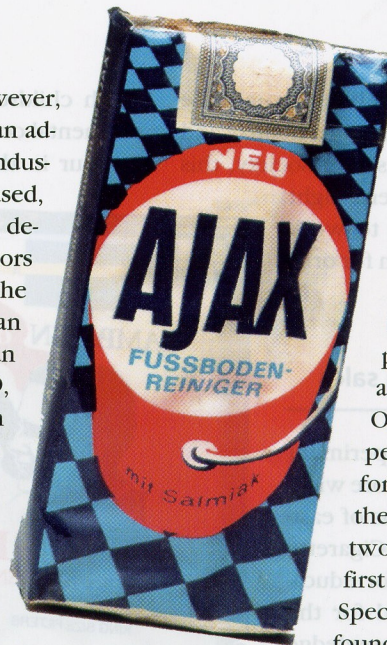
Because of the political and economic situation in those countries at the time – the tobacco industry was usually run as a state monopoly and marketing played no role in manufacture – smokers had no choice and had to accept the products that the state concerns put on the market.

Tourism as a topic

However, times have changed. Because of the increasing restrictions on tobacco, the cigarette pack has grown in significance as an advertising medium – in all countries of the world. With specially designed, expensively produced editions used to support product marketing, manufacturers are attempting to bind consumers to one brand and win new smokers for a particular cigarette. The theme of tourism has been discovered as an important topic for special editions. Whether Argentina, Brazil, Australia or Cambodia – the great attractions of these and other countries are presented in detail on special collector packs. These packs are intended as an incentive to travel and also as a souvenir. In the West, colourful high gloss photos are placed on the front of packs. In the People's Republic of China and many countries of the former Soviet Union, statues, monuments, historical buildings or great natural sights dominate.

Cigarette packs had, however, long been discovered as an advertising medium for the industry in general. They were used, for example, as specially designed packs to attract visitors at trade fairs. Whether at the second international Asian trade fair in the then Persian capital of Teheran in 1969, at the World Exhibition in Louisiana in 1984 or at the Milan Fair in 1990, there were no differences in concept or quality amongst countries and cultures.

As far as cultural history is concerned, the picture is completely different. In China, where mythology plays a much more important role in society than in the 'enlightened' West, many special series of packs carrying images of Buddhist and Taoist deities exist which have no western counterparts.

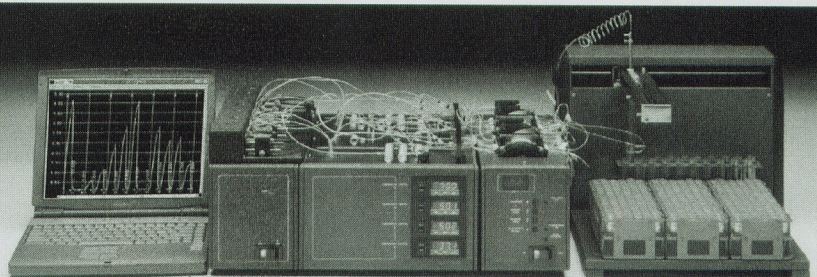


The packs are very colourful and the very nature of the naturalistic themes contrast sharply with the abstract packaging designs that are popular in Europe and the US.

On the whole, it appears that the themes for special editions in the West are limited to two main areas. The first is sport and leisure. Special editions are to be found in almost all larger countries for events such

as formula one racing, football tournaments, car rallies or the Olympic Games. The other large area revolves around lifestyle and pleasure and combines the standard themes of sun, beach and sea with attractive, happy, fit young people. ▶

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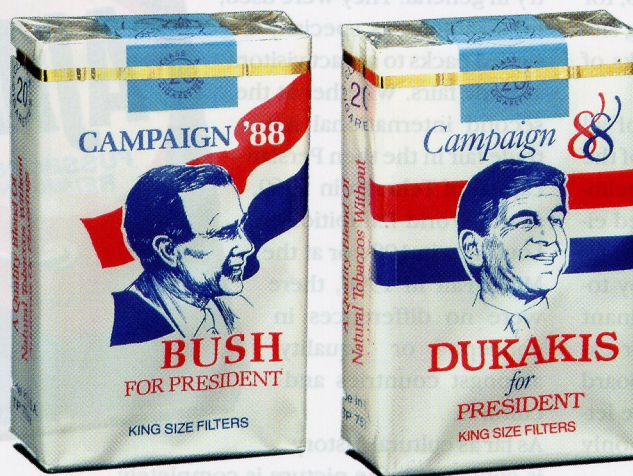
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Whether the Belmont brand from Chile or Lord from Germany, in a holiday and leisure-oriented consumer society, this concept of a modern, light lifestyle still seems to work but leaves little room for originality.

Against declining sales

The courage to experiment seems to be much more widespread in the regions of eastern Asia anyway. Cigarette packaging is used for educational purposes and for the dissemination of knowledge in miniature form. Excellent examples of classical painting and calligraphy, poems, scenes from famous novels, battle scenes or chess games can be found on packs. In Japan, pictograms have been used to

teach children traffic sense, and environmental concerns and the correct behaviour in the case of fire have been



graphically displayed on packs, too. It must be admitted that using a cigarette pack to inform and educate the public is an original idea. The latest example of

this known to the author is a series of packs in Brazil called Amigo. Portraits of children who have disappeared are placed on the front to the packs with a message urging the public to help in the search.

In Germany, other methods of pack concept are being employed to halt the fall in sales. The series, whether from Marlboro or Camel, have great appeal through modern design and clarity of presentation. The well thought through designs are produced using state-of-the-art technology, as the many computer-animated designs for Gauloise in France demonstrate, but unfortunately lots of colourful pictures only serve as eye-catchers, but have no deeper meaning. Attempts are only made to attract attention superficially, to the detriment of

originality. Exceptions do exist, for example, the Wild Lights series from West which is eye-catching and very effective because of the original design. When the pack lid is lifted, the jaws of the depicted wild animal open. As far as the motif is concerned, the pack has been purposely turned on its head. But the different approach to product design and marketing is not only a consequence of differing mentalities between East and West, but also a question of empirical knowledge from and with consumers. In many eastern European and Asian countries, the move into a free market economy is relatively recent. Decades of state indoctrination means marketing is still in its infancy. In many areas it is the blunt conveyance of information or values that dominate with little sign of subtlety. Satire in advertising, for example, quite common in the West, is hardly to be found in Asian countries – this type of

humour does not appeal to many consumers yet.

More creativity required

Despite all the criticism of the lack of creativity in the West, one has to admit that legal requirements often pose an insurmountable barrier. If Vietnamese and Russian promotional packs carry uncensored stills from films such as the blockbuster Titanic, in order to profit from the hype, this could qualify as an original idea, but would simply not be possible in the West. In addition, the high standards of quality of the cigarettes themselves and the product liability law restrict what is feasible in packaging design. In Laos, some cigarettes are not only made manually in backyards, but also sealed in small, practical plastic bags. In a high wage country like Germany on the other hand,

with established packaging technologies, the idea of doing something similar is simply unthinkable. For a variety of reasons, certain standards have been established and in the end, the smoker gains with regard to quality and financially.

Positive examples of unusual special editions are nevertheless to be found in many countries. If one looks at cross-marketing, one can find many original promotional packs as early as the 1970s, from Italy, Hungary or then Czechoslovakia. The only thing that connects the printed product promotion to the tobacco industry is actually nothing more than the pack as a commercial medium for advertising. Whether one is talking about fashion goods, beer, cars or the opening of a department store, there is nothing that could not find its place on a cigarette pack. The courage to experiment could result in a profitable renaissance.

packaging & design

Promotions for Ajax floor cleaner or for 100 000 sold cars were put on packs in Germany in 1955, but for the Gogomobile. First promising special editions of cigarette packs as interactive marketing

television actors from the pack to send in to the broadcasting station as tokens. And in Colombia packs have been coupled with competitions to boost sales of the flagging President brand. There are no common denominators

grow in importance and that the technological disadvantages of some developing nations will have disappeared in a matter of years. If the experience gained in free market economy is coupled with solid marketing knowledge then the lead the large tobacco concerns have over domestic tobacco industries now will soon dwindle to insignificance. So in future much more creativity will be required to keep cigarette packs attractive. And those who take the individual needs of the smoker into consideration, creating designs that are based on sound inter-cultural knowledge will be successful. It will be interesting to see the results.

Further information and a fascinating selection of pack examples and design inspirations of special editions around the world can be found in the book *Little treasures - Kleine Schätze* (see also page 107).

Christian Bommel



tools have been created. In Argentina, coupons to visit a music event are sealed in cigarette packs. In Brazil consumers are encouraged to cut out photos of tel-

that can be used to define all special editions from countries around the world. However, it is true to say that the market for special editions will continue to