

Research on the Development Dilemmas and Breakthrough Paths of Independent Design Brands in Wenzhou

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How to cite this paper: Liu, Q. Z. (2025). Research on the Development Dilemmas and Breakthrough Paths of Independent Design Brands in Wenzhou. *Economics & Business Management*, 1(3), 46 - 54. ISSN Print: 3079 - 5214; ISSN Online: 3079 - 5222.

<https://doi.org/10.63313/EBM.9054>

Published: 2025-05-15

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the development status of independent design brands in Wenzhou, deeply analyzes the dilemmas they face, covering aspects such as market recognition, consumer purchasing power, policy support, industrial chain, talent, and exhibition resources. By integrating relevant data and materials from 2021 to 2025, it reveals the root causes of the problems and puts forward targeted development suggestions. The aim is to provide theoretical and practical guidance for Wenzhou's independent design brands to break through development bottlenecks, promote the upgrading of Wenzhou's fashion industry, and shape a modern and fashionable urban image.

Keywords

Wenzhou; Independent Design Brands; Development Dilemmas; Development Suggestions

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization and cultural diversity, the fashion industry has become a crucial force in promoting urban economic development and image - building. The "2023 Wenzhou Government Work Report" clearly states the goal of shaping Wenzhou into a modern urban image that combines international charm with Wenzhou - style characteristics, and integrates a sense of fashion with cultural charm. As the core innovation driver of the fashion industry, independent design brands play a vital role in helping Wenzhou achieve this goal. However, field research and data analysis show that independent design brands in Wenzhou encounter numerous obstacles during the design and operation process. In - depth research and resolution of these issues are of far - reaching significance for the long - term development of Wenzhou's fashion industry.

In recent years, Wenzhou has witnessed continuous economic growth and gradual industrial structure optimization, achieving remarkable results in scientific and technological innovation, talent introduction, and other aspects. These development

trends have not only brought new opportunities but also more complex challenges to independent design brands. During 2024 - 2025, the new changes in Wenzhou's economic, social, and cultural fields are closely intertwined with the development of independent design brands, providing new perspectives and bases for deeply analyzing their development dilemmas and exploring breakthrough paths.

2. Dilemmas Faced by the Development of Independent Design Brands in Wenzhou

2.1 Lack of a Suitable Environment for Independent Design and Low Market Recognition

In developed fashion - industry countries such as Italy, the first - generation overseas Chinese engaged in the clothing industry are reaching retirement age. Their second - generation offspring, who have entrepreneurial enthusiasm and overseas design education backgrounds, attempt to return to Wenzhou to develop independent design brands but face many difficulties. In foreign countries with mature fashion industry ecosystems, all links, from design education, fabric supply to market promotion, collaborate seamlessly, and consumers have a high acceptance of independent design brands and are willing to pay for personalized designs.

In contrast, consumers in Wenzhou have relatively conservative fashion consumption concepts and tend to choose well - known mass brands. Products of independent design brands are often more unique and innovative in design and relatively high in price, making many consumers hesitant to purchase. Market data in Wenzhou from 2024 - 2025 shows that although the overall consumer market is growing, in the fashion consumption field, the consumption proportion of niche and personalized independent design brands is increasing slowly. A sample survey of consumers in major business districts in Wenzhou by relevant market research institutions shows that over 70% of consumers prioritize brand awareness and price when purchasing fashion products and have low attention and purchasing intentions for independent design brands. In addition, the fashion atmosphere in Wenzhou is weak, lacking an environment that encourages fashion innovation. As a result, designers returning from overseas find it difficult to showcase their talents, and their works are hard to be recognized by the market, leading most of them to leave Wenzhou.

2.2 Insufficient Fashion Consumption Power and Delayed Access to Fashion Information

Fashion consumption power is a key indicator for measuring the development potential of a city's fashion industry. According to the "Fashion Consumption Power Index" list jointly released by the New First - Tier Cities Research Institute and the China Chain Store & Franchise Association (CCFA) in 2021, Wenzhou performed poorly in terms of fashion consumption power and did not make it onto the list. In 2024, although Wenzhou's total retail sales of social consumer goods increased, the

sales proportion of high - end fashion products and products of independent design brands in the fashion consumption field was relatively low. Compared with surrounding cities with developed fashion consumption, such as Hangzhou and Ningbo, Wenzhou lags behind in terms of fashion consumption activity and level. Hangzhou attracts a large number of consumers to purchase fashion products with its rich fashion resources, active e - commerce atmosphere, and developed fashion industry. Ningbo occupies an important position in the fashion consumption market relying on its manufacturing foundation and fashion brand cultivation capabilities.

Timely access to fashion information is crucial for the development of independent design brands. However, Wenzhou has obvious shortcomings in fashion information dissemination. Fashion exhibitions, which are important platforms for fashion information exchange and release, are mostly concentrated in big cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Shenzhen. Due to geographical location and resource limitations, Wenzhou lags in receiving fashion information. During 2024 - 2025, although the development of Internet technology has accelerated information dissemination, Wenzhou's independent designers still have limited access to fashion information. They have fewer opportunities to participate in international and domestic fashion exhibitions and industry exchange activities compared to designers in first - tier cities, making it difficult for them to access cutting - edge fashion concepts and trends, which restricts the innovative development of their brands.

2.3 Inadequate Policy Support and Unobvious Agglomeration Effect

Policy support is of great significance for the development of independent design brands. However, Wenzhou has many deficiencies in this regard. Take the Fashion Intelligent Manufacturing Center in the World Wenzhou People's Home as an example. It has high entry thresholds, expensive rents, and inadequate subsidy policies. Many independent designers who are just starting out find it difficult to meet the entry conditions. After moving in, they cannot receive subsidy funds in a timely manner, resulting in capital turnover difficulties. Some offices have been idle for more than a year. At the same time, due to the small leased area, designers need to find additional warehouses to store fabrics and sample clothes, increasing operating costs and management difficulties.

During 2024 - 2025, although the Wenzhou government has introduced a series of policies to promote industrial development, special support policies for independent design brands still need to be improved. The implementation efficiency of policies is not high. The application and approval process for some industrial support funds is cumbersome, and the funds arrive late, affecting the development enthusiasm of enterprises. Under the impact of the epidemic, many buyers' stores closed, and fashion weeks in Shanghai and other places were cancelled or held online. Independent brand designers lost important platforms for display and sales. With fewer orders, their capital chains were broken, and some designers were forced to

leave Wenzhou or switch to working as designers in large enterprises, seriously affecting the agglomeration effect and sustainable development of independent design brands in Wenzhou.

2.4 Imperfect Fabric Market System and Incomplete Accessory Supply Chain

Fabrics and accessories are the basic elements of clothing design. In Wenzhou, there are obvious defects in the fabric market system and accessory supply chain. When operating an independent design brand in Wenzhou, designers often need to travel to other places to purchase fabrics, which increases time and costs. Moreover, due to information asymmetry, it is difficult for them to find fabrics that meet their design requirements. In contrast, the fabric markets in cities like Guangzhou are mature. Fabric suppliers not only offer a wide variety of fabrics but also actively promote their products, providing great convenience for designers. This difference puts Wenzhou's independent designers at a disadvantage in fabric procurement, affecting the quality of design works and cost control.

In terms of the accessory supply chain, Wenzhou also has deficiencies. Although accessories can enhance the fashion sense and added value of clothing, the accessory supply chain in Wenzhou is incomplete. Designers face problems such as limited choices and uneven quality when looking for accessories, making it difficult for them to create complete and fashionable clothing series and restricting the development and market competitiveness of their brands. Although Wenzhou has made efforts to improve the industrial chain during 2024 - 2025 and introduced some fabric and accessory suppliers, there is still a large gap compared with cities with mature fashion industries in terms of market system and supply chain perfection.

2.5 Difficulties in Recruitment and Lack of Advantages in Design and Development

Wenzhou's clothing industry has long been dominated by men's clothing, resulting in a single - structure industry. The clothing technicians trained in this context mostly focus on the men's clothing field, with relatively single skills, and it is difficult for them to meet the requirements of independent design brands, especially women's clothing studios, which demand technicians with comprehensive craftsmanship capabilities. This has led to difficulties in recruitment for independent design brands in Wenzhou. The number of professional technicians who meet the requirements is limited, and their high salary requirements increase the labor costs of enterprises.

During 2024 - 2025, although Wenzhou's talent introduction policies have led to an increase in overall talent inflow, there is still a large gap in professional design and technical talents required by independent design brands. Statistical data from Wenzhou's human resources market shows that there is an imbalance between the supply and demand of fashion design professionals, and enterprises' recruitment

needs are difficult to meet. In addition, Wenzhou's design education resources are relatively weak. There are gaps in teaching levels, teaching staff, and practical teaching in the design majors of local universities compared with those in cities with developed fashion industries in China. The professional qualities and innovation capabilities of locally - trained design talents are difficult to meet the development needs of independent design brands. At the same time, Wenzhou lacks policy and environmental advantages to attract outstanding domestic and foreign design talents, and the phenomenon of brain drain is serious, restricting the design and development capabilities and innovative development of independent design brands.

2.6 Insufficient Government Support for Fashion Exhibitions and Little Attention to the Independent Designer Community

Fashion exhibitions are important platforms for independent designers to showcase their works, expand customer resources, and enhance brand awareness. However, in the fashion exhibitions held in Wenzhou, the government provides insufficient support to the independent designer community. In terms of booth arrangements, large enterprises, with their strong strength and high popularity, occupy the central positions and obtain better display resources. Small enterprises and independent designers, on the other hand, have to rent corner booths at their own expense, resulting in poor display effects and making it difficult for them to attract attention and customer resources. In terms of subsidy policies, the government provides greater subsidies to large enterprises, while relatively few to independent designers. Many independent designers cannot afford the high costs of participating in fashion exhibitions due to limited funds, restricting the development space of their brands. During 2024 - 2025, the participation and display effects of independent designers in fashion exhibitions held in Wenzhou have not improved significantly. The government still tends to allocate exhibition resources to large enterprises. The rights and interests of independent designers in booth selection, publicity, and promotion are difficult to guarantee, and it is challenging for them to enhance their brand influence through fashion exhibitions.

3. Development Suggestions for Independent Design Brands in Wenzhou

3.1 Include Important Fashion Weeks in the Exhibition Subsidy Catalog

The Shanghai Fashion Week and the Shenzhen Fashion Week are influential fashion events in China, gathering professional buyers, media, and industry resources. Designers have the opportunity to establish contacts with domestic and foreign customers at these exhibitions, obtain orders, and expand market channels. For example, at exhibitions such as ONTIME and Shi Tang during the Shanghai Fashion Week, many designers have successfully received customer orders. Shenzhen has rich experience in cultivating and developing independent design brands. At the Milan

Fashion Week in 2022, 6 independent Chinese brands participated, and 3 of the dynamic exhibition brands were from Shenzhen.

It is recommended that the Wenzhou government include important domestic exhibitions such as the Shanghai Fashion Week and the Shenzhen Fashion Week in the exhibition subsidy catalog, provide financial support to Wenzhou's independent designers, reduce their exhibition costs, encourage them to actively participate, showcase their works, enhance brand awareness, expand market share, promote the integration of Wenzhou's independent design brands into the domestic fashion market, and facilitate their international development. During 2024 - 2025, Wenzhou can increase its support for independent designers to participate in important domestic and international fashion weeks. In addition to subsidizing exhibition costs, it can organize training and exchange activities to enhance their exhibition - participation capabilities and market - expansion abilities, and build communication and cooperation platforms with the organizers of fashion weeks to strive for better display opportunities and resource support.

3.2 Promote the Integration of Design with Life and Create a Design Agglomeration Center

Design originates from and serves life. Promoting the organic integration of design with lifestyle and practice can create a strong fashion atmosphere and provide inspiration for designers. It is recommended that the government plan an office building in the urban area as a design agglomeration center to attract independent designers to settle in. The design agglomeration center should lower the entry threshold, simplify the process, and issue subsidy funds in a timely manner to reduce the operating burden of designers. It should be equipped with complete infrastructure such as shared studios, fabric display areas, and sample - making workshops to provide one - stop services. Regularly hold design lectures, workshops, creative markets, and other activities to promote communication and cooperation among designers, inspire innovation, form a design industry agglomeration effect, attract more design talents and resources to gather in Wenzhou, and promote the development of the fashion industry.

During 2024 - 2025, Wenzhou has made new progress in urban construction and industrial planning, creating better conditions for building a design agglomeration center. The government can combine urban renewal and industrial upgrading projects, select areas with convenient transportation and complete supporting facilities to build the design agglomeration center, and use digital technology to create an online - offline integrated design service platform to provide a broader space for resource sharing and communication and cooperation.

3.3 Attract and Retain Design Talents

Talent is the core competitiveness of the development of independent design brands.

To attract outstanding domestic and foreign design talents to Wenzhou and increase the retention rate of graduates from the design majors of local universities in Wenzhou, the Wenzhou government can take a series of measures. Optimize the rental subsidy policy for fresh graduates. Increase the subsidy amount, refer to the subsidy standards of Taizhou to increase the intensity, simplify the application process, and improve the review efficiency to reduce the living pressure of graduates and demonstrate Wenzhou's emphasis on talent. Provide subsidies to design companies that hire fresh graduates, encourage enterprises to provide more employment opportunities, strengthen cooperation with universities, establish internship bases, and promote talent cultivation and delivery.

During 2024 - 2025, Wenzhou has achieved certain results in implementing talent strategies such as the "Ouyue Talent Plan". In terms of attracting and retaining design talents, the government can further improve relevant policies, provide personalized talent services, such as housing security, children's education, and career development planning. Strengthen cooperation with well - known domestic and foreign design institutions, carry out joint training and exchange projects, and improve the overall quality of Wenzhou's design talents.

3.4 Establish and Promote E - commerce Online Platforms

With the development of Internet technology, e - commerce platforms have become important channels for the sales and promotion of fashion brands. The government can cooperate with e - commerce platforms to create a special area for Wenzhou's independent designer brands, centrally display and sell their works, and improve brand awareness and influence through platform promotion and marketing. Provide e - commerce operation training and technical support to designers, enhance their operation capabilities, and expand the market. Encourage designers to carry out online live - streaming sales, short - video marketing, and other activities, interact with consumers through new media, enhance brand affinity and market competitiveness, build a convenient and efficient sales channel, and promote the development and growth of brands.

During 2024 - 2025, Wenzhou's e - commerce industry has developed rapidly, with a significant increase in cross - border e - commerce exports. The government can integrate e - commerce resources, create an e - commerce platform for Wenzhou's independent designers with local characteristics, accurately position and package it in combination with industrial advantages and cultural characteristics, attract the attention of domestic and foreign consumers, and strengthen platform supervision and services to protect the rights and interests of designers and consumers.

3.5 Promote School - Enterprise Cooperation

School - enterprise cooperation is an effective way to cultivate innovative design talents and promote the development of independent design brands. Large enter-

prises or independent designers can assign design requirements as assignments to college students, allowing students to improve their design capabilities through practice. Select the best works and sell them on online platforms through 3D technology. Production starts after receiving orders. This model provides students with practical opportunities and economic benefits, stimulates their learning enthusiasm and innovation capabilities, provides creative inspiration and excellent works for enterprises and designers, pre - tests the market recognition of design works, reduces production risks, enhances the brand awareness of teachers and enterprises, promotes the close integration of college design education with industrial needs, and cultivates more outstanding talents for the development of independent design brands in Wenzhou.

During 2024 - 2025, Wenzhou has made positive explorations in promoting school - enterprise cooperation, such as establishing internship bases and carrying out industry - university - research cooperation projects. In the future, the government can play a guiding role, improve the policy support and guarantee mechanism, set up special funds to support cooperation projects, establish an information exchange platform to promote information sharing and cooperation between colleges and enterprises, strengthen the evaluation and promotion of cooperation results, and widely apply successful experiences to promote the innovative development of independent design brands in Wenzhou.

4. Conclusion

Although the development of independent design brands in Wenzhou faces many difficulties, it also contains great potential and opportunities. By deeply analyzing problems such as low market recognition, insufficient fashion consumption power, inadequate policy support, an imperfect industrial chain, a shortage of talents, and insufficient support for fashion exhibitions, targeted development suggestions have been put forward. In future development, Wenzhou requires the coordinated cooperation of the government, enterprises, and society. The government should increase policy support and optimize the market environment. Enterprises should strengthen innovation capabilities and enhance brand competitiveness. Colleges and universities should deepen design education reform and cultivate professional talents that meet market demands. With the joint efforts of all parties, Wenzhou's independent design brands can break through development dilemmas, achieve sustainable development, provide strong support for Wenzhou to build a fashion city and enhance its comprehensive competitiveness, and enable Wenzhou's independent design brands to shine on the global fashion stage.

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