



Collector-toy makers aren't turning a blind eye to untapped market potential

Xu Wei

The popularity of “blind boxes” in China has moved beyond just trendy purchases for mostly young collectors. They are now a tool for introducing the world to Chinese films, TV series, culture and technology.

Blind-box toys, also known as mystery boxes, originated from Japan. People bought them sight-unseen and collected the contents — which could be fantastic or a bit mundane. It has become an obsession among some collectors.

Manufacturers now see a channel for expanding domestic sales by taking their products overseas.

Koitake, a relatively new toy brand under Alibaba Pictures, has developed Zheng Xiaolong's classic epic series “Empresses in the Palace” into toys depicting the emperor and concubines in the tale of love, betrayal and scandal during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). It's marketing the toys in blind-boxes for overseas buyers.

Eight regular models and two hidden editions of the classic characters are included in the blind-box series, along with various imperial palace memorabilia, providing insight into the royal court life in the ancient Forbidden City.

Koitake has also designed

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The vitality of classic culture is retained in these collections. At the same time, eye-catching spin-offs can also help take Chinese TV series and movies to people around the world. It is a virtuous circle.

Qu Fang

Koitake's product development director

blind-box toys from costume dramas such as “World of Honor” and “Immortal Samsara,” comedy series “Country Love,” period drama “The Age of Awakening,” the sci-fi comedy film “Moon Man,” and the variety show “Street Dancing in China.” Each figurine is priced at around 80 yuan (US\$11.46).

These blind-box toys seem to be favorably received abroad.

A foreign netizen calling

herself “Sweetgirl” posted on YouTube that she is a big fan of China's palace dramas and found all the figurines in the “Empresses in the Palace” series very enchanting.

After receiving the set of “World of Honor” toys, another foreign customer praised them as: “Absolutely beautiful! It's a great souvenir to remember a great series. Two thumbs-up!”

Since it began in 2021, Koitake's revenue has reached 100 million yuan. Many of its sets are particularly popular on overseas e-commerce platforms like Shopee and Lazada.

Within six hours of release last year, the “Country Love,” the first batch of 20,000 collectible figures sold out worldwide. The recent “Street Dancing of China” series has also performed well, with around 100,000 toys exchanged by show enthusiasts with Tmall membership points since August.

Qu Fang, Koitake's product development director, told Shanghai Daily that a new set of toys usually takes at least two months to develop. In the process, designers communicate with content providers, a series' crew and fans.

A big challenge for designers is to have a good grasp of a TV show's essence and plot so that the clothing of character figurines and backdrops resonate well with fans.

China's profound history

Koitake's new blind-box series features the main character in the classic Chinese epic drama “Empresses in the Palace.” — Ti Gong