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Semiotic Analysis of Color Symbolism and Brand Color in China

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ABSTRACT

Color occupies an important position in brand design and is an indispensable visual element in brand design. Color has the function of portraying things and guiding the line of sight when disseminating information, which can enhance the brand image. The color of brand design has become an effective carrier of brand characteristics.

This research aims to analyze the relationship between color symbols in Chinese culture and the use of colors in Chinese brands through investigating literature, and to understand the development and evolution of colors in Chinese history. Researchers take Chinese brands as the research object, and use semiotics to analyze how Chinese brand colors are selected and the meanings and symbols behind them, reflecting the characteristics and significance of the use of Chinese brand colors. This research will provide an analysis the use of different color combinations as brand design color elements in brand design, giving the brand a strong sense of the times and nationality, and making traditional culture more attractive. The research will reveal the understand the influencing factors of Chinese-style color design in brand design, so as to design and convey the brand concept more accurately, so that the brand has a unique cultural connotation. Finally, historical literature research and case analysis provide a deeper for Chinese brands to correctly use color elements to form a visual “Chinese style” effect.

KEYWORDS:

Color, Semiotic, Chinese color symbol, brand color, color culture code, Chinese brand

INTRODUCTION

Research backgrounds and purpose

In more and more brand designs, brand color appears as an important sensory asset. In the era of information explosion, color enables us to get a preliminary impression of the brand more quickly. Brands are not just widely communicable, but good brands should have rich connotations and contain spiritual and cultural content. For a country, it is represented of culture.

As a spiritual symbol, culture is the fundamental characteristic of a country and a nation that distinguish it from other nations. The Chinese civilization is the only uninterrupted ancient civilization in the world. It has lasted for five thousand years. This has further enabled the Chinese to nurture an extremely sophisticated color culture in the traditional color aesthetics.

In the history of the development of Chinese color culture, the formation and progress of the Chinese color system are interrelated with ideas. Based on the “Five Elements Theory”, a five-element color culture with significant national characteristics was born. These colors include: black, red, cyan (a mixture of green and blue), white and yellow. These colors correspond to the five water elements in traditional Chinese physics, fire, wood, gold and earth.

Influenced by Confucian culture in Chinese historical aesthetics, it emphasizes the beauty of implicitness; the beauty of seemingly loose but rhythmic rhythm; the beauty of the artistic conception of “the harmony between man and nature” integrated with nature. Chinese traditional culture gives unique cultural connotations to colors, and for the design of the mechanized and information age. Chinese brands have distinctive national characteristics and uniqueness. For the inheritance of Chinese traditional culture, combining the symbol of Chinese color culture with modern brand design makes Chinese traditional culture have vitality and characteristics of the time.

This study aims to investigate historical documents to understand the influence of Chinese color symbols and the development and evolution of Chinese historical colors, analyze the relationship between color symbols in Chinese culture and the use of colors in Chinese brands, and understand them in modern brand design. Understand the color design concept and color symbolic meaning rooted in the soil of traditional culture, so that the brand is more inspired by and at the same time accurately conveys the brand image. And provide ideas for the formation of “Chinese style” in brand color design.

Research scope and methods

Researchers take Chinese brands as the research object and take famous modern Chinese brands as examples to study their brand color symbolism and brand color strategy.

This article uses Pierce's semiotics as the main theoretical basis and research methods to analyze the relationship between Chinese color symbols and Chinese brands. It is mainly to analyze the interpretation of color as a symbolic representation for the brand in the context of Chinese history and culture. Using the color cultural code in the Cultural Code Brand Design Methodology (CCBD) as a theory, analyze the characteristics and meaning of Chinese brand colors. With more accurate design and communication of the brand concept, the brand has a unique artistic connotation. Finally, the study will include historical literature research and case analysis of the trend of using color elements in contemporary Chinese brands.

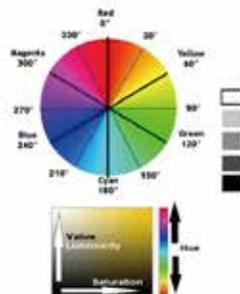
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Color theories

Color understanding is based on optics and involves disciplines such as psychophysics, psychology, physiology, aesthetics and art theory. For years, scientists had studied the mechanics of color going as far back as Newton's early color wheel. The color wheel consists of three primary colors (red, yellow, blue), three secondary colors (colors created when primary colors are mixed: green, orange, purple) and six tertiary colors (colors made from primary and secondary colors, such as blue-green or red-violet). The color wheel can be divided into cool colors and warm colors.

Munsell Color Theory is based on a three-dimensional model in which each color is comprised of three attributes of hue (color itself), value (lightness/darkness) and chroma (color saturation or brilliance). As shown in [Figure 1]

Figure [1] HSV System Components and Colors Selection



HUE - Hue is also a term which describes a dimension of color we readily experience when we look at color, or its purest form; it essentially refers to a color having full saturation.

VALUE - refers to the lightness or darkness of a color. It indicates the quantity of light reflected. When referring to pigments, dark values of black added are called “shades” of the given hue name. Light values with white pigment added are called “tints” of the hue name.

SATURATION -- (INTENSITY OR CHROMA) defines the brilliance and intensity of a color. When a pigment hue is “toned,” both white and black (grey) are added to the color to reduce the color’s saturation.

Brand Color Theory- cultural code of color

Color increases brand recognition by up to 80 percent . Brand color is an effective way to help to induce consumers’ feelings about the brand or usage situation. In expressing and inducing emotions, colors act more logically than shapes . In this way, brand design uses color to communicate a message, influence consumer perception, attract consumer attention, impact consumer behavior, and create continuity and continuity of the brand message .

The following color strategy plays an important role in brand design strategy.

1. Brand Identification - Humans use color to organize and classify objects - makes people think of red for Coke and brown for Asiana Airlines
2. Feature reinforcement - Quickly identify the characteristics of a specific brand among various brands - in the package design, black and white represent inexpensive generic brands, gold and silver represent premium brands, dark red represents strength, and pale blue expresses gentleness.
3. Differentiation of brands - differentiation from other brands
4. Following the leader - imitating the brand color of the brand leader to give a feeling of a similar brand - cell phones and other auxiliary products use similar colors
5. Trendy Color - build trend-sensitive colors to influence the brand colors of other brands
6. Extensive Marketing

If you can do just one color to build your brand’s trademark color, it’s probably the best approach. However, it is often challenging to establish a differentiated brand color with just one color because many brands exist and compete in

one product line now. If a new product line is developed and there are only a few brands, a brand color can be built with one color.

The brand color is divided into the following three categories.

1. Dominant Brand Color or Main Color - usually one color - occupies most of the surface - expresses the brand.
2. Sub-Dominant Brand Color or Minor Color- There is usually no color, or one of several colors.
3. Accent Color - calls attention to some information or separate - occupies the smallest part of the surface.

Basic Theory of Semiotics

Since the birth of the definition of the symbol, many scholars have different understandings and definitions of symbols. It was not until the 1950s that the principles of semiotics were introduced into the entire field of visual communication design. The introduction of semiotics theory in the design world for the first time. Saussure divides symbols into two interconnections, Signifier and Signified. From a macro perspective, the signifier relates to the entire world, and the signified relates to the meaning of the world.

The American philosopher and semanticist Peirce (Ch. Peirce, 1839-1914) believes that saussure's symbolic model is: a symbol is comprised of a symbol's representative, a symbol's object, and a symbol's interpreted. According to the relationship between the symbolic representation and the object that the symbol refers to, there are diverse types of symbols: icon, index, and symbol. Icon represents the object through realism or imitation of the object. It links to the artistic characteristics and the reproduction of multiple modes. There is a direct connection between the index and the characterizing object, that is, causal, spatial or logical connection; there is no similarity and no direct connection between the symbol and the object, and it is determined in a conventional way, and the object represented is not a certain A single, individual existence is not dependent on specific time and space conditions but is a category of universal things. It is built on a specific cultural background and uses a distinctive image to represent a certain general concept content . Most of the symbols that Pierce talked about are in fact mixed: they may all be mainly symbol, but they also have icon and index at the same time .

Among them, color is a language symbol directly acting on human vision, and each color represents different information. When people see a certain color, the brain nerves will receive the signals from the color and generate as-

sociations. Humans use color as a symbol in various cultural and artistic works, as a universally recognized symbol representing a certain message. Colors and the information they symbolize are based on individuals, cultures, and have universally recognized characteristics, so color symbols are diverse. Color symbolism is related to the situation and is affected by changes over time.

CHINESE COLOR SYMBOL AND BRAND CASE

Historical Research on Chinese Colors

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Color has shaped the life of Chinese people and has also become an external representation of Chinese culture. The starting point of traditional Chinese color is the concept. More emphasis is placed on the image of color, and the pursuit is “using color to express meaning”. Therefore, traditional colors can only be divided into orthochromatic and secondary colors.

In traditional Chinese art and culture, Black, Chi(赤), Qing (青) (greenish blue), White and Yellow are regarded as standard colors. The ancients believed that there are colors in nature. They are similar to the three primary colors and are orthodox colors. These colors correspond to the five elements in traditional Chinese physics: water, fire, wood, gold and earth. The five-color system and the cultural system accompany each other, and the development history of the five-color system is also a condensed cultural history .

The following table can be summarized with semiotic theory.

[Table1] Saussure's Semiotics Theory Analysis of Brand Color

Semiotic Analysis of Color Symbol							
Signifier	Signified						
Five positive colors (五正色)	Five Elements Theory(五行论)	season	position	Five Virtues	dynasty	dynasty	Spirit
Chi (赤)	fire	summer	South	Fire of Virtue	A symbol of dignity in the Han Dynasty	A symbol of dignity in the Han Dynasty	justice, bravery, enthusiasm
Qing (青)	Wood	spring	East	Wood virtue			quiet, peaceful
Yellow	earth		middle	Earthy virtue	A symbol of dignity in the Tang Dynasty	A symbol of dignity in the Tang Dynasty	noble
White	gold	Autumn	West	King's Virtue			disappear
Black	water	winter	North	The virtue of water	The symbol of dignity in the Qin Dynasty	The symbol of dignity in the Qin Dynasty	serious

“Zhou Li-Chun Guan-Da Zong Bo (《周礼·春官·大宗伯》)” talks about ritual instruments: “Use jade as the six vessels, present the heaven and the earth in the four directions, use the Cang-bi(苍璧) to present the heaven, use the Huang Cong(黄琮) to present the earth, the Qinggui(青圭) to the east, the Chi-zhang(赤璋) to present the South, the white Hu (白琥) to the west, and the Xuan-huang(玄璜) to present the north.”

This describes the custom of sacrifice in ancient China. The “Bi(璧), Cong(琮), Kyu(圭), Zhang(璋), Hu(琥), Huang(璜)” in the passage represent the six forms of the sacrificial jade utensils, and point out the five orthographic colors “Qing, red, white, black, and yellow” and five directions Correspondence between “East, South, West, North, and Central”. also talked about the imagery of utensils and colors:

Qing: Qing-gui symbolizes the “wood (木)” in the theory of the five elements, which symbolizes the sprouts that broke the ground in spring. It also means quiet and peaceful.

Red: Red-zhang symbolizes the “fire (火)” symbolizes the half-life of sum-

mer. And enthusiasm and loyalty.

White: white-Hu symbolizes “gold (金)” and also symbolizes The murderousness of autumn. It symbolizes the disappearance of all life.

Black: Xuan-huang symbolizes both “water” and the openness of winter, It symbolizes coldness and seriousness.

Yellow: Huang-Cong symbolizes both “earth (土)” and the earth. The ancient Chinese have always had the idea of centering and respecting. In terms of orientation, yellow represents the center and is also higher than the other four orientations, symbolizing dignity.

In folk customs, red is regarded as a symbol of auspiciousness because in primitive times, the ancients found that red fire can prevent the attack of wild beasts, and the red sun brings warmth and light, so the ancients believed that in order to avoid evil forces and ominous things, need something red to resist. The ancients believed that red could ward off evil spirits and was a symbol of auspiciousness.

In addition to the five primary colors, there are secondary colors. The secondary color refers to the result of the mixture of positive colors, “Qing and yellow are called green, red and white are called red, blue and white are called blue, red and black are purple, and yellow and black are yellow.”

This sentence explains how secondary colors are formed. Green and yellow mix together to make green. Red and white blended into red. Blue and white are mixed into Bi. Yellow and black are blended into a flowing yellow, like a modern khaki. Black and red are mixed into purple, like the color of chicken liver.

3.1.2 The Eastern Philosophical Thought in Color Symbolism

In the concept of the ancients, the traditional colors contain oriental philosophical thoughts. And black and white are the two colors that best reflect the oriental philosophical thought. The use of semiotics to explain black and white color symbols is shown in the figure:

[Table2] Saussure’s Semiotics Theory Analysis of Brand Color

Symbol of color in poetry		
Signifier	Relation	Signified
Black	Eastern Philosophy	strong, heavy,
	Chinese painting	ink style
White	Eastern Philosophy	pure and clean
	Chinese painting	leave blank

Eastern philosophy believes that water in the five elements is not only a physical and objective substance, but also the source of life, and even the origin of all things. Laozi said, “Water is good for all things without fighting”. This sentence means that water is good at nourishing all things without contending with them. Water can contain everything. Water is humble and gentle, but it is the most indispensable existence. So black, which corresponds to water, is also considered to have these characteristics, and it is also the most powerful and mysterious of the five colors.

The ancients believed that white was the most basic color.

Huainan Zi said, “Those who are colored stand in vain and become colored with five colors.”

This sentence means that among many colors, if white is established, other colors will be easily established and highlighted. White is also extended to “blank”, “pure and clean”.

The symbolism of color in China is influenced by factors such as Eastern philosophy and Chinese painting. Eastern philosophy influenced painting, transforming it from rich and gorgeous colors to ink-wash style, and Chinese painting directly influenced the Chinese people’s color aesthetics. Combining black and white into five primary colors and various secondary colors, secondary colors produced by desaturating each color. It has been developing a unique “Chinese style”.

SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL COLOR SYMBOLISM AND CHINESE BRAND COLOR

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At the beginning of 2021, the brand Tmall New Cultural and Creative, which aims to revive and spread Chinese culture, cooperated with the China Academy of Art to create “Giving Lihong” based on the “red” in the traditional Chinese five-color system. A color symbol represents Tmall’s new cultural and creative brand.

[Figure2] Tmall New Cultural logo



The two representative colors in “Power Red” are made up of red and black and white respectively. “Give Lihong” as a color symbol represents Tmall’s new cultural and creative brand. Use Saussure and Peirce’s semiotics theory to analyze brand color as shown in the figure: [Table3] semiotics theory to analyze brand color.

[Table3] semiotics theory to analyze brand color

Symbol of color in poetry			
	Signifier	Relation	Signified
	Red	custom	auspicious
	Black	painting	ink style
	Red	custom	auspicious
	White	philosophical thought	clean

[Table4] Peirce’s semiotics theory to analyze brand color

Icon	Index	Symbol
	auspicious and warm	The beauty of traditional Chinese history and culture, the beauty of Chinese colors and styles.
	clean and auspicious	

In 2021, the color “lychee red” is adopted, which symbolizes happiness and auspiciousness in 2021. “Give Lihong” as a color symbol represents Tmall’s new cultural and creative brand. Tmall Cultural and Creative uses color marketing strategies in its brand marketing strategy to influence consumers’ perceptions, influence consumers’ actions, and convey brand information through colors. Sustainability and continuity. Has the following characteristics,

1. Brand Identification-As a Chinese brand, Tmall New Wenchuang expresses enthusiasm and auspicious hope through traditional Chinese colors with low visual saturation. With exquisite visual image and profound cultural and historical connotation, it enhances the color atmosphere of the New Year. It makes people think of Tmall's new cultural and creative brand when they see "Give Lihong",

2. Feature Reinforcement- Each color in "Give Lihong" not only conforms to oriental aesthetics, is full of positive energy, but also absorbs the essence of traditional culture. It is used as a color symbol in the brand design, which represents the unique history of Tmall's new cultural and creative brand Cultural characteristics.

3. Extensive Marketing-Tmall New Cultural and Creative Co., Ltd., together with Yili, LILY, Magic Cat Box, and other brands, jointly released the "Give Lihong" Chinese Gift Series Gift Box. Introducing a variety of products to the market is conducive to the entry of the Tmall cultural and creative brand into the market.

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The cosmetics brand " Florasis ", which was born in Hangzhou in 2017, first proposed the brand concept of "Oriental Makeup, Makeup with Flowers". The " Florasis "brand hopes that Chinese women will be equally beautiful regardless of heavy makeup or light makeup. The English name of Florasis is "Florasis", which is "Flora" + "Sis", which means "Flower God". It is a metaphor for women who use " Florasis "products, who are as beautiful as the lotus flower god. As follows:

[Picture 3] "Florasis" brand logo and Florasis" brand packaging



The main color of the “Florasis” brand is cyan, the auxiliary color is gold, and the embellishment is red. The brand color of “Florasis” conveys the brand concept and makes consumers associate the brand with the color. Using semiotic analysis as shown in the figure.

[Table5] Saussure’s Semiotics Theory Analysis of Brand Color

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Signifier		Relation	Signified
	Qing	spiritual symbol	quiet, peaceful,
		Brand Features	natural
	Black	Eastern Philosophy	The heaviness of history
	Yellow	spiritual symbol	noble
	White	Eastern Philosophy	clean, pure
	Chi	spiritual symbol	warm

[Table6] Peirce’s semiotics theory to analyze brand color

Icon	Index	Symbol
	quiet, peaceful,	The beauty of traditional Chinese history and culture, the beauty of Chinese colors and styles.
	natural	
	noble, refined	

The main color of the “Florasis” brand is cyan, which expresses the safety of the brand’s materials and uses natural flowers and plants as raw materials. It also expresses that the brand is a Chinese brand with Chinese cultural connotations. The auxiliary color is gold, which assists in expressing the exquisite and noble brand concept. Dotted in red, it emphasizes certain information and sets it apart from the background. The color design of “Florasis” brand will have the following characteristics.

1.Feature Reinforcement- The unique brand colors of “Florasis” made him jump out of the “Western makeup” camp occupied by major international brands. Establish leadership in new category markets.

2.Differentiation- As a Chinese brand, the color strategy makes the brand distinctly recognizable.

Huaxizi brand conveys the continuity and continuity of brand information through color in brand marketing strategy. Through the combination of tradi-

tional Chinese colors and modern skin care concepts, the Huaxizi brand not only conveys the profound cultural and historical connotation of the “Florasis” brand, but also shows the exquisite and elegant characteristics of the brand.

CONCLUSION

As an indicator, the color of Chinese brands is instructive in the field of brand design. It is used to guide the brand characteristics of products and guide the establishment of brand image. As symbolic signs, Chinese brand colors mainly use symbolic language to promote Chinese culture and imply unique cultural features of products based on brand recognition. The meaning of color symbols develops with the development of society. Modern brand color design tends to integrate historical culture and brand communication concepts to produce culturally recognizable color symbols. The application of Chinese history and culture to the brand color design not only allows the culture to be inherited and developed, but also makes the brand easy to be identified and strengthens the brand’s Chinese characteristics. Chinese-style brand color design has gradually formed, showing Chinese colors to the world.

can discover poetic imagination that suggestively forms the object. Prior to being strictly distinguished, writing and drawing was perceived as a similar act as they both leave trace of something. For the pictorial Chinese characters, writing and drawing do not have much difference. Chinese characters, therefore, can be described as picture words. The grammatical relation between language and image is not about the confrontation or the coexistence; it is a complex matter that cannot be defined easily with social, political, philosophical, and esthetic concepts. Moreover, the recognition on the relation of language and image has been changing over the course of different standpoints, opinions and times; it cannot be absolute and is difficult to predict the future changes. However, language and image have long maintained the interrelationship due to their need for each other. But as image medium is becoming ever more popular these days, the lever is leaning more to image. It is presumed temporary, because image will always coexist with language.

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