Analyzing Brand Logos of Tourist Cities by Utilizing Peirce's Semiotics and Culture Code -Focused on The Top 10 Provincial Tourist Cities In China-

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ABSTRACT

With the in-depth development of China's tourism industry, tourism has entered the image-oriented stage from resource-oriented and market-oriented. In order to reveal how these tourist cities reflect the culture and symbolism of the city through the visual elements of the brand logo in brand communication. In this study, the top ten provincial-level administrative regions in China's tourism industry are taken as the research subjects. Firstly, the visual elements and theoretical background of tourism brand logos are investigated through relevant prior studies and books and internet materials. Secondly, the analysis is conducted from the perspectives of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics and the cultural code and brand touch point design in Cultural Code Brand Design Methodology (CCBD). In the symbolic part, the inner meaning of visual elements in the logo is analyzed from icon, index, and symbol by using Peirce's semiotics theory. And categorized according to the basic components of culture code in CCBD. For the analysis of touchpoint design of city signs, the touchpoint characteristics of each city sign are analysed in terms of six touchpoint design types, and the effectiveness of the communication of city signs is further analysed in terms of the three functions of touchpoints. Then the results of the analysis were summarized and conclusions of the study were drawn. Language and Art culture codes are used most frequently. This reflects their emphasis on the importance of language as a means of cultural transmission and communication, as well as the importance of artistic, cultural and creative aspects.Sustainable Design is

used in all the logos, indicating that sustainable design is very common in logo design. Stimulus-response Design is present in six of the cities and is also relatively common. Hard Subject Design, on the other hand, does not appear in any of these city logos. From the perspective of the function of brand touchpoint design, Communicating understanding and Communicating desire are the most common brand touchpoint design features. The city logos of Guangdong, Chongqing and Fujian have all three brand touchpoint design features and therefore achieve effective communication. The city logos of Hubei, Hunan and Anhui have only one branding touchpoint design feature and therefore cannot be effectively communicated.

KEYWORDS

City Branding, City Logos, Pierce Semiotics, Cultural Codes, Brand Touchpoints

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the tourism industry in China has experienced remarkable growth and transformation. With the shift from resource-oriented and market-oriented approaches, the industry has now entered a new phase characterized by a strong emphasis on image and branding (Dinnie,2009). In this context, the visual representation of tourism cities through brand logos has gained increasing importance. A well-crafted brand logo can not only convey the unique identity and characteristics of a tourism destination but also influence tourists' perception and decision-making process (Janiszewski et al., 2001).

However, despite the growing recognition of the significance of brand logos, the current situation of tourism city branding in China presents several challenges. Many cities struggle with unclear image positioning and a lack of coherent and connected image elements (Björner,2013). This hampers the effectiveness of regional tourism image promotion and limits the potential benefits derived from a well-established and recognizable tourism city brand.

Therefore, it is crucial to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the visual characteristics of brand logos in tourism cities, with a focus on provincial-level administrative regions in China. By examining the visual elements and design principles of these brand logos (Wang,2013), we can gain insights into their symbolic, Culture Code, which are essential for effective brand communication and differentiation.

The main objective of this study is to explore the visual characteristics of tourism city brand identities in ten provincial administrative regions of China, focusing on the analysis of visual symbols as well as related cultural codes and touchpoint designs. By conducting a systematic analysis, we aim to reveal the symbolic meanings embedded in these logos, and the characteristics of the customary cultural codes, as well as the availability of effective brand communication touchpoints.

In order to achieve this objective, this study will first review the relevant literature and theories on tourism brand logos. Next, we will apply Peirce's semiotic theory and CCBD to examine the symbolic as well as cultural code feature aspects of brand logos. In addition, we will further analyse the characteristics of brand touchpoints that the city logo possesses as well as the brand touchpoint functions to understand the effectiveness of the communication.

This study provides valuable insights into the construction and promotion of tourist city images by comprehensively analysing tourist city brand logos in 10 provincial administrative regions in China using semiotic as well as cultural code features. The results of the analyses will help to improve the effectiveness of tourism city branding and contribute to the development and competitiveness of these destinations.

2. RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

An administrative division is an area that a country has divided into graded zones to facilitate administrative management. Administrative divisions are also known as administrative regions. In China, administrative divisions are categorized as follows The whole country is divided into provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities. Provinces and autonomous regions are divided into autonomous provinces, prefectures, autonomous counties, and cities. Counties and autonomous counties are divided into townships, ethnic townships and towns.

According to China's "2022 National Travel Agency Statistical Survey Report", the top ten provincial administrative units in terms of domestic tourism arrivals in 2022 are Zhejiang, Hubei, Jiangsu, Hunan, Yunnan, Guangdong, Anhui, Guizhou, Chongqing, and Fujian in descending order. (Marketing Management Division, 2022) The research scope of this study is the logo design of city brands of 10 provincial-level administrative units in China (Table 1).

Table 1. Top 10 provincial-level administrative regions in China in terms of tourism in 2022

RANKING	PROVINCE	LOGO
1	Zhejiang	
2	Hubei	
3	Jiangsu	
4	Hunan	
5	Yunnan	
6	Guangdong	
7	Anhui	
8	Guizhou	
9	Chongqing	
10	Fujian	

Research Methodology First, the visual factors and theoretical backgrounds of 10 provincial metropolitan logos were examined through relevant prior research, books and Internet sources. Secondly, city branding, Pierce's semiotics, cultural code components in CCBD and cultural codes in brand touchpoints will be used as theoretical backgrounds. Thirdly, symbolism, cultural code constituents and cultural codes in brand touchpoints will be chosen as research themes. The visual elements in the logo are interpreted according to the icon, index, and symbol of Pierce's semiotics theory, and the symbolic visual images in the logo are analyzed. The elements of the cultural code embodied in the logo were summarised and generalised by analysing the logo using Pierce's

semiotics and further incorporating the basic components of the cultural code. The cultural code characteristics are analysed in relation to the type of brand touchpoint design. Finally, the above analysis is synthesized to draw conclusions of the study.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 CITY BRANDING

A city brand is a system of symbols, including cognitive marks, that represent a city. The etymological meaning of brand (Fowler et al., 1927) is a verb meaning "to stamp, mark," with a noun meaning of a mark, seal, or trademark left as a result. Later, brand came to mean "label or trademark" as a means of enhancing the recognition of a product. (Algeo, 2003) Brands with this cognitive or symbolic function have often been referred to as "names, letters, symbols, signatures, slogans, logos, colors, fonts," and by applying this etymological concept to cities, city brands are understood as cognitive or symbolic "names, letters, symbols, signatures, slogans, logos, colors, fonts, and combinations thereof" that express a city.

As a comprehensive concept, a city brand is a total tool and strategic decision that creates a lasting perception and feeling of a city. It is also accurately perceived by many people and used to help in the decision-making process related to the city. City branding is a part of city marketing, which is the process of building and managing a city brand.

3.2 CITI LOGOS

City logos are exposed through various events (e.g., local festivals, expos, etc.) and are widely used through a variety of channels, such as brochures, souvenirs, printed materials including outdoor advertising, websites, local signage, and production sponsorships (Lee et al., 2012). They are also often used on buildings, vehicles, and uniforms where organization are located (van den Bosch et al.,2005). Through these various uses, a city's logo can serve not only internally to increase cohesion and establish the culture of the community, but also externally to attract investment from residents or tourists by creating a positive image of the city itself or its specialities and differentiating it from other places (Choi, 2009). From this perspective, scholars consider logos as a key tool for communicating an or ganisation's image to internal and external audiences.

It has been reported that differences in logos affect not only the memory and meaning of the logo itself, but also the image, likability, and visitation intention of the object represented by the logo (Lee et al., 2012), indicating that the issue of how to create a city logo is not a simple decision. It is very unfortunate that there has been no systematic analysis of city logos in Korea. (Honget al., 2014) This study aims to explore the semiotic significance and cultural code characteristics of Chinese city signs, as well as the communication effects of brand touchpoint design. On this basis, it attempts to explore the potential problems of Chinese city logos and the points that should be considered in the future production and application of city logos.

3.3 PEIRCE SEMIOTICS

Charles Sanders Peirce has been working to reveal the reasoning process of the human mind through the study of symbols. He believed that his idea of symbols and the classification of symbols would address this problem well in its inclusiveness and explanatory aspects. The problem of symbols can be said to be a problem that Peirce has been considering constantly throughout his life. From time to time he gave his own understanding on the meaning of symbols, and it can be said that his understanding of symbols has been in a process of self-change, self-improvement, and self-breakthrough. Peirce's symbolic thought, in terms of content, can be simply divided into two major parts: the elaboration of the symbol itself and the classification of the symbol, but these two parts are often intertwined. The concept of the sign occupies a very important place in his thought. (Ji, 2014)

Peirce clearly states that there are three things in a symbol: the symbol itself, the object to which the symbol refers, and the explanatory term of the symbol. In other words, a symbol is a thing A, which leads to another thing B. B is the interpretative term of A, which is determined or generated by A. A also has the same correspondence with a third thing C, which is the referent of A. In this correspondence, A refers to C.

Peirce summarizes the relationship between a symbol and the object it refers to in three cases (Figure 1) (Bunt et al., 1980): one in which there is some similarity between the two, one in which the latter causes the former to exist, and one in which the relationship between the two is conventional. Peirce refers to the symbols in these three cases as icon, index, and symbol, respectively. (Go, 2011) Let us look at these three types of symbols one by one:

Analogous symbol: This kind of symbol is related to the referent object by being "somehow identical" to the referent object, in other words, if we find some common properties between the symbol and its referent object, this symbol is an analogous symbol, such as the above examples of portraits and photographs. Of course, the referent object does not have to be a real thing. A graph representing a quantitative change is such an image symbol.

Sign symbol: A sign symbol is a "realistic correspondence" between a symbol and its referent, such as a wind vane. The wind vane is the symbol, and the wind is the object of reference. Similar cases are common for thermometers, knocking on doors, symptoms of illness, proper nouns, pronouns, and so on. The relationship between it and the referent object is a de facto relationship. This is a characteristic of symbolic signs.

Symbolic symbols: A symbol is a symbol if there is "an artificially added quality" between it and its referent. In other words, the symbol was created to refer to something. If we can see an observable universal or conventional connection between the symbol and its referent, then the symbol is a symbol.
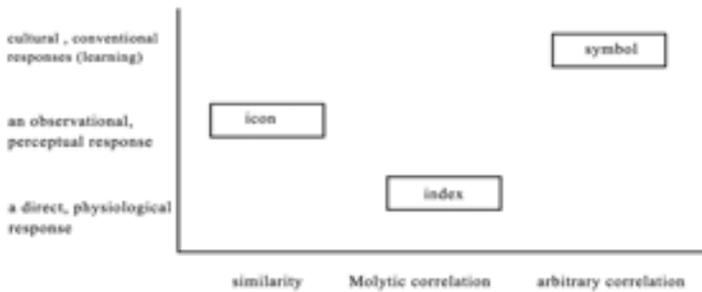
Figure 1. Relationship between symbol and target

3.4 BASIC COMPONENTS OF CULTURE CODE

Choi (2018a) describes the basic components of a culture code as follows: "Every person has unique mental, material, and intellectual characteristics (codes) based on the norms and values of a culture, such as art, literature, traditions, beliefs, language, customs, region, history, religion, and lifestyle. Culture Code (Cc) is the code that makes a culture." Therefore, brands should create a unique culture code to differentiate themselves from other brands and strengthen brand associations(Aaker,1991). The basic components of building a culture code are as in Table 2.

Table 2. Tbasic components of building a culture code

CULTURAL CODE BASIC COMPONENTS	CATEGORIZATION CRITERIA
Art	Human creative activity that shapes aesthetic values
Literature	Art that expresses ideas or assumptions in language
Tradition	A historically preserved and transmitted social heritage
Belief	A strongly held mental attitude
Language	A means of speech, writing, etc. used to express or communicate thoughts or feelings
Custom	An order or custom that has been observed for a long time and is widely recognized by members of a society.
Area	an area or geographic boundary with homogeneous characteristics
History	A record of events or people in the past
Religion	A cultural system that relies on a deity or absolute power to solve human problems and provide a fundamental purpose for life.

3.5 BRAND TOUCHPOINT DESIGN

Brand touchpoints can be described as "all the points at which a brand and its products come into contact with a customer." (Wheeler et al., 2011) If you want to be a successful brand in a competitive marketplace, you'll want to make sure that your messaging is consistent across effective brand touchpoints and that you're doing everything you can to make a positive impression on your customers. (Yoon, 2009) There are six brand touchpoint design types that can increase consumer persuasion and trust based on understanding, need, and emotional information to effectively communicate a brand's message. (Choi, 2013) The six brand design types are paired into three brand design polarities. The three brand design polarities are Sustainable Design and Ephemeral Design for understanding information (Table 3), Motivation Design and Stimulus-response Design for need information (Table 4), and Soft Subject Design and Hard Subject Design for emotional information(Table 5). By strategically applying the six brand design types and three brand design polarities, there

is no problem in building diverse and differentiated brand designs, and thus achieving brand goals. Brand touchpoint design can't just communicate one of the three functions. You need to communicate all three functions efficiently and in line with your strategy to truly convey your brand's personality. (Choi, 2018b)

Table 3. Communicating understanding

DISTINGUISH	SUSTAINABLE DESIGN	EPHEMERAL DESIGN
Attributes	Aesthetic consistency	Aesthetic diversity
	Longevity of functionality	Short-lived features
	Doesn't change with the times	Easy to change with the times
	Continued functionality	Maintain short-term functionality
	Long-term image communication	Short-term image communication
	Not sensitive to styles and trends	Sensitive to styles and trends
	Low relationship with seasonal celebrations	Highly relevant to seasonal celebrations
	Not easily adaptable to consumer reactions	Easy to adapt to consumer reactions

Table 4. Communicating Desire

DISTINGUISH	MOTIVATION DESIGN	STIMULUS-RESPONSE DESIGN
Attributes	It is a brand touchpoint design based on the brand's intrinsic functional elements that can attract consumers and impulse consumption behaviour by measuring their physiological needs, which are practical needs.	Satisfy hedonic needs, which are psychological needs that deviate from the general needs of consumers. Emphasise the derivative function of the brand as an external stimulus, visual design elements, to satisfy the social position and personal expression of desire in the purchase decision.

Table 5. Conveying emotional information

DISTINGUISH	SOFT SUBJECT DESIGN	HARD SUBJECT DESIGN
Attributes	It's a way for consumers to express their brand in a socially conscious way, and a witty, playful, soft-themed design expresses laughter, positivity, and happy feelings.	Ekman's basic emotions of fear, anger, happiness dismay, and sadness surprise, Hard Subject Design uses shocking or cutting-edge visual elements to create a sense of novelty or emotional unease. Hard Subject Design is also known as Cutting Edge Design.

4. ANALYSES UTILIZING PEIRCE'S SEMIOTICS AND CULTURAL CODES

4.1 COMBINATORIAL ANALYSIS OF SEMIOTICS AND CULTURAL CODES

In Table 6 it can be seen that the number of cultural codes in the signs of these 10 provincial cities is distributed between two and four. Among them, 3 provinces have 4 culture codes in their logos, 3 provinces have 3 culture codes in their logos, and 4 province has 2 culture codes in its logo. The logos of Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Guizhou provinces all highlight 4 cultural codes, which reflects their focus on the presentation of multiple cultural elements in their campaigns. Among them, Using the four cultural codes of Art, Literature, Language and Area as its symbols, Zhejiang shows the beauty and unique atmosphere of the Jiangnan region through the landscape painting style and the traditional ink painting style; Jiangsu Province demonstrates a rich academic and historical heritage through art, literature, language and history; Guizhou Province focuses on art, tradition, region and history, highlighting a diverse regional culture; and Fujian Province highlights beliefs, language and lifestyle, emphasizing a multi-layered cultural experience.

Table 6. Classification of symbolic types based on Peirce's semiotics

PROVINCE	ICON	INDEX	SYMBOL	CULTURE CODE	NUMBER
Zhejiang		Ink painting, mountains, water.	It has the showy temperament of the Jiangnan region.	Art, Literature, Language, Area	4
Hubei		Map, Lu Xun's title and seal	Calligraphy, water pattern, show Jing Chu culture	Art, Language	2
Jiangsu		Chinese characters "苏" "家" "水" and Seal	Focus on water and Jiangnan water town	Art, Literature, Language, History	4
Hunan		Rivers, hibiscus flowers	Rivers meet to form hibiscus flowers	Language, Area	2
Yunnan		Clouds, Calligraphy	Colourful clouds, beautiful scenery	Art, Language	2
Guangdong		Love, sunshine, beach, mountain, dragon boat	Youthful and sunny modern city	Tradition, Language, The way of life	3
Anhui		Anhui Hui-style architecture	Emphasis on ancient Chinese architectural culture	Art, Area, History	3
Guizhou		Wine Bottles, Karst Landscapes	Home of Moutai Wine, Magical Karst Landscapes	Art, tradition, Area, History	4
Chongqing		Chinese character "人"	Embracing gestures	Belief, The way of life	2
Fujian		Flowers, sun, greenery	Fresh, natural and comfortable	Belief, Language, The way of life	3

The logos for both Guangdong and Anhui provinces highlight three cultural codes, indicating that they focus on diverse cultural elements in their designs to show the richness of the place. Characterised by the three cultural codes of Tradition, Language and Lifestyle, Guangdong is a blend of modern styles and traditional cultural elements, reflecting its unique charm and diversity; Anhui conveys regional characteristics and historical heritage through art, region and history. The logos of Hubei, Hunan, Chongqing and Yunnan provinces all highlight 2 cultural codes. Hubei and Yunnan highlights historical heritage and local culture through art and language; Hunan province emphasizes regional characteristics through language and region; Chongqing conveys the spirit of the city and the culture of life through beliefs and lifestyles.

4.2 ANALYSES WITH A FOCUS ON CULTURAL CODES

The predominance of language and culture codes can be seen in Table 7, with language and culture codes being the most used in tourism labelling in these provinces, appearing seven times. This shows that these provinces emphasise the importance of language as a means of cultural transmission and communication. The culture code for arts is also popular: the culture code for 'arts' is used six times, indicating that these provinces emphasise artistic, cultural and creative aspects.

The Area and The way of life culture codes are also important: the Area culture code was used 3 times and the way of life culture code was used 3 times. This suggests that these provinces focus on emphasising local regional characteristics and people's lifestyles.Other culture codes are relatively rare: other culture codes such as 'Literature', 'Tradition', 'Belief' and 'History' are relatively rare, appearing only twice each. This may mean that these provinces do not strongly emphasise these cultural elements in their logos, or that these cultural elements are not a priority for tourism promotion in the local context.

Table 7. By type of cultural code

CULTURAL CODE BASE COMPONENTS	LOGO	NUMBER
Art		6
Literature		2
Tradition		2
Belief		2
Language		7
Area		3
History		2
The way of life		3

Overall, the tourism Logos of these provinces emphasise features such as language, art, regionality and lifestyle through the use of cultural codes, aiming to attract tourists and showcase the richness and diversity of local cultures.

These features reflect the unique cultural traditions and characteristics of each province.

4.3 BRANDED TOUCHPOINT DESIGN ANALYSIS

Table 8. Analysis of communication understanding

PROVINCE	COMMUNICATING UNDERSTANDING	
	Sustainable Design	Ephemeral Design
Zhejiang	Aesthetic consistency, Longevity of functionality, Long-term image communication	
Hubei	Aesthetic consistency, Doesn't change with the times, Not sensitive to styles and trends	
Jiangsu	Aesthetic consistency, Longevity of functionality, Continued functionality, Long-term image communication	
Hunan	Aesthetic consistency, Longevity of functionality, Long-term image communication	
Yunnan	Doesn't change with the times, Continued functionality, Long-term image communication	
Guangdong	Continued functionality, Long-term image communication	Aesthetic diversity, Easy to change with the times, Highly relevant to seasonal celebrations
Anhui	Aesthetic consistency, Long-term image communication	
Guizhou	Aesthetic consistency, Long-term image communication, Not sensitive to styles and trends	
Chongqing	Aesthetic consistency, Continued functionality, Long-term image communication	Easy to change with the times, Sensitive to styles and trends, Easy to adapt to consumer reactions
Fujian	Continued functionality, Long-term image communication	Aesthetic diversity, Easy to change with the times, Sensitive to styles and trends

Table 9. Analysis of Communicating Desire

PROVINCE	COMMUNICATING DESIRE	
	Motivation Design	Stimulus-response Design
Zhejiang		Make relaxation and feel the nature
Hubei		
Jiangsu		Water town, home feeling
Hunan		
Yunnan		Colourful clouds, beautiful sky
Guangdong		Relaxing and enjoyable
Anhui		
Guizhou	wine bottle	The birthplace of wine, the karst landscape of the application
Chongqing		Embrace. A gesture of welcome.
Fujian		Freshness, Happiness, Comfort

Table 10. Analysis of Conveying emotional information

PROVINCE	CONVEYING EMOTIONAL INFORMATION	
	Soft Subject Design	Hard Subject Design
Zhejiang		
Hubei		
Jiangsu		
Hunan		
Yunnan		
Guangdong	Love, sunshine, dragon boat, etc. in sketch form	
Anhui		
Guizhou		
Chongqing	Two people with open arms form the word "庆"	
Fujian	The sun, the clouds, the flowers.	

Ten provincial-level tourism cities in China used different touchpoints in designing their logos to convey their respective characteristics and appeal. Sustainable Design appears in all 10 cities, indicating that sustainable design is

very common in logo design everywhere. (Table 8) Stimulus-response Design appears in 6 cities, indicating that Stimulus-response Design is also relatively common. (Table 9) Ephemeral Design and Soft Subject Design appear relatively infrequently in 4 and 3 cities, respectively. Motivation Design appears in only 2 cities, with the fewest number of occurrences. Hard Subject Design is not used in the design of these signs. (Table 10) It is not one of the main design elements in the logos of these provincial tourism cities.

In terms of the number of touchpoints embodied in each city logo, Guangdong, Chongqing and Fujian used the most 4 touchpoints, while Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Yunnan and Guizhou used between 2 or 3 touchpoints, and Hubei, Hunan and Anhui provinces used only 1 touchpoint. This reflects the differences in the choice and emphasis of the various touchpoints in logo design across provinces.

4.4 BRANDED TOUCHPOINT FUNCTIONALITY ANALYSIS

Table 11. Touchpoint functionality in the logo

PROVINCE	FUNCTIONS			FORMS OF COMBINATION
	Conveying emotional information	Communicating understanding	Communicating desire	
Zhejiang		●	●	Understanding+Desire
Hubei		●		understanding
Jiangsu		●	●	Understanding+Desire
Hunan		●		Understanding
Yunnan		●	●	Understanding+Desire
Guangdong	●	●	●	Emotional+Understanding+Desire
Anhui		●		Understanding
Guizhou		●	●	Understanding+Desire
Chongqing	●	●	●	Emotional+Understanding+Desire
Fujian	●	●	●	Emotional+Understanding+Desire

From Table 11 it can be seen that based on the analysis of the number of touchpoints in each city logo, the most common branded touchpoint design feature is "Communicating understanding", which appears in all city logos. Communicating desire" is also common, appearing in 8 city logos. On the contrary, "Conveying emotional information" is less common in these city logos, appearing in only 3 city logos. This analysis reflects that "Communicating understanding" and "Communicating desire" are more common brand touchpoint design features in the design of these provincial tourism city logos, while "Conveying emotional information" is less frequently used. This may reflect the fact that designers focus more on communicating understanding and desire for the city and less on communicating emotional information.

The city logos of Guangdong, Chongqing and Fujian show better results in expressing brand identity because they have all three functions simultaneously. This indicates that they are effective in communicating the emotions, understanding and aspirations of the city, resulting in a distinct brand identity.

The city logos of Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Yunnan and Guizhou use two functions, which indicates that they are able to convey understanding and aspirations for their respective regions to some extent. However, these logos do not cover emotional communication, which may mean that they fail to fully stimulate emotional resonance in viewers.

However, some of the logos of other provinces, such as Hubei, Hunan and Anhui, only show one function, which means that they are relatively weak in expressing brand identity. While they may emphasise an understanding of the city, they fail to adequately convey emotion or evoke aspirations.

5.CONCLUSION

By analysing the brand logos of 10 provincial tourism cities in China, this study applies Pierce's concepts of semiotics and cultural codes, focusing on the visual elements of the logos, the symbols and cultural codes, and the touchpoint design. The following are the main conclusions of the study:

Firstly, the logos of these provincial tourism cities have diverse cultural codes, with Language and Art cultural codes being used most frequently. This reflects their emphasis on language as an important means of cultural transmission and communication, as well as their emphasis on artistic, cultural and creative aspects. In addition, Area and The way of life culture codes are also important, emphasising the characteristics of the region and the way people

live. Other cultural codes such as Literature, tradition, belief and history were relatively less frequent, implying that these cultural elements were not a priority in the context of local tourism promotion.

Secondly, touchpoint design is also diverse across these city logos. Sustainable Design appears in all logos, suggesting that Sustainable Design is prevalent in logo design. Stimulus-response Design appears in six cities and is also relatively common. Ephemeral Design and Soft Subject Design appear relatively infrequently in 4 and 3 cities. Motivation Design appears the least frequently in only 2 cities. Hard Subject Design is not used in any of these city logos. In terms of the number of touchpoints, Guangdong, Chongqing and Fujian used the most 4 touchpoints, while Hubei, Hunan and Anhui used only 1 touchpoint.

Finally, from the perspective of brand touchpoint functionality, Communicating understanding and Communicating desire were the most common brand touchpoint design features, appearing in all city logos and 8 city logos, respectively. On the contrary, Conveying emotional information appeared less frequently in these city logos and only appeared in three city logos. This suggests that in the design of these provincial tourism city logos, designers focus more on conveying understanding and aspirations and less on conveying emotional information.

The city logos of Guangdong, Chongqing and Fujian have three touchpoint design functions at the same time, so they achieve effective communication. Other city logos with two touchpoints are less effective, and those with only one touchpoint do not achieve effective communication.

This study only focuses on 10 provincial tourism cities in China and does not cover city logos in other regions and countries. Therefore, the findings may not be generalisable. Most of the analyses are qualitative and lack the support of quantitative data. More quantitative analyses and market research may help to strengthen the credibility of the findings. Although cultural codes and semiotic aspects were analysed, there may be room for further research on the in-depth cultural interpretation of each city sign. In future research, efforts could be made to address these shortcomings in order to gain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding and provide more insightful recommendations for urban sign design.

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