



Regional Cultural Shaping and Cross-city Expansion Strategy of the New Style Chinese Tea Brand: Case Study of Chayan Yuese

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Abstract. With the new-style tea beverage industry entering a phase of intense competition and chain expansion, how to take regional cultural brands beyond the original city has become a real problem for brand management. This study takes the case of Chayan Yuese entering Shenzhen in 2026. Based on public news reports, brand information and relevant information on brand management, it analyses how the new Chinese tea brand re-codes Changsha's regional culture, new Chinese aesthetics and Shenzhen urban consumption scene in cross-city expansion. The study found that the expansion of Shenzhen mainly relies on three types of mechanisms. Cultural identification is formed with Changsha origin, new Chinese vision and direct experience. Realise urban adaptation with high-energy business circle, classic menu and Shenzhen limited products. Form opening communication and experience control with queueing, limited purchase, social platform sharing and technical dining. This study shows that the cross-city development of regional cultural brands needs to transform short-term punching into stable repurchase, and cultural recognition into sustainable store management ability.

Keywords: New Chinese-style tea drinks, Chayan Yuese, Regional culture, Cross-city expansion, Market strategy.

1 Introduction

On April 22, 2026, Chayan Yuese Shenzhen Bay Wanxiang City Store and Shenzhen Wanxiang Tiandi Store opened simultaneously. This is Chayan Yuese's re-entry into the Shenzhen market after five years, and it is also the first time to lay out the core business circle of first-tier cities in the form of long-term direct stores. On the opening day, some consumers in Shenzhen Wanxiang Tiandi Store began to queue up at 4 a.m., and at about 8:30 a.m., there was a prompt that "it takes 2.5 hours to queue up here". There is also modern purchase information on the social platform, and the original price of a drink of more than ten yuan has been speculated to be 88 yuan a cup. In order to alleviate the crowding of yellow cattle and on-site, the brand sets a rule that each person is limited to 2 cups during the opening period. At about 11:20 a.m. on the same day, the Chayan Yuese applet showed that there were still 403 drinks being made in the

Shenzhen Bay Wanxiang City store, and the estimated pick-up time was close to 7 hours. This opening scene shows that Chayan Yuese's entry into Shenzhen has gone beyond the scope of ordinary new store opening and has become an urban consumption event with close attention.

The special feature of tea is that it has long been understood by consumers as a part of Changsha's urban consumption. Founded on December 28, 2013, the brand started in a small store of less than 30 square metres at the gate of Changsha. With the product concepts of "new Chinese fresh tea" and "new Chinese tea", it emphasises the extraction of the present, and uses Chinese aesthetic elements in vision, naming, and store experience. According to the relevant introduction of the brand, as of August 2024, Chayan Yuese has opened more than 600 direct stores in all cities and states in Hunan Province, as well as Wuhan, Chongqing, Nanjing, Wuxi, and other cities, and began to lay out new retail, e-commerce, and cultural and creative product lines in 2020. The brand expressed its mission as "making a cup of warm tea" and proposed to promote the "new Chinese lifestyle". These data show that the brand value of Chayan Yuese comes not only from the taste of drinks, but also from Changsha's geographical labels, new Chinese vision, and shareable consumption experience.

Brand assets can be understood as the differentiated response of consumers based on brand knowledge [1]. Brand name, vision, association, and experience will all affect consumers' response to marketing activities [2, 3]. In the case of Chayan Yuese, information such as "Changsha", "New Chinese Style", "Direct Operation", and "Queuing and Checking in" together constitute the memory structure of consumers to the brand. Research on brand authenticity also suggests that consumers will judge whether a brand is credible by location, history, cultural continuity, and consistency of expression [4, 5]. Therefore, the key question of Chayan Yuese's entry into Shenzhen is how to be re-understood and accepted in Shenzhen's high-density, high-speed, and highly competitive new tea market, which originally relied on the Changsha scene.

Based on the above background, this study focuses on three issues. First, how to form brand recognition through Changsha's regional culture and new Chinese aesthetics. Second, what marketing strategies did Chayan Yuese adopt when it entered Shenzhen? Third, how can the cultural heritage be transformed into market performance in the cross-city expansion of regional cultural brands? This study believes that the process of Chayan Yuese entering Shenzhen reflects the recoding of Changsha's regional culture, new Chinese aesthetics, and Shenzhen urban consumption scene by regional cultural brands in cross-city expansion. Its market performance is jointly affected by factors such as brand culture identification, direct operation control, city-limited products, social media punching, and high-energy business circle site selection.

2 Case Background

Chayan Yuese originated in Changsha, and its early development heavily relied on local business districts and urban tourism consumption. According to the official website of the brand, the first store opened on December 28, 2013, and began to quickly enter the core business circle of Changsha in 2015. In August 2017, there were 40 direct stores

in Changsha, 20 of which were located in the May Day business circle. The May Day Business Circle is an area where tourists and local young consumers are highly concentrated in Changsha. The dense layout of early stores allows Chayan Yuese to quickly gain urban visibility, and also allows consumers to associate the brand with Changsha leisure, tourism, and punching experience.

Compared with franchise brands, Chayan Yuese has long adhered to the direct operation model, and the pace of expansion is relatively cautious. In 2020, the brand began to leave Changsha and enter Wuhan, Changde, and other markets, and then gradually expanded into Chongqing, Jiangsu, and other places. The expansion of Shenzhen has a clear stage. In 2021, Chayan Yuese entered Shenzhen in the form of a flash, which attracted strong attention, but did not form a long-term store network at that time. On April 22, 2026, Shenzhen Bay Wanxiang City Store and Shenzhen Wanxiang Tiandi Store opened synchronously, marking the brand's shift from short-term trial to normal operation.

The Shenzhen market itself has strong consumption scene attributes. The 2025 economic operation data released by the Shenzhen Municipal Government shows that catering revenue will increase by 2.5%. For Chayan Yuese, Shenzhen is not only the consumption centre of South China, but also a market for intensive competition for new tea brands. All kinds of milk tea and other brands have been rooted in Shenzhen for a long time. Chayan Yuese chose to enter Shenzhen at this time, which requires facing mature consumers, dense store networks, and high operating costs, which makes the case have strong observation value.

3 The Shaping of Regional Culture in Chayan Yuese

3.1 From Local Brand to Urban Consumption Symbol

Chayan Yuese's brand identity originates from Changsha. For a long time, the brand's stores have been highly concentrated in Changsha and its surrounding markets, creating an association among consumers of "drinking Chayan Yuese in Changsha". This association serves two purposes. First, Changsha, as the brand's origin, provides a clear regional anchor, differentiating it from nationwide tea beverage chains. Second, out-of-town consumers' imaginations of Changsha's tourism, food streets, and nightlife translate into their consumption expectations for Chayan Yuese. A Securities Times reporter interviewed consumers at the Shenzhen opening ceremony who stated, "I have drunk it in Changsha before, and now that there's a store in Shenzhen, I don't need to go to Changsha to drink it anymore". This kind of expression indicates that Shenzhen consumers' interest in Chayan Yuese didn't start from scratch; it includes the continuation of past consumption experiences and urban memories in Changsha.

The value of a regional cultural brand is not simply the display of a local symbol. Chayan Yuese transforms Changsha's attributes into consumable daily scenarios. Consumers, while purchasing tea beverages, are also participating in Changsha's new consumption lifestyle. The phenomenon of early morning queues, social media frenzy, and price gouging by resellers after a brand opened in Shenzhen indicates that its Changsha origin has become a scarce resource. When a brand that previously required a trip to

Changsha to experience enters Shenzhen, consumers' desire to try new things, their yearning for a first-time city store, and their need for social sharing are all amplified.

3.2 Visual Symbols and Brand Identity

Chayan Yuese's second layer of brand identity stems from its Neo-Chinese aesthetic. The brand name, product names, packaging illustrations, store space, and peripheral products all exhibit a strong Eastern visual style. Consumers' recognition of Chayan Yuese is often not based on a single product, but rather on a combination of product names, classical figures, paper cup designs, store displays, and cultural and creative retail elements. Brand-related materials indicate that Chayan Yuese attempts to present the beauty of Chinese culture engagingly, allowing the Neo-Chinese aesthetic, popular among young consumers, to enter daily consumption in a richer form.

This approach is well-suited to the communication environment of new-style tea drinks. Tea drinks are high-frequency, low-priced, and highly contextualized consumer goods. Consumers are likely to take photos and post them on WeChat Moments or Xiaohongshu after purchase. Chayan Yuese's Neo-Chinese visual style provides consumers with symbolic materials to display, enabling a beverage to enter the social media image system. Service scenario theory points out that the physical environment influences the behavioral responses of customers and employees, and store space, decoration, and visual cues collectively shape the consumer experience [6, 7]. In the Chayan Yuese case, stores are not just places to get your cup, but also scenarios where consumers take photos, queue, check in, and share on social media.

3.3 Consistent Control of Cultural Expression

Chayan Yuese's third layer of cultural shaping comes from its directly operated experience. For brands with strong cultural identity, store visuals, product flavors, service scripts, queue management, and retail displays are all part of brand expression. If these aspects deviate significantly in other markets, consumers may feel the brand has lost its original flavor. While the direct-operation model slows down rapid expansion, it enhances the brand's control over product and service details.

The two Shenzhen stores have been reported as regular, long-term, directly operated stores, unlike the pop-up stores of 2021. The brand simultaneously introduced classic whole-leaf light milk tea, real fruit juice series, Chayan coffee, retail products, and fully automated robotic milk tea machines in the Shenzhen stores, indicating that its expansion into other cities is not just replicating the Changsha stores, but also testing first-tier city markets with a more complete product and service mix. For consumers, the stable experience provided by directly operated stores helps maintain brand authenticity. For businesses, directly operated stores also allow them to collect feedback from Shenzhen consumers more directly, providing a basis for future store expansion.

4 Market Strategy Analysis of Chayan Yuese's Entry into Shenzhen

4.1 Site Selection Strategy

The two stores in Shenzhen were located in Shenzhen Bay MixC and Shenzhen MixC World, both situated in the core commercial areas of Nanshan District. Related reports indicate that both stores were chosen as prime locations in their respective areas, complementing each other's customer flow and alleviating the pressure of excessive crowding at a single store. Shenzhen Bay MixC possesses the combined attributes of high-end commerce, office space, and seaside leisure consumption, while MixC World connects technology companies, young white-collar workers, and urban lifestyle consumers. Chayan Yuese's choice of these two commercial districts facilitated rapid growth in foot traffic and brand awareness during the opening period.

The significance of high-potential commercial districts lies in their ability to transform a new store opening into a city event. The higher the public visibility of the store's location, the easier it is for queues, photo opportunities, and social media buzz to generate a spillover effect. On opening day, a reporter from the Securities Times observed long queues at the Shenzhen Bay MixC store, with customers crowding the "pink street" where the store is located. Multiple social media posts indicated that customers who had already purchased drinks waited in line for approximately 3 hours. For a new-style Chinese tea brand that relies on social media check-ins for brand awareness, the store location itself is a medium for promotion.

However, high-potential commercial districts also bring operational pressure. Rent, labor, and queue management costs are high in core commercial areas, and long wait times during the opening period can lower customer satisfaction ratings. Chayan Yuese adopted a dual-store opening strategy in Shenzhen, which is more effective in distributing traffic than a single-store opening. However, judging from the number of cups waiting to be made displayed on the mini-program, the pressure of preparing drinks on the opening day was still significant. This shows that while the first-store effect in a city can generate market buzz, it also places higher demands on the supply chain, on-site organization, and service stability.

4.2 Product Strategy

Chayan Yuese's product strategy in Shenzhen can be summarized as "stable core products, updated city expression". The Shenzhen store retains its classic original leaf light milk tea and adds two new categories: real fruit juice and Chayan coffee. It also launched two Shenzhen-exclusive drinks and two freshly brewed quick-service coffees.

Classic products serve as brand identifiers. Products like the Orchid Latte and the Oolong Tea confirm to consumers that they are drinking the familiar Chayan Yuese. Shenzhen-exclusive beverages and new coffee products serve a city-adaptation function. Shenzhen consumers have a fast-paced work environment and a high acceptance of refreshing flavors, coffee, and quick-delivery products. The grapefruit, coffee, and quick-delivery design help reduce the sense of distance for the brand when entering a new city. Brand extension literature suggests that consumer acceptance of extended

products is related to the degree of matching between the parent brand association and the new product [8]. Chayan Yuese's use of a combination of tea, juice, coffee, and city-exclusive merchandise in Shenzhen is key to maintaining the core identity of new-style Chinese tea drinks while expanding product usage methods more suitable for the Shenzhen context.

The merchandise is also noteworthy. Shenzhen stores launched Shenzhen-themed paper cups, postcards, and city-exclusive gift boxes, incorporating local characteristics into the design. The Shenzhen Bay store is a "park-like" store, focusing on a one-stop "beverage + retail" consumption experience, launching over a hundred retail products, including snacks, tea powder, and lifestyle and cultural products, at its opening. Beverages address immediate consumption, while merchandise addresses the needs for souvenirs and sharing. For regional cultural brands, city-limited gift boxes and paper cups can transform a single purchase into a collectible item that can be kept, photographed, and given away, thereby extending brand touchpoints.

4.3 Channel Strategy

When Chayan Yuese entered Shenzhen, it continued to adhere to direct operation. Two new stores are currently under preparation in Shenzhen, expected to open within six months. All stores will be directly operated. The Securities Times report summarized its characteristics as a long-term commitment to direct operation without franchising and a cautious and restrained pace of expansion into other provinces and cities. Direct operation control allows Chayan Yuese to maintain consistency in product standards, visual merchandising, service processes, and opening activities in Shenzhen, which is particularly crucial for a new Chinese cultural brand.

The advantages and limitations of the direct operation strategy are both obvious. The advantage lies in reducing flavor drift and service loss of control during franchise expansion, maintaining the integrity of the cultural experience. The limitations include slower store opening speed, higher capital requirements, and longer staff training cycles. In recent years, the new tea beverage industry has seen franchising expansion to the scale of tens of thousands of stores, with many brands forming channel advantages through larger-scale store networks. Chayan Yuese is adopting a direct-operation model in Shenzhen, making it difficult to compete with other brands in terms of store density in the short term. Therefore, it needs to differentiate itself through cultural identity, location selection, and experiential differentiation.

Shenzhen also serves as an operational testing ground. Public reports indicate that Chayan Yuese's Shenzhen stores are focusing on new businesses, new products, and new technologies. The brand's decision to treat Shenzhen as a long-term market, rather than a pop-up event, suggests it needs to verify whether its product structure, retail operations, and technological equipment can handle peak customer traffic in a first-tier city. If the Shenzhen stores can achieve stable repeat purchases, the brand's regional cultural assets can then translate from opening hype into sustained operational capability.

4.4 Communication Strategy

The communication surrounding Chayan Yuese's Shenzhen opening did not solely rely on brand advertising; it stemmed more from the on-site narrative co-generated by consumers and the platform. Social media brand management research indicates that consumers become significant authors of brand stories on social networks, and companies need to navigate a communication environment where both company-generated and consumer-generated content work together [9]. During its opening in Shenzhen, the early morning queues, the two-cup-per-purchase limit, the resale price of drinks by scalpers reaching 88 yuan, and the long wait times displayed on the mini-program all became topics of discussion and sharing.

The long queues at the opening reinforced the brand's scarcity, but also brought risks to the customer experience. Consumers' willingness to queue indicates high expectations for the brand in Shenzhen. The emergence of scalpers suggests that brand hype was being converted into short-term arbitrage opportunities. Chayan Yuese's measures, such as limiting purchases to two cups per person and reminding consumers not to buy drinks from scalpers at inflated prices, helped mitigate the risks of ordering during the opening.

Highly evocative content is more easily spread, especially queuing, surprise, anxiety, and the psychology of onlookers, which easily fuel social media discussions [10]. Chayan Yuese's rapid rise to fame at its Shenzhen opening was precisely due to the high emotional intensity of the opening event. The early morning queues created a sense of scarcity, the 88-yuan scalping sparked controversy, the purchase limit generated discussions about order, and the first store in the city fostered a sense of participation. Brands need to be wary that high media buzz does not automatically translate into long-term positive word-of-mouth. If the primary experience for consumers during the opening period is waiting and crowds, repeat purchases may be negatively impacted.

4.5 Technology Strategy

A new change in the Shenzhen store is the fully automated milk tea machine with a robotic arm. This equipment can autonomously complete the processes of grabbing the cup, accurately dispensing ingredients, stirring, and handing the cup over. The operator only needs to complete the final topping step, and a cup can be dispensed in as little as 30 seconds. The significance of the robotic arm goes beyond just increasing dispensing speed. For directly operated brands, the challenge of expanding across cities lies in how to transform the experience of the Changsha store into a replicable process. While human training can maintain service warmth, inconsistencies can easily arise during peak hours. Automated equipment can improve recipe stability and peak-hour processing capacity. Chayan Yuese's introduction of robotic arms in Shenzhen indicates that it is attempting to use technology to compensate for the expansion limitations of its directly operated model. This move also resonates with Shenzhen's urban character, which emphasizes technology, efficiency, and innovation. The robotic arm connects the new Chinese-style tea beverage with a technology-driven consumption scenario.

5 Conclusion

This study uses Chayan Yuese's entry into Shenzhen as a case study to analyze the integration of regional cultural shaping and market strategies in the cross-city expansion of a new-style Chinese tea beverage brand. The study finds that Chayan Yuese's brand value stems from brand identity formed by the combined influence of Changsha regional culture, new-style Chinese aesthetics, direct-operation experience, and social media communication. The market strategy for expansion in Shenzhen is primarily manifested in high-potential commercial districts, retention of classic menu items, Shenzhen-exclusive products, control of direct-operation channels, introduction of robotic arm technology, and social media promotion during the opening period. This case illustrates that when regional cultural brands enter first-tier cities, they need to transform their existing cultural assets into consumption scenarios that consumers in the target city can understand, participate in, and share.

For new-style Chinese tea beverage brands, firstly, it is necessary to clearly define core cultural elements before cross-city expansion. One reason Chayan Yuese was able to enter Shenzhen and gain attention is that consumers already had stable associations with its Changsha origins, new-style Chinese visuals, and classic products. Secondly, it is necessary to design localized touchpoints when entering a new city. Shenzhen-exclusive drinks, themed paper cups, city-limited gift boxes, and high-potential commercial districts allow consumers to rediscover the brand in a local context. Third, the promotional efforts for a grand opening need to be commensurate with the operational capacity. Queues and purchase limits can generate buzz, but they can also lead to waiting fatigue and service pressure. In the long run, whether Chayan Yuese can establish a firm foothold in Shenzhen depends on its ability to convert first-store visits into daily repeat purchases and transform social media buzz into stable product, service, and store operation capabilities.

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