

An Analysis of the Influence of Traditional Auspicious Patterns on Modern Totem Design in Brand Culture Construction from the Perspective of Function

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Abstract—Living in the modern Chinese society of commodity economy, people pursue especially the consumption of “image”. The modern advertisements create consumption, the image as well as create a variety of innovative “totems”—enterprises and brand images. Brand culture is also the soul of enterprise and brand image. For commercial interests, the modern society needs to create a “totem worship” so as to use the power it brings to attract the consumers and establish a psychological effect concerning the “totem” myths. In this paper, the author, by analyzing the auspicious concept and culture connotation hidden in the traditional auspicious motifs on the Peking Opera costumes, explored the consumption psychology of modern society and roughly discussed the demands of consumer psychology, the brand image and cultural values, all from the perspective of the spiritual and cultural level as well as the relationship between brand image and cultural value. As a result, he summed up the core culture of modern “totem” myth—the “affinity”, leading us to appreciate the charm of the modern “totem”. This paper is written in the hope of setting a good example for design educators to conduct some more in-depth researches.

Keywords—*Traditional Auspicious Patterns; Brand Culture; Modern “Totem”; Affinity*

I. CULTURAL BACKGROUND—THE AUSPICIOUS PATTERNS IN THE TRADITIONAL ART

A. Auspicious concept in the traditional auspicious patterns

For thousands of years, the vitality of traditional auspicious patterns in Chinese arts and crafts is inseparable from its accordance with our nation’s cultural-psychological structure, cultural origin, and ways of emotional expression. The witchcraft rituals and nature worship in the primitive society brings the earliest auspicious concept into being. It is recorded that our ancient ancestors as early as in the YaoShun era have had their worship in astronomy. They considered the nature entities as gods and attached great importance to signs of good or bad luck. In the Shang and Chou Dynasties, people held belief in fortune telling widely. Based on this belief, the Taoism and

Confucianism in Hun dynasty influenced each other, and fused with the ruling class's will in the feudal society, thus forming the auspicious ideas among the feudal upper class. They aspired for riches and honor and the immortality of imperial power as well as being immortals. In the adornment designs of Han dynasty, there are auspicious Chinese characters. In Sui and Tang Dynasties, new patterns such as Po-phase flowers ha been created with the fusion of the foreign and native patterns. In Song and Yuan Dynasty, the design of auspicious patterns were constantly influenced by Taoism, Buddhism, the masses. The themes of patterns are also increasingly rich and colorful, with diverse techniques of expression. In the Ming Dynasty, with the development of commodity economy and the more frequent activities of citizens, the feudal upper class consciousness and citizen consciousness influenced mutually and fused with each other. The traditional auspicious ideas has the new content and became secular. Such secular notions as wealth and longevity are worshiped. Decorative auspicious patterns in the Qing dynasty had reached the peak of decoration skills, among which each pattern has its meaning and every meaning tended to be auspicious. Those decoration designs were widely used in printing and dyeing, silk embroideries, clothing, crafts, building painting and folk art, etc. Hence existed in various forms and a multitude of names. The Chinese nation, in many thousands of years of continuous creation activities, has utilized the wisdom and talent of the skillful Chinese imperial craftsman and kept fusing the Chinese Taoism, XuanRu, political ethics and customs, thus formed a profound system of designing auspicious patterns of Chinese characters.

B. The cultural implication of the traditional auspicious patterns

1) The meaning of faith

In ancient Times. People had only a very limited understanding of the nature. They realized gradually in difficulties and setbacks that it was the outside world that could control humanity. Only by obeying it could they get the chance

of survival. Therefore, in order to acquire peace and harvest, they became to pray. Then, pursuing of good fortune and avoiding disasters to seek a survival environment became the original human instinct. When people were creating the vessels, they decorated them with patterns which symbolize the auspicious wished so as to show their respect, and desire of the blessing. If, as early as six thousand years ago, the fish lines, deer lines and frog lines that appear on the bumper painted pottery were the first outlined emotional symbols and showing people's understanding of nature and worship of nature, graphic patterns in Beijing Opera costume are kind of people's praising of nature.

Since ancient times, the dragon has had various symbolic meanings: bravery, power, mystery, auspicious, happiness and so on. In the later period of feudal society, dragon and phoenix became auspicious patterns for palaces and royal family only. Most of the patterns were grand, witty dragons and phoenixes floating in the sky, which became a sign to distinguish the ruling group and junior level ethics. The dragon, as a mythical, totem image, is the symbol of beauty showing great vitality of the Chinese nation. The primitive totem culture is the root of Chinese aesthetics. The auspicious patterns evolving from the totems reflects the most real and simple life consciousness of the Chinese nation.

2) *The connotation of thought*

The ideological quality of the Chinese nation and cultural-psychological structure is built with Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Moreover, the social operation and maintenance take the philosophy of "three in one" as the axis, which is fully reflected by the traditional auspicious patterns on the Peking Opera costumes.

a) *In Confucianism, Confucius regulated the arbitrary hierarchy in the interpersonal relationship, promoting the maintenance of relationship with the ethical and moral principles.* The decoration designs used in Beijing Opera performance symbolize five strict and gradational ethical relationships in the Confucian philosophy, they are relationships between emperor and officials, father and son, brothers, husband and wife, friends and so on. Meanwhile, under the influence of Confucianism, many feudal ideologies are reflected in some auspicious patterns on the Peking Opera costumes. For instance, the idea of "salary for riches means honor" formed the Lu culture. Thus, its homophone in Chinese became the mascot of the first.

b) *The Taoist life attitude, values and ideas made the pursuit of immortality the common goal in life.* Hence the existence of auspicious words describing people's life span as longer than that of the mountains and one's fortune as large as the sea. Auspicious patterns like "five blessed things bring longevity" and "several fairies celebrating birthday" also became people's favor. All those auspicious things have become the special content of traditional Chinese arts and crafts.

c) *The prevail of Buddhism in China, has vital significance in the formation of auspicious patterns.* For example, yellow is dedicated by the emperor in Chinese feudal society. It is the symbol of supreme rank, a symbol of imperial power. So, in the Peking Opera costumes, yellow (bright yellow) dragon patterns can only appear on the clothes belonging to the emperor. In addition to the dragons on the whole clothes, eight treasures patterns are placed in the significant positions both at two sides. Besides, "eight auspicious" are scattered in the bottom of the clothes, which is originally used as sacrifices for the Buddha and Chinese Gods in the Buddhism temples. Peking Opera costumes use so many decorations as to show the nobleness, hoping to represent the dignified manner of the monarch. These auspicious implies deriving from the Buddhist to some extent are in line with our national psychology of pursuing the good and the ideal of having an eternal life.

C. *The folk custom meanings*

The art of making Peking Opera costumes is the art of life which reflected much folk custom meanings. The auspicious patterns for decorative use, in particular bring out the meaning of folk custom incisively and vividly. Therefore, traditional decoration pattern, can also be said as a concrete world representing the folk customs.

The ancient Chinese cosmology is different from the west. In view of ancient Chinese working masses, living the current, and loving it are of much significance. They did not want to seek the paradise and put their hope in fantasy. Therefore, Chinese people wish to have a true and good life, hoping to continue this reality. This concept is shown on the auspicious patterns with a lot of forms and varieties. In short, all kinds of auspicious patterns can show vividly the human wish for the reality in life, which is the most plain expression of the working masses for a better life. They can also reflect directly our national character and personal character for the intrinsic spiritual and cultural value they have.

The folk custom meanings shown in the traditional Chinese auspicious patterns, have certain limitations from aspects of modernity, nationality and so on. Yet it is kind of a spontaneous act out of the group consciousness during a specific period which had the enormous internal force and formed the inner cohesion of national spiritual world.

II. MODERN "TOTEM" —THE BRAND CULTURE AND VALUE

A. *The core of modern "totem" — the brand culture*

In the era of "image consumption" which pursues the quality and emphasizes personality, the modern advertisement not only create consumptions and images, but also created a variety of modern "totems"—enterprise and brand image. Brand culture is also the soul of enterprise and brand image. For commercial interests, the modern society needs to create a "totem worship"

so as to use the power it brings to attract the consumers and establish a psychological effect concerning the "totem" myths.

The excellent brand culture can highly refine the national culture and sublimate its spiritual and human values. Besides, it also bring about the essence of developing civilization and is permeated with the praise of kinship, friendship, love and affection, advocating the life tenets of being a healthy, ambitious and enthusiastic man. The excellent brand culture can live on and grow in nature, lead the consumption trend of the times and change the lives of millions of people. It can even shape the values of several generations. The excellent brand culture, with its unique character and style, can go beyond the bounds of race, border as well as consciousness so as to make the brand enjoy popular support among the people and attract people's common desire and common consumption in the whole world. The excellent brand culture can provide the brand with strong vitality and extraordinary expansionary force, make full use of the brand's reputation and popularity to extent it, and further enhance the brand's appeal and competitiveness.

B. The brand culture creating the myth of modern "totems"

The brand culture is the core of the modern "totem" myth as well as the special "totem" of a brand that can distinguish it from other competitors.

The core value of brand culture is the cultural connotation, to say specifically, the profound value connotation and emotional connotation. To be more concrete, the core value of brand culture are spiritual symbols such as the concept of value, life attitude, aesthetic taste, personality cultivation, fashion taste, emotional appeal which are represented by the modern "totems". By creating a perfect world where the products utility and brand spirits are highly united, the brand culture can transcend the limitation of time and space to bring to the consumers more and more high levels of satisfaction, mental comforts and spiritual sustenance, thus forming a potential cultural identity and emotional attachment with it in the mind of consumers. In the consumers' mind, in addition to representing the quality, property of products and its unique market positioning, their favorite brand serves as a "totem" to represent their own values, personality, taste, style, way of life and consumption patterns. Moreover, the products they buy is not just a simple good, but a kind of extraordinary experience or kind of a specific tool to express themselves and to realize one's value. Likewise, setting a specific brand when purchasing is not simply a buying behavior, but the pursuit of one's mental interests and the release of one's personal emotion which "totem" can bring. Therefore, they form a strong sense of trust and dependence on their favorite brands, together with many good association and meaningful memories. Their choice and loyalty of brands are not based on direct benefits of the product, but on the profound cultural and spiritual connotations of the brand. One thing that keeps them in touch with each other for a long time is the brand image and emotional factors. Customers of this kind find it difficult to switch brand.

There is no doubt that such consumers are the inexhaustible source of corporate wealth for each enterprise.

Thus, choosing brands are like worships of modern "totem", its unique charm lies in the fact that it not only provides customer with utility, but also help customers to find their spiritual home and to achieve their lifelong goals.

C. The core of establishing the modern "totem" myth -- "affinity"

In order to establish a corporate image, many enterprises often use ways like "information bomb" and "to be different" to obtain consumer's recognition and to stimulate consumer's potential desire of buying. Looking at the market in recent ten years, there were indeed some influential brands which have earned huge profits for their enterprises. However, they were often flash in the pan and soon disappeared quickly in the market. One of the important reasons for their failure is: lack of brand affinity.

1) What is "affinity"

"Affinity" has two different objects. There is both difference and link between them. For consumers, "affinity" is emotional measurement for a certain brand. For the enterprise, "affinity" is acquired when an enterprise gains its social significance by establishing close contact with the cultural background of consumers, their habits, personality and their interests.

Chinese consumers has their unique ethnic connotation due to the influence of history and culture such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Therefore, Chinese behavior and concept generally have psychological characteristics like wishing for the better, for beauty, morality, goodness, and dignitaries etc.. Enterprises often use good manners to achieve spiritual resonance with Chinese consumers in order to establish the brand familiarity, intimacy and trust.

2) The value of brand "affinity"

a) The brand with "affinity" can avoid much channel construction and control the cost. An "affinity" brand can get consumer's recognition and understanding more easily so as to form the brand loyalty. Owing a number of loyal customers can reduce the marketing cost. Firstly, it can reduce the consumer's sensitivity to the price and establish a stable brand image so that consumers will not easily abandon the habit of using this brand, which reduces the transaction cost of the enterprises. Secondly, the customers with brand loyalty will pay close attention to the development of the enterprises and actively participate in the enterprises' activities. In addition, they may advertise for their products through word of mouth and thereby significantly enhanced the brand expansionary force.

b) The brand "affinity" helps build brand difference, the exclusiveness of the consumer brand decision making and increase the cost of its brand switching. With the continuous innovation of manufacturing techniques and the comprehensive

application of marketing strategy, there are increasingly more products of the same kind competing fiercely. Meanwhile, the differences between similar products is decreasing. The focus of competition will be shifted on brand. Then the competitiveness lies in whether the enterprises can establish a higher consumer's brand loyalty so as to make consumers resist the temptation of other brands. The brand "affinity" make the products special by increasing its intangible value. From another perspective, consumers, limited by the information constraints and their good-purchasing inertia when choosing the goods will not choose unfamiliar goods for the purpose of minimizing the risk of purchase. In other words, the brand "affinity" can form a consumer psychological barrier to resist or alleviate the impact from other brands.

c) The construction of brand "affinity" can effectively increase the added-value of the products, providing a higher profit space for enterprises. On one hand, it can effectively maintain sustainable development and technical innovation. On the other hand, it can make enterprises respond to the possible price-lowering strategy of the competitors. For example, the Coca Cola Co. has a large consumer group with its strict and orderly management mechanism, stable and reliable product quality, worldwide sales network. In the mind of the consumers, Coca-Cola is not only a drink, but also a symbol of culture. In nineteen eighties, Coca Cola Co.'s decision to change its prescription ended in failure. That's because such behavior was considered as betrayal to the customers. Therefore, a successful brand will form some "affinity" in the consumer psychology, increasing consumer's feeling of pride which in turn will increase the brand assets' value.

3) The construction of brand "affinity"

Building the brand "affinity" requires enterprises to be patience and perseverant, to examine and assess the development with a long-term vision. It is dangerous to seek the immediate interests while abandoning the brand's long-term planning and construction. The following are some basic strategies for constructing the brand "affinity".

a) Using non-price promotion as the main strategy with price promotions as a supplement.

At present, many enterprises using discount or disguised discount (such as buy and give activities) to lure consumers to try the products, hoping that some consumers may form preference to the very brand and establish their consumption habits. However, the reality is, in the period of introducing products, price promotion can increase the short-term sales volume, but it is not beneficial to the long-term development of the brand. Too frequent use of the strategy can lead to the consumers' expectations that the price will fall in the future. What's worse, similar behaviors of the competing products will strengthen such psycho and ultimately harm the brand image. So, when the product enters the period of growth or maturity,

enterprises should make a strict control over such useless price promotions so that they can avoid falling into the vicious circle of price competition. The enterprise should pay more to non-price promotion strategies such as promotion of community brand image, the construction of community culture, and co-promotions with some well-known brands.

b) Taking excellent quality as the basis, establishing good communication and relationship with consumers and increasing consumers experience on enterprises

The effective spread of corporate culture and business philosophy rather than a single product's advertising appeal, can help customers to form an emotional loyalty to the brand. Therefore, the enterprises should make full use of the advantageous resources so as to create a meaningful interactive relationship. For example, the establishment of enterprise open system. In certain times, the enterprises could invite the target consumers to have a visit, to attend seminars to eliminate obstacles in understanding between enterprises and consumers.

c) Establish the terminal customer database to maintain the existing customers, rather than only for new customers.

Database marketing means that the enterprise, through the way of collecting and accumulating a large amount of information of the relevant market and processing them, forecasts the purchase potential of the target market and uses these information to precisely position the products, using the proper way to communicate with consumers in order to achieve the purpose of marketing. First, only by establishing a perfect customer data can the effective communication with the target object become possible. Therefore, in the process of product designing, channeling, price planning and theory transfer, enterprises should attach much importance to the target consumer groups so as to let them think this brand is designed for them particularly. Then the flattered consumers may have a sense of intimacy and trust on the brand. Secondly, more and more enterprises realize that compared with seeking for new customers, retaining old customers seems cheaper and more economical. These enterprises also maintain frequent and close contact with consumers through the database. In this case, the database becomes a powerful tool to guarantee the stable customer group and improve the customers' loyalty to the brand. For example, American jeans makers Levi Strauss has kept in its computer the data of the customer's name, size and height. Customers can choose models suitable to them among 400 kinds of jeans, then this information will be sent to the Levi Strauss factory for production. On the other hand, the information will be input into the computer as part of the database. Thus the production process is open directly to the consumers for their satisfaction.

4) Paying attention to the social development and actively participating in social activities.

The social roles played by enterprises and their behavior are more influential than advertising activities on consumers. For example, as people's awareness of environmental protection and green marketing gains, green product is stepping into people's daily life. In this case, enterprises should pay attention to the evolution of the consumption demand and the requirements of environmental protection into as well as putting the concept of environmental protection in the enterprise's brand management concepts. For example, the Haier Refrigerator Company in QingDao, through improving the manufacturing process, has reduced the amount of Freon by 50% which can damage the ozone layer, thus becoming the most successful Asia Company in German in terms of the sales volumes of refrigerators. The concept of green manufacturing has become a tide sweeping through both the domestic and foreign companies. People's consumption has changed. Vigorous development of the green product become an important means for enterprises to strengthen the competitiveness and occupy the market. In addition, paying attention to social welfare activities will also enable consumers to enjoy and trust the brand.

Domestic enterprises, facing the threaten of more and more enterprises entering into China after its entrance in WTO, should change their management concept, improve their brand strategy, and cultivate their brand affinity, which are the key to standing out of the rest in the competition.

III. CONCLUSION

In Chinese traditional culture, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism all ask people to believe there is an ideal spiritual world, and require them to cultivate their mind, pursue moral perfection and finally achieve eternal happiness. Rulers in every dynasty tried to win over people's support by this thoughts, either advocating the overwhelming Confucianism or upholding the three religions. Taught and promoted by the upper class, these thoughts became the soul of Chinese spiritual world and DNA, exerting a subtle but profound influence on the values of modern people.

In such a social and cultural background, every successful brand, eventually left a clear impression of morality and prosperity on the consumers' mind, because only this feeling

makes it outstanding, tug on the consumers' heartstring and thus interest them. For example, there are several successful examples in the furniture industry: Huari furniture, commitment with your life; Lianbang brings you high quality life; Yatang furniture, taste from connotation; The Hus in Nanyang, a sign of success; Yulu villatic furniture bring nature home. All these images accurately grasp the most primitive, simplest and sweetest theme that "home is the eternal soul".

As the appeal of advertisements, the shape of theme od brand culture is not a simple word games, not ground racking one's brains to come up with a beautiful sentence to impress consumers, and not explaining the product or brand with a sentence, but arousing friendly feelings in customers with all forms of expression and transmission. Such beautiful expression comes from consumers, rather than from the speakers with self-admiration. Customers have feeling correspondent to what you show. If their feeling is consistent with what you want to express, it means that the benefit, quality and characteristics shown in the products cohere with customers' feeling and you convey your brand in the right direction. Otherwise, dislocation rises between you and the consumer, which requires recreating the core value, or redoing the product planning.

Beginning with the traditional auspicious meaning of Peking Opera costumes and decorations, the author finds some morality as the main body of Chinese spiritual culture, forms his own opinions, and expects more scholars and experts would be attracted for further studies. At the same time, this paper suggests that people should not forget to inherit and promote our traditional national culture while developing economy and society.

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