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Keywords: *chinese domestic luxury brands, logotype, chinese values and aesthetics, branding, chinese consumers, luxury fashion industry.*

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A STUDY TO CHINESE DOMESTIC LUXURY VISUAL BRAND LOGO FROM DOMESTIC TO GLOBAL

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Abstract- The present study examines the logotypes of successful Chinese domestic luxury brands (CDLBs), Shanghai Tang and Shang Xia, in order to reveal the underlying resonance between Chinese values and aesthetics. The research underscores the importance of incorporating Chinese cultural elements into the branding strategies of CDLBs to attract Chinese consumers and distinguish themselves within the luxury fashion industry. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, comprising literature review, case analysis, and in-depth interviews, to analyze data from three distinct perspectives: contemporary trends, Chinese name selection, and the incorporation of local cultural elements in design. The findings suggest that CDLBs must strike a balance between conforming to current trends, particularly simplicity, and preserving authenticity, when selecting a Chinese name that holds cultural significance, and integrating traditional design elements in the details. This research provides practical guidance for professionals in the field and paves the way for future studies to explore related topics.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The mainland of China has emerged as a leading market for luxury goods in recent years, driven by economic growth and increased demand for such items. According to a report by Bain & Company, while the global luxury market saw a decline of 23% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese market experienced a 48% increase in luxury consumption. Furthermore, the report predicts that the Chinese luxury market will continue to expand significantly in the coming years as travel restrictions are lifted and the "Zero-Case" policy is eliminated (Lannes, B., & Zhang, C, 2020).

This research specifically focuses on two Chinese domestic luxury brands, Shanghai Tang and Shang Xia, rather than the more well-known international luxury brands such as Cartier, Louis Vuitton, and Chanel. These two brands are notable for their success as luxury brands that are "Made in China" and have been the subject of extensive research in the past decade (Carson, 1985; Heine & Phan, 2013; Schroeder et al., 2014; Zhiyan et al., 2013). However, this study goes a step further by specifically examining their brand logo design, which is a crucial element in the brand identity design (van Grinsven & Das, 2016). A brand

logo serves as a visual representation of a brand and is an important tool for differentiating a brand from its competitors (Maset et al., 2021). In the rapidly changing luxury market, the brand logo also serves as a cultural signifier (Cian, Krishna, and Elder 2014; Hagtvedt 2011) and is the first element that consumers encounter, influencing their perception of the brand (Shi & Jiang, 2022). Furthermore, a brand logo design incorporates elements of culture, marketing, aesthetics, and design language (Bossel et al., 2019).

This study aims to investigate how these two Chinese domestic luxury brands express and resonate with Chinese values and aesthetics through their visual design elements, specifically their brand logo design. Previous research has primarily focused on the marketing, product design, and catwalk fashion events of these brands, with relatively little attention given to their branding and visual design elements (Chevalier and Lu, 2010). Both brands have utilized traditional elements in their logo design, such as the use of Chinese characters, traditional motifs, and specific reading order, to communicate their cultural heritage and identity to domestic and overseas consumers.

Given the significance of visual image design in the realm of luxury brand design, this study represents an important contribution to the gap in consumer and marketing research knowledge. It highlights the multidimensional aspects of Chinese domestic luxury brand logo design and represents a step towards a more cohesive framework for understanding local luxury brand design.

II. METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this study includes several chosen approaches: literature research, case study, and summary and in-depth interviews with target consumers. Firstly, literature reviews and research were conducted using a non-experimental qualitative design (*what it is*) to gain an understanding of consumption trends CDLBs, the incorporation of Chinese traditional elements in modern graphic design practices, and the expansion of Chinese culture in overseas markets through CDLBs brand logo design. Literature research was conducted through various sources such as journals and books. This step is critical for forming an understanding of CDLBs and their consumers, as well as for collecting secondary data.

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//the existing data of shanghai tang and shang xia, how I analysis the data, what methods applied

The case study, specifically based on the brands Shanghai Tang and Shang Xia, was conducted according to the methodologies outlined by American social scientist Robert Yin, who stated that "Case studies can be done using either qualitative or quantitative evidence. The evidence may come from fieldwork, archival records, verbal reports, observations, or any combination of these" (Yin, 1981). The case studies of these two brands were used to further enhance understanding and make the findings more applicable and holistic for future practice.

Finally, in-depth interviews were conducted to gather additional findings, specifically to understand why and how CDLBs consumers engage with the brand logos. Furthermore, interviews with designers were conducted to provide a professional understanding. These three steps were used to form a conclusion: What elements in these CDLBs logos resonate with the audience? What different design strategies do the two CDLBs brands take?

III. RESULT

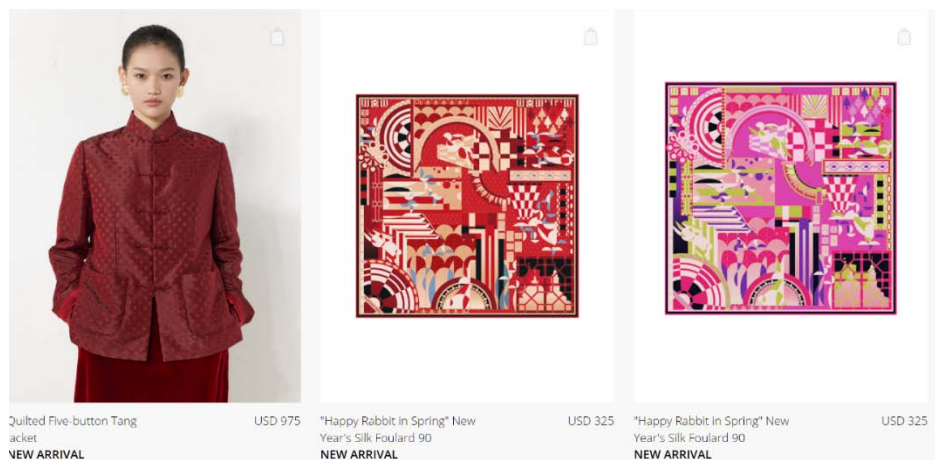
a) The Change in CDL Markets

i. The Current Trend

The Chinese luxury market is characterized by two key features: a young and large consumer base, coupled with positive economic growth (Kumar et al., 2015). Previous research has identified brand consciousness and attitudes towards certain brands as significant factors that influence Chinese consumers' purchasing decisions in the luxury market. The concept of "Mainzi," meaning "face value" in Chinese, refers to the desire to gain higher social status through the possession of identifiable prestige items, such as luxury fashion bags and clothing (Liao and Wang, 2009).

However, inconspicuous luxury consumption has been on the rise, becoming a trend both globally and in the Chinese market (Cavender et al., 2014; Eckhardt et al., 2015). Inconspicuous luxury consumers prefer to express their true personalities and tastes through unique designs on inconspicuous luxury items, rather than through loud logos (Han et al., 2010). Shanghai Tang and Shang Xia are two Chinese domestic luxury brands that have embraced inconspicuousness since their establishment (Schroeder et al., 2014). Additionally, the increasing preference for domestic brands suggests that Chinese young consumers are more likely to choose local brands for more expensive products.

Shanghai Tang was founded in 1998 by Sir David Tang in Hong Kong (Deng, 2018). The brand positioned itself as the first and only luxury brand to have emerged from China (Shanghai Tang.com, 2014). Shanghai Tang is unique for its fusion of Chinese traditional culture and design language, such as calligraphy and Qipao, with Western luxury fashion (Fig. 1). With the founder's ambition to become an internationally recognizable luxury brand, and to break the negative perception of "Made in China" (Aswir & Misbah, 2018). In 2008, Swiss luxury giant Richemont fully acquired the brand, and it was sold to Italian entrepreneur Alessandro Bastagli in 2017 (Aswir & Misbah, 2018). In 2000, after Frenchman Raphael le Masne de Chermont, the CEO of Shanghai Tang, and Joanne Ooi, the creative director joined, they repositioned the brand image and marketing strategy. After several years, the brand has been competing with world-class luxury brands such as Prada and Gucci (Hameide, 2011). Shanghai Tang's primary market is mainland China, followed by the United States (Harilela, 2013).

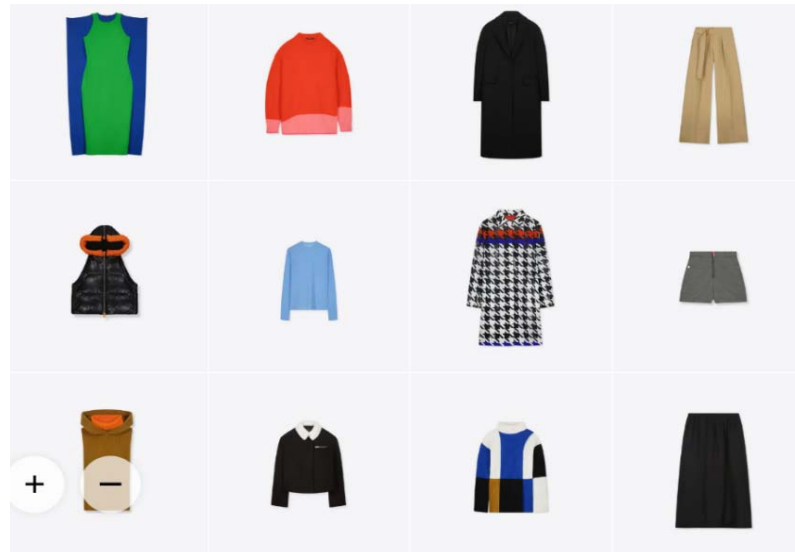


Source: shanghaitang.com

Figure 1: Shanghai Tang AW22 collection.

Shang Xia, a Chinese luxury lifestyle brand that has been acquired by Hermès Group, draws inspiration from traditional Chinese tea culture and incorporates traditional decorative elements and details in its design (Fig 2). The brand offers low-key luxury products that signify Chinese craftsmanship and aesthetic. Recently, the brand has expanded into the foreign market. According to Wendlandt and Denis (2013), Shang Xia

aims to revive Chinese crafts that were nearly destroyed by China's Cultural Revolution, including ancient styles of porcelain, cashmere, felt, and furniture, and is part of a new generation of Chinese brands competing in the crowded European luxury goods market. The brand's product line includes fashion, teacups, houseware, and furniture that all communicate the spirit of the Chinese tea ritual (Red Luxury, 2012).



Source: shangxia.com

Figure 2: Shanghai Xia 2022 collection.

The two brands are all successfully address Chinese traditional culture into the luxury industry and accept by the global market. Their success provides applicable case study and reference for other Chinese brands (Schroeder et al., 2014).

b) Cultural Authenticity, and Heritage Branding in CDLBs

The acceptance of Chinese local culture in the global market, particularly in the fashion context, has been under-researched in the past decade. For luxury brands, authenticity and cultural heritage hold greater importance compared to other product categories. The concept of "cultural heritage branding" was proposed by Eunju and Seulgi in 2011. They analyzed three Asian brands: Issey Miyake (Japan), Damyoon (Korea), and Shanghai Tang (China) and found that cultural authenticity was key to gaining global acceptance (Ko & Lee, 2011).

The visual appearance and brand name all contribute to creating an authentic brand. Integrating the value proposition, Chinese heritage, and modernity in the brand logo and name is crucial. For Western audiences, foreign cultures are often closely associated with Orientalism, which can lead to it being viewed as a rare and exotic style. The branding of cultural heritage refers to the positioning of a brand based on its cultural heritage (Prentice, 1993; Urde, 2007). Cultural heritage

can be tangible or intangible attributes, and previous studies have explored how Asian luxury brands can incorporate cultural heritage as a competitive advantage in their marketing strategy (Ko & Lee, 2011).

Studies have also suggested that brands with distinctive positioning and authentic brand value are key in cultural heritage branding (Heine, 2010). This is particularly true in the global market, where a brand infused with its culture is necessary (Stewart-Allen, 2002).

c) Luxury Brand logo design

The importance of logo design in brand identity cannot be overstated (Melewar & Jenkins, 2002). A brand logo often includes elements such as the brand name, logotype, symbol, and color (Melewar et al., 2000). While there have been numerous studies and case studies on the Chinese logo design that incorporate traditional elements into the modern design (Liu et al., 2018), most of these have focused on utilitarian products rather than hedonic products (Shi & Jiang, 2022). However, luxury fashion brands are more oriented towards the hedonic side and are considered to have higher hedonic value (Lee & Shin, 2020), thus creating a research gap that this study aims to fill.

i. Brand Logo Simplicity

The majority of luxury fashion brands are western, therefore, the logo often involves alphabetical

characters, such as Burberry, Chanel, and Gucci. Some luxury fashion brands include symbols in their brand identity, such as Versace and Hermès. However, the recent rebranding trends in the luxury fashion industry

indicate that simplicity is key (Loureiro et al., 2020; Lyppert, 2020; Wiley & Rapp, 2019), for example in the rebranding of Burberry and YSL.



Source: shanghaitang.com

Figure 3: Shanghai Tang logo evolution.



Source: shangxia.com

Figure 4: Shang Xia logo evolution.

The examination of luxury Chinese domestic brands Shanghai Tang (Fig. 3) and Shang Xia (Fig. 4) reveals a trend of simplicity in brand logo design. Shanghai Tang has undergone a shift from a highly decorative and complex logo formation to a simple black and white design featuring only Chinese and English characters. In contrast, Shang Xia has adopted a more modern and minimal style, with a transition from a calligraphic touch to a machine-written typeface. Both brand logos are presented in simple black and white, a universally accepted visual cue that signifies premium and luxurious characteristics (Wang et al., 2022). It is noteworthy that the inclusion of alphabetical letters as a main component in the brand logo design can be attributed to the findings of a study conducted by Lu (2010), which suggests that Chinese consumers tend to view brands with names written in alphabetical (roman) letters as more luxurious.

// my own conclusion

ii. Brand Logo Complexity

Despite the trend towards simplification in brand visual design, the distinction between Chinese

luxury brands and their Western counterparts remains discernible. Shanghai Tang, for instance, maintains a strong connection to traditional Chinese culture, as evidenced by its incorporation of the Chinese characters "上海滩" in its brand logo (Figure 4). Chinese logographic characters are generally considered to be more visually complex than alphabetic characters (Tavassoli & Han, 2002), and the company has retained the same Chinese typeface for over three decades. In contrast, Shang Xia adopts a more Western aesthetic, opting to replace its original "上" "下" monogram with the horizontally oriented letters "SHANG" and "XIA", which have been rotated 270° and 90° respectively in clock wise. This unconventional arrangement of letters creates a sense of visual complexity (Pieters et al., 2010) and requires more time to process.

Visual complexity can influence consumer perceptions and preferences for a brand and its products (Lee et al., 2018). Previous research has indicated that luxury brands can benefit from simplicity and directness (Lee et al., 2018), however, this may not be the case in China, where the writing system is more visually complex (Shu, 2003). Jang et al. (2018) found

that higher levels of visual complexity in brand and store design did not negatively affect consumer perceptions in Asian countries and, in fact, resulted in increased engagement among those with a higher level of fashion involvement (Jang et al., 2018). An interview with Mr. Xiao, a 32-year-old interior designer based in Shanghai, who is a consumer of Shanghai Tang and willing to spend money on fashion products, revealed:

I don't think the use of Chinese characters in the brand logo diminishes its luxuriousness, especially when it is executed correctly. I genuinely appreciate Shanghai Tang's current brand logo design, as compared to previous versions. The logo is more complex than some Western brands, but it aligns well with the brand's style and cultural background. It is both modern and retro at the same time.

iii. *Typeface in Two Logos*

The two CDL brand logos exhibit distinct characteristics that reflect their respective brand strategies. In addition to the presence of Chinese characters in the logo of Shanghai Tang and the unconventional placement of letters in Shang Xia, the choice of Roman typeface also differentiates the two brands. The Roman typeface used in Shanghai Tang is characterized by a subtle handwritten touch, while Shang Xia employs a bold, machine-style font. The usage of type font plays a significant role in shaping brand perception and personality (Pan & Schmitt, 1996; Batra et al., 1993). In an interview with a senior graphic and brand designer, Mr. Wong, based in Hong Kong, he remarked that the obvious visual differences between the two logos are not only a result of their marketing strategies but also their brand culture and consumer preferences. He states that

The obvious visual difference is not only due to their marketing strategy, as well to their brand culture, as their consumer preference. Shanghai Tang is a more historic brand than Shang Xia. The subtle calligraphic touch in Shanghai Tang's roman letter is echoing its brand history and hand craftsmanship, however, Shang Xia is a much more contemporary feeling. The same phenomenon can be found in their store design as well.

Shanghai Tang is a more historically rooted brand compared to Shang Xia, and the subtle calligraphic touch in the Roman letters of Shanghai Tang's logo effectively echoes its brand history and hand craftsmanship. Conversely, he suggests that Shang Xia conveys a more contemporary feeling. This phenomenon is also evident in the store designs of the two brands. Mr. Wong speaks from a professional perspective on the brand logo designs. The researcher argues that as Shang Xia strives to represent the concept of "splendid simplicity," and simplicity is a fundamental aspect of its product design, this is reflected in its store appearance (Heine & Gutsatz, 2015) and, as the researcher argues, in its brand logo design. Additionally, both brands employ uppercase lettercase in their logos as it creates a sense of premium

and high-end feeling, as supported by research (Teng et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2021).

d) *Examining the Cultural Factor and Brand Logo Design*

The incorporation of Chinese cultural elements in branding and design refers to the use of symbols and artifacts that embody the traditional and distinct characteristics of Chinese culture (He and Wang, 2017). According to Zhang (2007), these elements often involve artistic expression and carry ideological values. As such, this study will examine the use of cultural elements in branding and design in two categories: naming and visual.

i. *Chinese Culture in Naming*

The consumption of luxury goods and brands are inherently embedded within various cultural contexts (Ying et al., 2011). Furthermore, research suggests that a brand's name plays a significant role in shaping consumers' perceptions of the brand's image by communicating its origin, manufacturer, or functionality (Thakor and Lavack, 2003; De Mooij, 2010). The naming of CDL branding is heavily influenced by domestic culture and is a key component in overall brand equity and design (Aaker, 1991). A study conducted in 2020 by Kim et al. found that bilingual (English and Chinese) branding can hurt Chinese consumers' perceptions of Western luxury brands (S. Kim et al., 2020). However, it should be noted that this study only examined luxury brands of Western origin and did not include CDL luxury brands.

Previous research has shown that Chinese consumers tend to prefer Chinese names for brands with traditional backgrounds and spirits (Chan & Huang, 2001). The rich Chinese semantics developed for traditional brands such as bicycles, clothing, tea, and wine (Chan & Huang, 2001). The two CDL brands have effectively leveraged this preference by utilizing Chinese names that directly indicate their origin. The name "Shanghai Tang" or "上海滩" is created from two words that were chosen to convey a specific significance. The use of the founder's name in the brand name implies a sense of genuineness (Paulicelli & Clark, 2008). "Shang Xia" or "上下" on the other hand, means "up and down" in English, and references the Chinese philosophy of seeking balance and harmony in relationships, similar to the concept of "Yin" and "Yang" (Eckhardt et al., 2015).

In contrast, using a Chinese name that is translated from its Western (Roman) name based on phonetic similarity can potentially damage the brand image and dilute the cultural meaning (S. Kim et al., 2020). CDL brands, however, have taken the opposite approach by first creating Chinese names and then creating Roman name accordingly. This approach was noted by Miss. Amelia, a US photographer currently working in Shanghai, states:

I don't speak Chinese and am not familiar with Chinese culture as well, however, the "Shang Xia" sounded oriental and authentic to me. Me and friends were instantly attracted by its name when we heard it for the first time! The meaning explained by my Chinese friend, I think it is brilliant to adopt a philosophy and a lifestyle into the brand name, more interesting than simply using the founders' name."

This statement highlights that a meaningful Chinese brand name can resonate with Western audiences, particularly when the meaning behind it is understood (Chan & Huang, 2001). The spelled and sounded are all in foreign language can be the differentiated cue for a more authentic brand perception (Ko & Lee, 2011). Overall, luxury fashion brands need to understand Chinese culture and consumers' preferences when choosing a name for the brand to resonate with Chinese consumers and to be perceived as authentic.

ii. *Chinese Culture in Designing*

Unlike other daily commodities such as food and beverages, luxury fashion brands require global recognition to be successful, as stated by Turunen (2017). As a result, the marketing and visual strategy for adopting Chinese elements in design should be approached differently. As previously discussed, the two Chinese luxury fashion brands, Shanghai Tang, and Shang Xia, have reduced their visual elements to align with contemporary and trendy trends. However, the visual elements still symbolize Chinese culture. Shanghai Tang, for example, incorporates Chinese characters set in a traditional right-to-left reading order, a hallmark of traditional Chinese fashion. The Shanghai Tang motif (Figure 5) is another illustration of cleverly using Chinese elements. The motif reflects the charm of Chinese seal carving and showcases the beauty of Chinese logographic characters. The layout is complex yet elegant, and the creative arrangement of letters provides a unique feeling. It is rooted in ancient history but elevated to the modern luxury market.

Shang Xia presents a different method of incorporating local elements. It not only reduces overall visual complexity, but also gradually adopts more Western elements in comparison to Shanghai Tang. As a brand that emphasizes modernity and craftsmanship, it rebranded in 2021 in order to appeal to the Generation Z demographic. The direct Chinese visual elements, such as the seal-looking logo and calligraphic implications in typography, have been removed (Figure 4).



Figure 5: Shanghai Tang Motif

IV. DISCUSSION

The Chinese luxury market is experiencing a drastic increase, even amidst the impact of the COVID-19 situation. For CDLBs are looking to gain a foothold in the market and achieve global recognition, it is crucial to establish a brand image that is visually appealing to both domestic and overseas consumers. Therefore, there are several suggestions for brand logo design strategies that can help CDLBs to optimize their brand image. Literature on the subject has highlighted the importance of creating an authentic, traditional culture as the foundation for CDLBs to be successful. An example of this is Shanghai Tang, which lost half of its sales and customers due to its imitation of Western styles and exoticism. However, a new creative director was able to revive the company by returning to authentic Chinese culture and incorporating Chinese elements, resulting in a more distinct and recognizable brand.

a) *Perspective I: Trendy but Different*

The results of this research and previous studies reveal that modern-day luxury brands are rebranding to become simpler, and Chinese Gen-Z are also preferring simpler visual identities. Therefore, CDLBs with highly complex brand logos may damage their brand image in both the domestic and overseas markets. This finding is reflected in the case studies of logo evolution in Shanghai Tang and Shang Xia. However, CDLBs also need to consider that domestic consumers have a higher tolerance for visual complexity than Western consumers. Furthermore, Asian consumers tend to associate complexity with traditional culture (M. J. Kim & Lim, 2019). Therefore, a deliberate and moderately complex visual appearance may help CDLBs differentiate themselves in the global market.

b) *Perspective II: Name Selection*

The semantic meaning in the logo name is extremely important. As part of the cultural elements in the design, the naming has a connotation with Chinese history. Due to the shifting Chinese domestic market, young Chinese Gen-Z are beginning to appreciate their

own country brands. An appropriate name that can refer back to Chinese traditional culture and heritage can facilitate the CDLB brand promotion and recognition in both domestic and overseas markets. The name selection can be in figurative forms (e.g., animals, locations, etc.), such as Shanghai Tang, or referring to abstract Chinese philosophy and spirit, such as Shang Xia. Practitioners in the field should also be aware that the Chinese name applied in CDLB should not be meaningless, for example, like direct translations based on its western name. The process suggested by this study is creating a meaningful Chinese name first, then making an English translation based on it.

c) *Perceptive III: Cultural Elements in Design*

The cultural heritage must also be applied visually. While the brand name must heavily imply Chinese culture, the visual elements can be more subtle. Through the case study and interviews, the analysis of Shanghai Tang and Shang Xia illustrates that different marketing strategies require different visual applications. While Western design was once highly sought after, recent years have seen the incorporation of Chinese elements in brand design prove to be an effective means of attracting consumers. For CDLBs, particularly in the fashion industry, originality and authenticity are of paramount importance. Elements such as traditional calligraphy style can be subtly incorporated into Roman alphabets. The case study of Shanghai Tang demonstrates the preservation of the right-to-left reading order, along with slight modifications to Roman letters, such as calligraphy. For CDLBs with more Western styles, such as Shang Xia, a different placement of Roman letters may be appropriate. Furthermore, Shanghai Tang's motif serves as inspiration for the combination of traditional culture with modern aestheticism. The seal-crafting with beautifully arranged letterforms can be appreciated by individuals even if they do not understand Chinese.

V. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This research offers a comprehensive analysis of Chinese domestic luxury brands (CDLBs), specifically focusing on two iconic brands: Shanghai Tang and Shang Xia, which are among the most recognizable CDLBs worldwide. The research also thoroughly examines the visual identities and brand logos of these two brands. The results bridge the gap in understanding what CDLBs should consider when it comes to branding or rebranding, particularly regarding their brand logo design. Luxury is heavily rooted in local culture and recognized globally (Hennigs et al., 2012), with some countries having reputable luxury histories such as France, Italy, and Switzerland. However, "Made in China" has long been associated with mass production and poor quality. Therefore, CDLBs must incorporate rich Chinese heritage into their brands rather than simply

imitating Western brands. To this end, the research provides three perspectives for CDLB brand logo design: following the trend while differentiating oneself, choosing a meaningful name, and incorporating traditional elements. These strategies are supported by the examples of the two successful brands and in-depth interviews. This research may be beneficial for designers and brand managers in terms of promoting their brands and increasing recognition both domestically and overseas. For the brand logo design, combining elements of the brand cultural heritage can enhance its authenticity and appeal, therefore, might help its performance in the market. The logo should effectively communicate the brand's value proposition and cultural heritage, while also being modern and visually appealing. By combining traditional cultural elements with modern design elements, a brand can create a unique and authentic visual identity that sets it apart in the global market. From an academic standpoint, this research provides a comprehensive examination of the utilization of "cultural heritage branding" in the logo design of Chinese domestic luxury brands (CDLBs), an area that has not been thoroughly explored to date. Prior studies have analyzed related concepts such as "heritage branding" (Urde, 2007), "cultural archetype" (Lim & Yoon, 2008), and "cultural heritage" (Herbert et al., 1995; Prentice, 1993), however, this study introduces a new convergent concept that can open up avenues for further research and discussions in the future.

However, it should also be noted that there are limitations to this research. For example, the interviews were only conducted in cities such as Shanghai and Hong Kong, and the subjects were primarily middle-class individuals with a high level of fashion involvement. Future studies could expand upon this research by being more inclusive in terms of location and subject. Subsequently, future research may explore the correlation between visual complexity and the selection of Chinese names, as a more Chinese-centric name may or may not require the incorporation of a more complex visual image. Additionally, future studies may examine the perception of Chinese traditional design elements by both Chinese and non-Chinese consumers.

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