



## Improving the brand identity of time-honored Chinese brand through visual innovative design

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### ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to explore the role of visual innovation design in brand identity with time-honored Chinese brands. Traditional design and innovative design are two inherent attributes of visual design for time-honored Chinese brands. Different visual design approaches have varying effects on brand identity, thus necessitating research on the impact of brand visual design on brand identity. This paper employs quantitative research by conducting a survey among 566 consumers from different age groups. The empirical results indicate that the traditional design of time-honored Chinese brands does not significantly influence brand identity, whereas innovative design does impact brand identity for these brands. This study highlights the importance for time-honored Chinese brands to pay attention to the role of innovative visual design in responding to changing consumer demands and addressing the issue of brand aging. Only by doing so can they effectively manage their brands and achieve long-term development. Therefore, it is recommended that brand managers or relevant departments of time-honored Chinese brands utilize innovative visual designs with elements of tradition during brand promotion to attract more consumers and achieve sustainable growth. This study also promoted the in-depth development of research on consumer culture, corporate culture, and brand cultural heritage management.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study reveals the role of brand visual innovation design in the process of consumer brand identity with time-honored Chinese brands. It emphasizes the importance of innovative design, urging brand managers to adopt new strategies in the brand visual design process to attract consumers and secure long-term brand development.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The intensification of market competition leads to frequent changes in brands and products, with numerous new brands and products emerging annually while many old ones exit and even fade away. Data indicates that only 30% of newly established brands survive each year, with only a small fraction of those growing and developing into well-known brands over the long term. Poor management at any stage of a brand's development could potentially lead to its decline.

China's time-honored brands, with their rich historical and cultural significance, have histories even longer than their Western counterparts. Brands like Tong Ren Tang, Yunnan Baiyao, and Guan Sheng Yuan have been passed down through many years, each serving as a well-established trademark. However, due to historical conditions and business environments, there is a significant issue with aging and extinction of these brands in China. Problems exposed in the management of these brands are also quite prominent. Although the Chinese

economy is growing and technology is advancing, time-honored Chinese brands are experiencing struggles in survival and development. The number of these brands has sharply decreased from over 16,000 when New China was founded to the current 1,129, with over 90% facing business risks and decline.

Despite opportunities provided by specialized production and more detailed market segmentation, the innovative and ever-changing market landscape significantly impacts the development of time-honored brands. Consumers purchase time-honored brands for various reasons: some cherish the unchanged classics, while others follow the trend of retro. Although both approaches promote the survival and development of time-honored brands to some extent, they provide differing insights. Time-honored brands are primary targets for nostalgic consumption in China, embodying rich cultural heritage after hundreds of years of legacy. These brands are inseparable from the history and culture of the Chinese nation, as well as from individuals' and families' growth. Recognizing the crucial role of traditional elements in time-honored brands not only provides a new starting point for their long-term development but also supports the prevalence of nostalgic culture in China. Innovation, a buzzword in the 21st century, is also a key driver for deepening reforms in China's industrial structures. Innovation is comprehensive, including not only traditional concepts like technological and product innovation but also visual creation in the new era. The perception that time-honored brands are rigid and unchanging is extremely detrimental to their development; therefore, adjusting the elements of these products from an innovation perspective is crucial.

Research into the issues related to time-honored brands began in the 1990s. Within academia, two primary perspectives have emerged in the study of management strategies for time-honored brands, represented by the dual choices of "change" and "consistency." For the first time, Zhao and Xiang (2023) discussed the dilemma of choosing between these options for time-honored brands, differentiating the effects on the market between nostalgic and innovative attitudes within these brands. This sparked further academic research into strategies for strengthening and revitalizing time-honored brands through nostalgia and innovation. Here, traditional cultural nostalgia utilizes the classic elements of time-honored brands to convey consistent brand meanings to consumers, emphasizing the "unchanging" nature of these brands. On the other hand, innovation aims to enhance brand value by updating the old elements of time-honored brands (especially visual elements), emphasizing "change." However, current academic research on time-honored brands is primarily limited to the consumer level. The focus is on how consumers' traditional or innovative tendencies impact their purchasing intentions towards time-honored brands, with studies often approaching from perspectives such as consumer nostalgia (Chen, Huang, & Hou, 2020) and innovative traits (Chen et al., 2020). Most research adopts case study methods, for instance, examining the brand assets of Wang Lao Ji or using Guan Sheng Yuan's "White Rabbit" as a case study for long-term brand management of time-honored brands. There's limited research exploring the factors influencing purchasing intentions for time-honored brands from a brand or product perspective.

From the perspective of the visual image of time-honored Chinese brands, it is necessary to study the impact of different design approaches on consumer brand identity. Herein, building upon existing research, this paper collects relevant data on the influence of traditional and innovative designs on brand identity through quantitative research methods and employs statistical research methods to identify factors within the inherent attributes of time-honored Chinese brands that affect brand identity. The study also analyzes and compares the effects and differences between traditional design and innovative design on brand identity. This research provides a theoretical foundation for the later-stage visual image design of brands.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Definition of Time-Honored Brands

In China, "time-honored brands" are a conventionally accepted concept. Generally, it refers to enterprises that have operated for a significant amount of time within a certain region, possessing a good reputation and a high level of recognition. Over time, more and more brands join the ranks of time-honored brands, with their products, crafts,

and business philosophies passed down through generations, thereby enriching the connotation of time-honored brands.

At the end of the last century, Kong Lingren and Li Dezeng, the chief editors of the book "China Time-Honored Brands," included and examined over 1600 Chinese heritage enterprises established before 1949. This helped define time-honored brands existing before the foundation of the People's Republic of China that had the nature of national capital. According to their research, time-honored brands should exhibit four basic characteristics: prominent historical significance, outstanding quality, reputable credibility, and distinctive national and cultural identity. This emphasizes that time-honored brands are "old brands" formed through extended market competition and remain strong amidst the process of renewal and replacement. They include famous stores, brands, and signs (Xu, Prayag, & Song, 2022). As a product of traditional Chinese commercial civilization, time-honored brands naturally inherit the meanings and connotations of traditional Chinese culture. Due to China's initially underdeveloped industry and highly skilled traditional craftsmanship, the merchants themselves frequently handcrafted the products of well-known brands. This resulted in unique production processes and high product quality (Wan, 2017). In 2006, China's Ministry of Commerce issued the "Standards for Identifying China Time-Honored brands," providing a clear definition of China time-honored brands for the first time. It described them as brands with a "long history, possessing products or crafts passed down through generations, having a distinct traditional cultural background and profound historical significance, widely recognized by society, and having a good reputation." Moreover, the brand must have been established for over 50 years. This definition offers a reasonable and accurate textual explanation of "time-honored brands." Based on this concept, this paper believes time-honored brands should possess the following characteristics: 1) a long history; 2) deep cultural significance; 3) a good reputation; and 4) production or business philosophies passed down through generations.

## *2.2. Research on the Status of Time-Honored Brands*

Time-honored brands in China have an average establishment age of over 100 years, with nearly 50% of them being over a century old, according to a survey by the Ministry of Commerce. Brands such as "Tong Ren Tang," "Quan Ju De," and "Liu Bi Ju" have histories spanning hundreds of years, serving as precious treasures of China's commercial civilization and embodying the essence of China's excellent historical culture. These time-honored brands, having stood the test of time and the scrutiny of generations of consumers, are widely known for their products and reputation, often enjoying good word-of-mouth and reputation. Compared with younger brands, time-honored brands possess the solid strength to build dominant brands and have the capital and capability to ensure long-term development. However, the reality is not promising. In 2006, to revitalize time-honored brands, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce initiated and started implementing the "Time-Honored Brands Revitalization Project." It required local commerce departments to conduct comprehensive surveys on the developmental status of local time-honored brands. In the same year and in 2011, two batches of time-honored brand directories were released. Development reports pointed out that after the impacts of public-private partnerships since the founding of the People's Republic, political fluctuations, and economic reforms, the number of time-honored brands in China sharply decreased from over 16,000 at the inception of the nation to just over 1,600 in the early 1990s. Among these remaining brands, polarization is extremely severe, with only about 70% barely maintaining their operational status, 20% facing long-term losses, and approximately 10% retaining some production scale and generating decent profits. This suggests that time-honored brands, which represent the essence of Chinese historical culture, are generally in decline. With the decline of time-honored brands, international brands have begun to flood into the Chinese market en masse, and young Chinese brands are rising, posing the urgent problem of how time-honored brands can survive in market competition and achieve long-term development.

Upon studying the current status of foreign time-honored brands, research has identified three primary reasons for their aging: products and services, target market, and marketing communication (Lehu, 2004). In terms of

products and services, outdated market research results for time-honored brands lead to difficulties in tracking changes in consumer demands. Obsolete production technologies and equipment result in insufficient production efficiency in market competition, while outdated product designs, packaging, styles, and classifications make it challenging for time-honored brands' management to keep pace with market changes. Regarding target markets, as original consumers age and have more choices, the demand for favored time-honored brands products decreases, while younger consumers are less familiar with these brands and products, making them unlikely to choose them. This increases the difficulty for time-honored brand to develop new products to penetrate the market. In terms of marketing communication, there is a severe disconnect between the chosen brand ambassadors and brand stories and the current consumer demands, with communication content being too rigid and lacking necessary creativity, leaving time-honored brands unprepared to face competitors.

Time-honored brands in the East and West have grown based on different social and market environments. Brands developed under various sociocultural backgrounds exhibit substantial differences in their current statuses. Problems existing in the aging of Western time-honored brands reflect, on the one hand, the commonalities in the aging and decline of such brands. On the other hand, while providing references for the study of the current situation of Chinese time-honored brands, the uniqueness of the decline of these Chinese brands should also be taken into consideration. In this regard, Chinese scholars have summarized the problems existing in China's time-honored brands as follows:

1. Lack of Innovation: Although the history of time-honored brands demonstrates their success to some extent, some continue to adhere to traditional concepts, with a few even resorting to resting on their laurels. Handmade production under old craft conditions, with low technology integration and slow product updates, often fails to meet contemporary consumer needs. While the packaging style and services are characteristic of most time-honored brands, strict adherence to these traditions might lead to obsolescence and a loss of appeal.

2. Insufficient Brand Protection: Given the historical development of time-honored brands, it's often challenging to determine asset ownership accurately, leading to issues with unclear property rights definitions. The lack of effective constraint mechanisms intensifies the misuse of time-honored brands by unidentified speculators, resulting in problems like premature trademark registrations, insufficient brand scope inclusion (Yao, 2022) and excessive counterfeit and imitation products (Peng & Chao, 2012) which seriously damage the reputation and competitiveness of time-honored brands.

3. Historical Reasons: The path from prosperity to decline for well-known brands includes public-private partnerships during socialist transformations, significant losses during the Cultural Revolution, and the destruction or even loss of some distinctive, long established crafts, severely impeding the continual development of well-known brands.

4. Restrictive Business Strategies: Research emphasizes that a rigid image significantly hinders the development of time-honored brands. Current time-honored brands often overemphasize their "age" during promotion, and as markets and consumer demands evolve, the misalignment between time-honored brands and consumer needs becomes increasingly apparent. Solely emphasizing "age" doesn't always produce the desired effect (Zhang & Guo, 2023). Additionally, time-honored Chinese brands also show evident deficiencies in market positioning, product extension, and business philosophy. Irrational business practices and models not only constrain the growth of time-honored brands but also render their products less competitive in the market (Kunda, Zemite, & Lake, 2021).

### *2.3. Activation and Revitalization of Time-Honored Brands*

A brand is deemed aging when consumers begin to ignore it, manifesting a phenomenon known as brand aging (Lehu, 2004). Often, this occurrence is not due to issues with the product's quality but because, compared to new

brands, they appear or taste "old." Nonetheless, consumers' affection for time-honored brands doesn't vanish; they simply gradually "forget" about them and cease to consume their products.

Problems in time-honored brands should be addressed from the brand's perspective (Zhang, Li, Liu, & Ruan, 2021). In essence, the revitalization of time-honored brands can be approached from two fundamental starting points: inheritance and innovation. Inheritance means carrying on and promoting the existing strengths of time-honored brands, emphasizing the "old" aspects in the brand, and conveying consistent brand meaning to consumers. However, blind adherence to inheritance might not always be effective. As the market continuously changes and evolves, the unchanging content that time-honored brands inherit might be precisely what consumers no longer favor. In contrast, the nostalgic elements within inheritance can better reflect the connection between the brand and consumers. Nostalgia, grounded on an emotional foundation, can directly communicate the value a brand wishes to convey, allowing consumers who harbor nostalgic feelings to perceive the brand's attention to them, thereby fostering a positive attitude towards the brand. The research perspective is detailed to focus on heritage, with nostalgia serving as the subject of this study. This approach is firmly based on this concept.

Keeping up with the times is crucial for any brand's development, and innovation is not only the driving force behind brand growth but also the most direct way to prevent aging. Nowadays, the overemphasis on the "old" aspect of time-honored brands doesn't yield ideal revitalization. Therefore, Zhang and Guo (2023) suggests that time-honored brands should also explore the "new" elements within them, seeking development through change. Time-honored brands inherently possess technological advantages. While inheriting and promoting traditional crafts, integrating modern production technology is essential for improving operational efficiency and innovating within time-honored brands (Zhang & Li, 2011). In today's era, the diversification of the internet offers new opportunities for the innovative development of time-honored brands. They should keep up with the trends of the times, establish emotional connections with consumers, and provide a more comprehensive experience of emotions and values (Wu & Gao, 2019).

Considering the various challenges in the development of time-honored brands, both traditional and innovative designs require time-honored brands to offer more elements and connotations that can be explored. It's imperative to strategically choose under new market conditions.

#### *2.4. Fundamental Approaches of Nostalgia Creation by Time-Honored Brands*

Past research has primarily classified nostalgia creation by time-honored brands from an emotional perspective, viewing traditional nostalgia as a consumer psychological response encompassing both positive and negative emotions. Xu (2010) suggests that merely integrating elements that a brand wishes to convey while depicting a typical scenario related to consumer experiences is essentially "hitchhiking" on consumers' memories (Xu, 2010). This method of invoking consumers' nostalgic feelings is often a "bandwagon" behavior by companies, and it might not regard nostalgia as a crucial path for long-term brand development.

The "old" in time-honored brands primarily reflects a long establishment time and deep historical roots, tying them inseparably to specific eras and histories. The collective memories generated from interactions between the brand and consumers during specific stages, and the imprints left by products made using special techniques, are closely related to the time-honored brands themselves, highlighting the importance of nostalgic elements to these brands. Zimmer, Little, and Griffiths (1999) point out that recognizing historic brands using traditional nostalgic visual elements primarily involves two strategies: nostalgic brand strategy and fabricated history brand strategy. The nostalgic strategy develops new visual images for time-honored brands using associations familiar to consumers to establish an "old" image for the brand, resonating with consumers. The implementation of this strategy is primarily realized through the use of product styles and can also be regarded as product-style nostalgia. The fabricated history brand strategy constructs traditional or historical stories from years ago for newly developed visual images, conveying a realistic and credible product environment to achieve brand strategy



management goals. Advertising is a crucial medium for disseminating brand stories. The stories explained, slogans used, and spokespersons selected in advertisements all intuitively and vividly convey brand stories to consumers. Muehling, Sprott, and Sprott (2004) conclude from their study on the effects of advertising on promoting nostalgia that, compared to advertisements without nostalgic characteristics, nostalgic advertisements more easily evoke positive brand attitudes. This, to some extent, enhances consumers' preferences for time-honored brands products and strengthens their identification with and attachment to time-honored brands (Wang, Zhou, & Peng, 2011). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H<sub>1a</sub>: Traditional visual design positively influences brand association.*

*H<sub>1b</sub>: Traditional visual design positively influences perceived value.*

*H<sub>1c</sub>: Traditional visual design positively influences brand identity.*

### 2.5. Fundamental Approaches of Innovation by Time-Honored Brands

Currently, most scholars primarily focus their research on the innovation of "time-honored brands" on consumer's innovative traits or awareness towards the attitudes and behaviors related to "time-honored brands." The research suggests that once consumers possess innovative awareness, their capacity to accept and adapt to innovative products enhances, reducing the time it takes for them to embrace innovative products. Products and brand statuses of "time-honored brands," which are known for being "old," can hardly meet market demands. To regain market recognition, these brands must initiate changes from within. In 1962, Cox introduced the concept of "cues," defining price, taste, color, opinions, and other "cues" as information related to the brand. Building on this research, Jacoby, Olson, and Haddock (1971) further proposed "internal cues" and "external cues." Internal cues refer to the intrinsic attributes of a product, including its shape, size, taste, etc., which are related to the product itself without affecting its characteristics. In contrast, external cues relate to the product but aren't part of the product itself, like price, packaging, brand name, advertising, and other non-product elements. During the purchasing process, the limited product or brand information consumers grasp mainly focuses on internal and external cues. Problems in time-honored brand development, such as aging brand image, technology failing to meet demands, and outdated packaging, undoubtedly influence consumer product preferences.

Innovative design in brand visual image is a crucial approach to preventing brand aging, with the driving force behind innovative design being the continuously changing external consumer demands (Keiningham et al., 2020). Changes in consumer needs can stimulate enterprises to adjust brand positioning and continuously innovate brand design to adapt to the external environment (Keiningham et al., 2020). Comparing the development disparities between domestic and international "time-honored brands", Wang Chengrong believes that China's time-honored brands should find the optimal ecological niche and pinpoint accurate positioning in innovation without blindly extending or misusing brand images. Leveraging the value embodied in products and services to attract consumers is a vital means to gain consumer recognition (Wang, 2005). Innovation is a process of interaction between enterprises and consumers, aiming ultimately to obtain consumer recognition (Zhang, 2009). Consumer brand recognition induces a positive emotion towards the brand. Li and Zhang (2013) believe that this positive emotion will endear them to the brand, boost their confidence during interactions with the brand, and stimulate their intention to purchase (Li & Zhang, 2013). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H<sub>2a</sub>: Innovative visual design positively influences brand association.*

*H<sub>2b</sub>: Innovative visual design positively influences perceived value.*

*H<sub>2c</sub>: Innovative visual design positively influences brand identity.*

### 2.6. Brand Associations, Perceived Value, and Brand Identity

Brand associations refer to all information nodes related to a brand within a consumer's brand knowledge system, encapsulating a consumer's understanding and awareness of a particular brand's essence. The most direct

associations consumers might have with a brand can be a symbol, a product, a company, or an individual. These associations might pertain to the functional, symbolic, or experiential benefits of a product, or they might reflect the consumer's overall attitude and assessment of the brand. Each association that a consumer has with a brand can be measured through three indicators: strength, level of recognition, and uniqueness, and the aggregate of brand associations with these three indicators constitutes the brand image.

Keller (1993) measures brand image using various dimensions of brand associations and divides the content of brand associations into three types:

1. Attribute Associations: attribute associations are descriptive characteristics related to a product or service.
2. Benefit Associations: These represent the personal value that consumers attribute to product or service characteristics—essentially, what consumers believe a product or service can do for them. Benefit associations can be further divided into: functional benefits, experiential benefits and symbolic benefits.
3. Attitude Associations: Brand attitudes represent consumers' overall evaluation of a brand and serve as the foundation for consumer behavior. Brand attitudes correlate with beliefs about product-related and non-product-related attributes, functional benefits, experiential benefits, and symbolic benefits (Laforet & Chen, 2012).

Perceived value is the consumer's assessment of the trade-off between perceived benefits and perceived losses (Sinha & Verma, 2020). Bozkurt, Gligor, and Babin (2021) argue that the more value consumers perceive from a brand through interaction, the more likely they are to recommend the brand's products to their friends and family. When consumers can obtain sufficient information related to a brand's products or services before making a purchase decision, their descriptions and expectations of the brand will be more accurate, facilitating the generation of positive word-of-mouth after the purchase. McDougall, Claxton, Ritchie, and Anderson (1981) believe that the formation of consumers' brand identification attitudes and the facilitation of purchasing behavior are significantly related to the perceived value of the brand. Yang, Tang, Men, and Zheng (2021) suggest that perceived value positively influences consumers' attitudes. Zeithaml (1988) identified four aspects of perceived value: Lower price contributes to higher relative value; value is present when needed in a product or service; value is the trade-off between consumer expenditure and the benefits obtained, with the proportion serving as a measurement criterion; value is the total return obtained from consumer expenditure. Additionally, Sweeney and Soutar (2001) expanded the measurement criteria of perceived value, emphasizing the importance of social attributes and emotional value of products, besides their quality, price, and functions, thereby enriching the connotation of consumer perceived value from the perspective of overall utility.

"Identity" refers to the behavior through which individuals express alignment with those they perceive as more accomplished than themselves, alleviating dissatisfaction and anxiety about their reality. Lu, Lin, and Lin (2016) define "brand identity" as a consumer's willingness to choose a brand at the time of purchase. The stronger the consumer's identification with a brand, the stronger their intention to acquire its products. The intensity of a consumers' intention to buy reflects the level of their internal dependence on a brand. Besides incorporating intrinsic functional value, a brand can also express a sense of personal identification. To some extent, brand identification is a reflection of the intensity of consumers' self-concept. Consumers tend to view their own self-concept as a form of image presentation when a brand can communicate it, which increases their affection for and propensity to buy the brand (Belk, 1988).

According to (Aaker, 1991), the degree of alignment between a brand and its target audience in terms of concepts, images, and personality traits determines consumer identification with the brand. The closer the brand's personality is to the consumer's personality traits and the brand image is to the consumer's self-concept, the smaller the psychological distance between them. This closeness facilitates psychological resonance and a sense of belonging in consumers when they interact with the brand. During this process of psychological approximation, consumers develop an identification with the brand, leading to a positive consumption psychology and an enhanced desire to purchase products of the identified brand (Schouten, 1991). Consumers often favor brands that resemble

their personalities and buy from brands they like and identify with. This purchasing behavior is, to some extent, a way for consumers to meet their social needs and a reflection of their values (Jin, 2006). A brand has distinctive qualities; if customers value these qualities, the values it conveys are simple to accept, which encourages customer identification with the brand. Underwood, Bond, and Baer (2001) explained the motivation for consumer brand identification using identity theory from sociology, highlighting the crucial role of consumer self-concept.

According to the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H<sub>3a</sub>: Brand association positively influences perceived value.*

*H<sub>3b</sub>: Brand association positively influences brand identity.*

*H<sub>4</sub>: Perceived value positively influences brand identity.*

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Following an analysis of the theory and relevant literature, we developed the following conceptual framework refer to Figure 1.

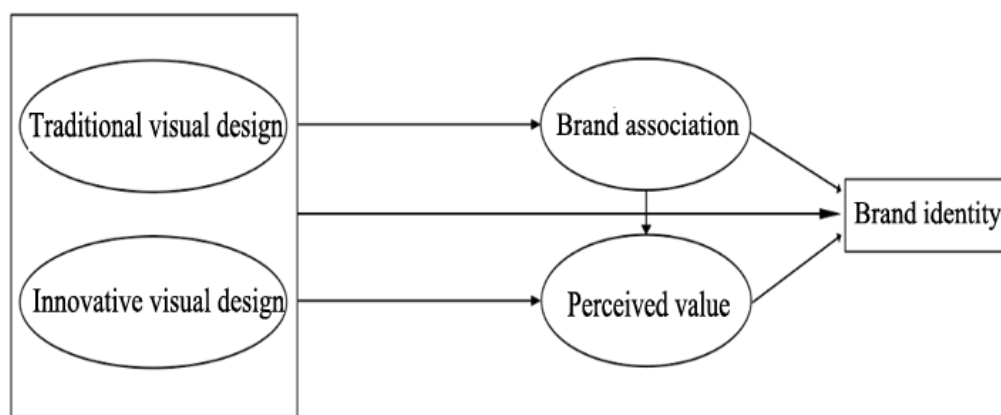


Figure 1. Research framework.

#### 3.1. Measurement Scale

The variables included in the model of this study are traditional visual design, innovative visual design, brand association, perceived value, and brand identity. The scale that Liu, Zhao, and Deng (2007) developed serves as the basis for measuring both conventional and innovative visual design. The measurement of brand associations primarily refers to the research findings of Sweeney and Soutar (2001) and Jin (2006) with three measurement items designed; perceived value measurement mainly refers to the research findings of Sweeney and Soutar (2001) with four measurement items designed; brand identification refers to the scales by Belén, Vazquez, and Iglesias (2001) and Jin (2006) with a total of three items.

#### 3.2. Data Collection

The data used in this study were collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire items, designed with reference to specific scales, were adjusted considering the uniqueness of traditional and innovative designs. The participants in this study were invited to fill out a questionnaire consisting of 24 main items, including 19 items on traditional visual design, innovative visual design, brand association, perceived value, and brand identity. These items were calculated using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 point (strongly disagree) to 5 points (strongly agree). The remaining 5 items were the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, age, educational background, occupation, and annual family income. Questionnaires were distributed both online and in paper form, primarily in Beijing, Shanghai, and Jiangsu, with 582 surveys returned and 566 deemed valid.



### 3.3. Sample Structure

The basic information of the participants included gender, age, education level, occupation, and income, with the statistical results as follows:

The statistical results yield the following information:

**Table 1.** Structure of respondents.

Indicators	Items	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	257	45.4
	Female	309	54.6
Age	Below 30	179	31.6
	30-39	164	29.0
	40-49	123	21.7
	50-59	70	12.4
	Over 60	30	5.3
Highest educational	High school and below	74	13.1
	Diploma	144	25.4
	Degree	261	46.1
	Master /PhD	87	15.4
Occupation	Student	101	17.8
	Government servant	198	35.0
	Enterprise employee	111	19.6
	Private/Industry sector	90	15.9
	Others	66	11.7
Income	Below 2500RMB	130	23.0
	2500~4999RMB	174	30.7
	5000~7999RMB	103	18.2
	8000~15000RMB	90	15.9
	Over 15000RMB	69	12.2

The statistical results in [Table 1](#) show that:

**Gender distribution:** Female participants outnumbered males, with 257 male participants (45.4% of the total) and 309 female participants (54.6% of the total), aligning with the study's requirements.

**Age distribution:** Based on the historical development of time-honored brands, consumers were categorized into five age groups, with each group spanning ten years. Consumers born after 1996 were the most numerous, accounting for 31.6% of the total. In contrast, there were fewer participants born before 1963, which may be related to the difficulty in reaching this demographic for survey participation. Overall, the age distribution of participants reasonably reflects the current age distribution in the consumer market.

**Educational background:** Participants who received high school education or below accounted for 13.1%, those with associate degrees comprised 25.4%, undergraduate participants represented 46.1%, and participants with master's degrees or higher constituted 15.4% of the total. The largest group was participants with undergraduate degrees, aligning with the trend of higher educational attainment among modern consumers.

**Occupation:** Participants working in government or public sector positions were the most, making up 35.0% of the total. Participants from the corporate sector comprised 19.6%, students and self-employed participants totaled 33.7%, and participants from other occupations made up 11.7%.

**Income:** Participants earning less than 2500 yuan and those earning between 2500 and 4999 yuan comprised the largest groups, accounting for 23.0% and 30.7% respectively. This distribution indicates that most participants have average income levels, which reflects the current social situation.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Reliability Test

The study used SPSS 26.0 to test the reliability of various variables. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient for each variable was greater than 0.85 (see Table 2), indicating good internal consistency in the selected scales.

**Table 2.** Reliability test results for each dimension.

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	N of items
Traditional design	0.925	4
Innovative design	0.928	5
Brand association	0.853	3
Perceived value	0.918	4
Brand identity	0.918	3

### 4.2. Validity Test

The study conducted a validity test on the sample using SPSS 26.0. As shown in Table 3, the results show a KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) value greater than 0.7 and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity of  $0.000 < 0.01$ , indicating that the sample size is adequate and there are sufficient common factors between variables for factor analysis. Further exploratory factor analysis was conducted to test construct validity. Using the principal component method, factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were found. The cumulative variance contribution rate was over 60%, which means the factors had good explanatory power and had good effects. Each factor loading was greater than 0.5, indicating distinct dimensions and consistency within the items of each dimension, thus meeting the requirements and demonstrating good validity in the data.

**Table 3.** Validity test results for each dimension.

Variables	Items no.	Factor loading	Total variance explained	KMO	Significant(p)
Traditional design	TD1	0.896	81.635	0.856	0.000
	TD2	0.924			
	TD3	0.906			
	TD4	0.887			
Innovative design	ID1	0.878	77.728	0.900	0.000
	ID2	0.868			
	ID3	0.878			
	ID4	0.886			
	ID5	0.898			
Brand association	BA1	0.852	77.533	0.703	0.000
	BA2	0.872			
	BA3	0.917			
Perceived value	PV1	0.905	80.286	0.855	0.000
	PV2	0.861			
	PV3	0.91			
	PV4	0.907			
Brand identity	BI1	0.936	85.890	0.756	0.000
	BI2	0.914			
	BI3	0.931			

### 4.3. Hypothesis Testing

Utilizing AMOS 21.0 (one of the software packages specially used for structural equation model analysis.) for path analysis of the model, it was discovered that except for the influence of traditional and innovative design on perceived value, and both on brand identification (where  $p > 0.05$ , indicating no significant impact), all other paths passed the significance test. In the model revision during this research, paths with non-significant coefficients were removed, with the modified hypothesis testing results displayed in Table 4. Simultaneously, by analyzing the

model's goodness of fit, results obtained are presented in Table 5. The value of  $X^2/df$  (chi-square degree of freedom ratio) lies between 1 and 3, indicating good model adaptability. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) all reached the most suitable standard for fit goodness, implying the model fits well. Based on the model hypothesis testing results, Hypotheses H1a, H2a, H3a, H3b, and H4 are all true. However, a traditional design does not have a significant effect on perceived value or brand identification, and neither does innovative design.

Table 4. Results of hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis	Y	X	Standard estimate	C.R.	P	Results
H1a	Brand association	Traditional design	0.164	3.557	***	Y
H2a	Brand association	Innovative design	0.241	5.174	***	Y
H1b	Perceived value	Traditional design	-0.047	-1.067	0.286	N
H2b	Perceived value	Innovative design	-0.006	-0.142	0.887	N
H3a	Perceived value	Brand association	0.496	10.209	***	Y
H4	Brand identity	Perceived value	0.402	9.15	***	Y
H3b	Brand identity	Brand association	0.373	7.834	***	Y
H2c	Brand identity	Innovative design	-0.002	-0.048	0.962	N
H1c	Brand identity	Traditional design	0.037	0.971	0.331	N

Note:  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*\*.

Table 5. Model fitting indicator.

Index	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	GFI	NFI	TLI	CFI
Judgment standard	1-3	<0.08	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9
Value	1.372	0.026	0.965	0.975	0.992	0.993

## 5. DISCUSSION

The differences between traditional and innovative designs significantly influence consumers' brand identification with time-honored brands. Through empirical research, we explored the effects of traditional and innovative designs on consumers' identification with time-honored brands, and the following conclusions were obtained:

Firstly, both traditional and innovative designs of time-honored brands significantly impact consumers' brand associations. However, traditional design has a less substantial impact (with a path coefficient of 0.164) compared to innovative design (with a path coefficient of 0.241). Consumers' brand associations with time-honored brands are intricately linked with their personal experiences, which are inseparable from individual, familial, social, and generational contexts. This connection engenders a preference for time-honored brands, offering emotional consolation when consumers perceive and identify with these products. While the term time-honored inherently connotes age, the characteristic of being "old" is double-edged. Innovation is crucial for preventing brand aging; it not only emotionally engages older consumers but also meets the distinctive needs of younger ones.

Secondly, neither traditional nor innovative designs significantly affect consumers' perceived value. Currently, many time-honored brands in China are experiencing aging. On the one hand, products and designs struggle to meet diverse consumer demands; on the other hand, outdated distribution and promotion strategies render time honored brands less compelling in the competitive market against younger brands. Consumers deeply connected with time-honored brands are typically older, and their consumption power represents only a fraction of the market demand. Younger consumers often have various alternatives when choosing brands or products.

Thirdly, neither traditional nor innovative designs significantly influence consumers' brand identification. The findings indicate that both design approaches fail to directly impact consumers' brand recognition. As Sun Minggui pointed out, the influence of traditional design on brand recognition undergoes an indirect transformation process.

Whether it's traditional or innovative design, consumption is primarily driven by effective demand. For time-honored brands, the establishment of demand is extensively linked to emotional brand attachment. Therefore, enhancing brand recognition for time-honored brands requires further strengthening from various aspects.

Lastly, brand association significantly impacts both perceived value and brand identification, and perceived value significantly influences brand identification. Brand association and perceived value are vital pathways affecting consumers' brand identification. Traditional and innovative designs can indirectly influence consumers' identification with time-honored brands through brand association and perceived value. From a practical standpoint, enhancing consumers' brand association and perceived value through various methods is crucial for strengthening brand identification.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Through quantitative analysis, this study reveals that traditional designs of time-honored Chinese brands do not have a marked impact on brand identity, while innovative designs do influence consumer perceptions of these brands. Consequently, it is crucial for time-honored Chinese brands to prioritize the importance of innovative design in satisfying consumer demands. By following contemporary trends while preserving traditional elements, they can create visually appealing brand identity.

In the study on the impact of traditional and innovative designs of time-honored brands on brand identification, there are inevitably some limitations. First, there is a limitation in the distribution of the samples. Among the effectively collected questionnaires, there are fewer samples from older consumers. In reality, consumers of different ages, especially older ones, have varying degrees of emotional attachment to time-honored brands. Therefore, it's recommended that future research increase the sample size of older consumers to make the sample structure more reasonable. Second, the study didn't consider the effect of individual differences among consumers on the research results. Differences in consumer personalities may interfere with their perception of time-honored brands, affecting their perceived value and identification with these brands. It's suggested that future research could introduce indicators measuring consumer personalities as influencing factors.

Moreover, as China enjoys a continuous boom in its economy, these time-honored brands are increasingly expanding internationally. Future research could explore the influence of different cultures and nationalities on the visual image of China's time-honored brands.

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