

*Creating Visual Identity with Cultural Symbols and Local Fairy Tales-A Case Study:
Packaging Beipu Oolong Tea,*

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0218

The Asian Conference on Media and Mass Communication 2013

Official Conference Proceedings 2013

Abstract

Cultural and creative industries in Taiwan have boomed in the last decade as a result of the encouragement of government policies. This is a win-win situation in which local culture is preserved and popularized commercially, while traditional industry is enhanced by the use of distinguishing features of local culture.

In this research, Beipu oolong tea was taken as a subject, to review how this traditional industry has been renewed, and how it found added value by the employment of visual imagery adopted from local fairy tales and cultural symbols. Historical documents, records and photos were searched, analyzed and discussed to picture the local culture (*Hakka*) and review how Beipu oolong tea, one of the most important local industries, has named, branded and exported since 1935. Using deconstructionist theory, together with semiotic analysis, four cultural characters from local fairy tales were extracted, in combination with cultural symbols, five strategies used in the composition and presentation of significant visual identity are formed. The results have implications for future packaging or brand design, with respect to the ultimate purposes of cultural preservation and transmission, of bolstering traditional industries and identifying further opportunities for growth.

Keywords: visual identity, cultural symbol, Beipu oolong tea.

Introduction

Phong Hong tea, the special oolong tea in Beipu, is famous with its unique fruity flavour which results from the sucks of *Jacobiasca formosana*, a little sprout-eating insect. Also, it is the highest class of oolong tea with highly fermentation. A century ago, the globally well-known “Formosa tea”, “Oolong tea”, “Formosa Oolong tea” were all refer to this kind of tea (Xue, 2003). For allowing the insects to access to the tea leaves, it has to be chemical free environment in the tea farms. Therefore, Phong Hong tea is not only reputed with its unique flavor, but also its organic production which satisfies the modern people’s healthy standard.

Today Phong Hong tea is mainly produced in Beipu and Emei of Hsinchu County in Taiwan. In Beipu, tea farmers still insist to name this high class oolong tea as “Phong Hong tea”, but it has been rename as “Oriental Beauty tea” in Emei. In the second big place of production, Toufen, Sanwan and Touwu of Miaoli County, the local tea farmers name it “Fan Chuang Oolong”. In north Taiwan, the local governments promote Phong Hong tea very much lately. Its name is “Shiding Beauty tea” in Shiding Dist. of Taipei County and “Peng Feng tea” in Longtan Dist. of Taoyuan County. The reasons and background of those various names that refer to the same kind of tea form the motivation of this research.

In this research, deconstructionist theory is applied to discover the essences of local fairy tales that the tea was named. Combining these essences with the cultural symbols which are extracted with semiotic analysis, the abstract spirits of Phong Hong tea are visualized and identify its local cultural, *Hakka*, in a way people, both from local and foreign places, can understand and recognize it. The research results have implications for future packaging or brand design and to carry out the mission of “commoditizing culture and culturalizing commodities”, which is one of the ultimate purposes of the cultural and creative industries.

Literature Review

1. Utilizing cultural codes for visual communication and identity

“Culture” is always a popular terminology, issue and concern in various fields. From 1871 to 1951, the definitions of culture, for the points of view of anthropology, sociology, ethnology, arts, etc., are more than 164 (Kroeber, Kluckhohn, 1952). Today it is believed that there are more than 300 definitions of culture but none of them can singly present all aspects of it (Yin, 1998; Lan, Chiou, 2008). In this research, culture is defined as a common life style that gradually be formed by a group of people who live in certain areas and supported by the similar resources. Just like the hordes, their life style is the result of the local climate and geography. In order to accurately present Phong Hong tea with

cultural symbols and local fairy tales, the backgrounds of historical immigration, traditional industries and local life style are gone through to picture the cultural and humanistic characters in Beipu.

The concept and term of “cultural code” was firstly addressed by Roland Barthes in his work “S/Z (Barthes, 1970) along with four other codes: hermeneutic code, proairetic code, semic code and symbolic code. Not only been an academic concept, cultural code has been utilized in driving consumers’ need and products development (Rapaille, 2006). Rapaille states that it is cultural code triggers the emotional attachment between consumers and products. It is essential for designing and developing a good product that understand and research on cultural codes which are embedded in life experiences, social events and historical memory (Rapaille, 2006). Cultural code has also been applied for branding design. Schroeder addresses that cultural process, including historical context, ethical concerns, and representational conventions, affect contemporary brands and need be more concerned for understanding culture, ideology, and politics, in conjunction with more typical branding concepts (Schroeder, 2009).

Utilizing cultural codes in design is a process of transmission local live style and cultural characters into products. Cultural codes, according to the semiology, are composed with shapes, colors and textures to form a signifier then present the culture signified. With the accurate and firm relationship between signifier and signified, cultural codes are able to present significant meaning for communication (Su, Yen, Lee, 2007).

2. The historical background and geographical features of Beipu

Beipu was developed officially back to 1835 (Qing dynasty 15 years) when Chin Kuang Fu House was established by Qing dynasty. Chin Kuang Fu House was a rare case that people from Taiwan, Fujian and Guangdong worked together as a co-ethnic group. For the meaning of the name, “Chin” means gold, the common word for good luck, “Kuang” means "wide" which represents Guangdong , and “Fu” means "blessing" on behalf of Fujian. This co-ethnic group did set a model for the people to come.

Beipu and the areas around, such as Emei and Bao Shan, were developed under the direct of Chin Kuang Fu House from 1835 to 1886. The hilly geography was difficult to exploit so people from Fujian gradually left and the Jiang family, the people from Guangdong, took the control in this area.

Years later after Hakka group migrated in, the industries of tea, wood and coal made this area thriving for a period of time. However, because of the hilly geography and the poor traffic system, this area was developed slowly but was

able to keep the tradition, live styles and great amounts of historical sites.

3. The production process, characters and reputation of Phong Hong tea

Phong Hong tea, also known as Oriental Beauty tea , Peng Feng tea , longevity tea , or Fan Zhuang Oolong. Hakka people name it Ice-wind tea , smoke-wind or slug Aberdeen tea , Because of its clear pekoe, the down-like white "hairs" on the leaf, people also call it pekoe tea . Among all semi-fermented green tea , Phong Hong tea is fermented with the heaviest degree. According to the Taiwan Tea Research and Extension Station, the fermentation degree of Phong Hong tea is 60%. In Hsinchu and Miaoli areas, farmers have made as many as 75-85% degree of fermentation. This high fermentation makes the tea taste not bitter or astringent and easy to drink. Phong Hong tea is mainly grown in Hsinchu and Miaoli in Taiwan, and the suitable tea plants include "Green Heart Big Nuisance", "white hair monkey", "Taiwan tea No. 15th," "Taiwan Tea No. 17", in which the "Green Heart Big Nuisance" is the best. Now the harvest of Phong Hong tea need to be in summer especially in June and July, in the Lunar calendar is between Mangzhong to great heat which is ten days after Dragon Boat Festival. The little tea buds grow into tea leaves after the *Jacobiasca formosana*, a little sprout-eating insect, suck the buds. It is the process referred to "the saliva". Usually the amount of "the saliva" on tea leaves decides the quality of tea. After hand picking the "a bud and two leaves", the way used to describe the "leafiness" of a flush, the advanced technology is applied to make the traditional oolong tea. The process is: firstly is parching. Then is a second fermentation by wrapping tea leaves with a cloth and placing it in baskets or iron withins to "standing back to Run" or "softened". After that is the process of rolling, piling, drying and made the **primary processed tea**. Then finalizing it by grading, refined roasting and packaging. Pekoe tea is reputed with its big down-like white hairs on the leaf and its white, green, yellow, red, brown vivid colors. It also tastes like honey and fruit. It got reputation as Oriental Beauty by the Western tea lovers.

The unique fruity and honey taste of Phong Hong tea is said come from the insects *Jacobiasca formosanas*' bites. Thus the tea farmers absolutely cannot spray any pesticides for attracting tea leafhopper clusters. It is therefore said that pest tea got the best quality for Phong Hong tea.

Research analysis and discover

1. The fairy tales of Phong Hong tea

In order to investigate the two fairy tales of how Phong Hong tea was named, the field study was applied by interviewing the Chief Executive Officer of the museum of

Phong Hong tea, the publicist of Beipu farmers' association, and the owner of Bao Ji tea store. After analyzed all the historical events, the contents of naming Phong Hong tea are sorted as those four steps below:

(1) Introduction

In old-time when chemical insecticides were not applied, the production of oolong tea declined because of the plague of *Jacobiasca formosana*.

(2) Elucidation

The tea farmers were sad with the insects' damage but did not want to waste the tea leaves. They still followed the traditional tea-making process but over fermented it accidentally. This mistake resulted in good quality of oolong tea which is dark color with unique fruity taste.

(3) Transition

In 1935, Japanese government held an exposition in Taiwan. The local leader was afraid to be blamed if his area got no production involved. He therefore exhibited these special oolong teas which were made by the leaves with insects' damage.

(4) Conclusion

Nagakawa Kenzou, the 16th governor of Taiwan, bought all the good quality tea before he left. The price of the tea was two thousand Yuan which equal to the salary for twenty months of a mayor of village back to then. The local people in Beipu were laugh at that price and commented it "phong hong" (means: boasting). After showed on the local newspaper, people realized how special and good quality of that tea then named it phong hong tea. Phong hong tea was marked as the highest class among all kinds of tea which export from Taiwan since then.

These four steps list above not only introduced how Phong hong tea was named, but also describe the characters of *hakka* culture:

(1) Hard working and no complaining:

As a proverb says "where the mountain is, the *hakka* village is", in Beipu, *hakka* villages are mostly in hilly areas which are limited for growing rice. The Hakka people therefore grow tea in the hills to make living. It is the way Hakka people fight and be meek to the difficulty. Traditionally Hakka man need to work in the farms, make teas and at the same time equip with arms. The women's job was to manage the household and do farm work (Hakka Affairs Council, 2013). The harsh natural conditions make Hakka people hard working and no complaining.

(2) Diligent and thrifty:

The difficult live conditional also makes Hakka people diligent and thrifty. It is

why when the tea leaves were damaged by the insects, Hakka tea farmers did not waste it and insisted to make a good use out of it. They treasured all the resource and believed that if can, sale it, otherwise use it themselves.

(3) Simple and unsophisticated live style:

Hakka people are simple and unsophisticated since their harsh migrating lives. They ask for practical instead of luxurious. This character is reflected when the Phong hong tea, the product made from the damaged leaves, was submitted to the Japanese exhibition: Instead of showy products, Hakka people rather provide something useful and worthy.

(4) Inheriting and insisting the tradition.

As the old saying “even sold the family farms, cannot forget family precepts”, until now, tea farmers inherit and insist the traditional live styles, thinking and customs of Beipu. Mr. Gu, the owner of Bao Ji tea store, points out in the interview that when former premier, Mr. Yu, commented that “Phong hong tea” is considered vulgar, the tea farmers in Emei then rename the tea “Oriental Beauty tea”. However, people in Beipu insist the name of “Phong hong tea” and believe it is not vulgar but presents the original sense of *Hakka* culture.

2. The correspond cultural symbols

After the analysis of the fairy tales of naming Phong Hong tea and the Hakka characters indicated, the symbols for visualizing this culture are gone through and listed below. The semiotic theory is applied for categorizing the signifiers and signified. It is a process of characterizing Hakka culture from Phong Hong tea, and visualizing its identity with cultural symbols.

Cultural characters of Hakka	Forms design in	signifier	signified
Hard working and no complaining	Shapes	The shapes of cotton-padded jacket with buttons on the right	The traditional costume of Hakka is “ <i>Da Jin Shan</i> ”, the cotton-padded jacket with buttons on the right. It is the clothes that use for laboring because of its simple, tough and easy-to-wear. The typical clothes to present Hakka.
Diligent and thrifty	Materials	Recycle materials	Recycle materials usually deliver the rough, natural and handmade feelings. It presents how Hakka people utilize, adapt and respect the natural resources.
Simple and unsophisticated live style	Colors	Simple and harmonious colors	Simple and harmonious colors present Hakka as a culture emphasizes reconciliation and unification. Bright or vivid colors with too much personality are avoided to present the tradition of Hakka.
Inheriting and insisting the tradition	Pictures and illustrations	Fairy tales, legends and historical sites	Hakka is the culture abundant with legends, fairy tales and historical sites because of their inheriting and insisting of tradition from generations to generations. The Pictures and illustrations of Hakka themes can not only spread the culture but also show how Hakka people adore and respect their tradition.

Table 1. The analysis and categorizing of Hakka culture.

Conclusion

After investigating and analyzing the origin of naming Phong Hong tea, the characters of Hakka, including hard working and no complaining, diligent and thrifty, simple and unsophisticated live style and inheriting and insisting the tradition, are addressed. In order to visualize those characters, the cultural symbols and forms, such as the shape of “*Da Jin Shan*”, recycle materials, simple and harmonious colors, Hakka fairy tales, legends and historical sites etc., are suggested. The results have implications for future packaging or brand design and require further empirical researches.

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