

Constructing Cultural Identity Through Multimodal Metaphors in Chayan Yuese's Advertising: A Case Study on Chinese Social Media Platforms

Shuyi Zhang

*University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, Australia
ShinyShuyiZhang@outlook.com*

Abstract. Multimodal metaphors have progressively emerged as a focal topic in advertising scholarship, primarily because the interaction among linguistic, visual, and auditory modes does more than convey information; it actively deepens cultural resonance and stabilizes brand identity across sensory and symbolic levels. Anchored in cognitive metaphor theory as well as the analytical principles of visual grammar, the present study examines how Chayan Yuese's advertisements on Xiaohongshu deploy multimodal metaphorical resources to construct cultural identity within the rapidly expanding market of China's "new-style tea." Through qualitative content analysis combined with AI-assisted video summarization (ViSMaP), and supplemented by quantitative evaluation using Excel and ANOVA techniques, the research investigates representational patterns alongside audience responses. Previous scholarship indicates that these metaphors often rely on color symbolism, calligraphic aesthetics, and nature-based imagery to evoke traditional Chinese values. In line with the research questions, it is anticipated that the advertisements intentionally embed culturally meaningful elements aligned with consumer cognition, ultimately reinforcing a hybrid identity that is simultaneously modern and rooted in tradition through sustained aesthetic and symbolic integration.

Keywords: Multimodal Metaphor, Cultural Identity, Chinese New-Style Tea Beverage, Social Media Communication

1. Introduction

Recent scholarship on multimodal metaphors has examined their structural characteristics and rhetorical functions across advertising, packaging design, and public communication. Prior studies demonstrate that metaphors combining visual, verbal, and auditory modes enhance sensory appeal, emotional engagement, and cultural resonance [1-3]. Research on beverage branding, fashion discourse, and urban promotional videos has further shown that multimodal metaphors can effectively embed cultural narratives and strengthen audience perception of brand identity. These findings establish the value of multimodal metaphor as a persuasive device in contemporary media communication.

However, existing studies have not fully addressed how multimodal metaphors contribute to cultural identity construction in the emerging context of China's new-style tea beverage industry. Most research remains focused on aesthetic appeal, product features, or cross-cultural comparison, while few explore how such metaphors shape consumers' cognition and cultural belonging. Furthermore, platform-specific advertising strategies on Chinese digital lifestyle media, such as WeChat and Xiaohongshu, remain underexplored.

This study proposes to investigate how multimodal metaphors in Chayan Yuese's advertising construct cultural identity through a combined qualitative–quantitative approach. A dataset of 30 advertisements will be analyzed using cognitive metaphor theory and visual grammar, supported by AI-based video analysis (ViSMaP) and statistical evaluation (Excel, ANOVA). By addressing this gap, the study aims to contribute new insights into the relationship between multimodal communication, consumer cognition, and cultural identity in China's rapidly evolving tea beverage market.

2. Literature review

2.1. Multimodal resources in advertising communication

A substantial body of research has examined how multiple semiotic modes—particularly language and visuals—interact to shape persuasive effects in advertising. Studies on tea packaging [2] have demonstrated that colors, composition, and traditional Chinese symbols serve as key carriers of cultural meaning, while research on Coca-Cola's Instagram campaigns revealed how linguistic play (e.g., alliteration, rhyme) complements visual strategies such as gaze and posture to project values of masculinity, hedonism, and even spirituality [4]. Similarly, Ye [5] analyzed HEYTEA's advertising to show how rhetorical visuals reinforce textual appeals to highlight product uniqueness. Meanwhile, studies on Chinese brand naming [6] have demonstrated that linguistic elements themselves carry profound cultural and semantic meanings. The use of logographic characters and symbolic word choices contributes to cultural resonance in branding, echoing the metaphorical construction of identity in visual communication. These findings underscore the centrality of multimodal complementarity, though they are largely constrained to either packaging or Western corporate contexts, leaving new tea beverage advertising underexplored.

2.2. Metaphor, symbolism, and cultural representation

Beyond surface-level design, many scholars have investigated the role of metaphor and cultural symbolism in conveying deeper brand meanings. Shao [3] compared Chinese and foreign liquor advertisements and found that while both rely heavily on visual and auditory metaphors, cultural cognition led to divergent metaphorical source domains. Yu, Zhang, and Liu [7] identified common metaphor sources—plants, animals, and traditional symbols—in ideological promotional campaigns, showing how these resources guide value internalization. Erge and Guohong [1] highlighted similar processes in coffee advertisements, where sensory metaphors extend to reflect cultural beliefs such as individualism versus harmony. These studies collectively demonstrate that multimodal metaphors function not only as rhetorical devices but also as vehicles for cultural identity construction. However, their corpora remain industry-specific (e.g., liquor, coffee, public service), with limited attention to the emergent “new tea” sector.

2.3. Cultural identity and branding in contemporary contexts

Recent scholarship has emphasized how brands leverage multimodal strategies to construct cultural identity in both domestic and global markets. Wang [8] examined the rise of guochao (“national tide”) branding, noting the interplay between traditional cultural elements (“guo”) and hybridized fashion styles (“chao”), which together reframe “Chineseness” as both heritage and modernity. Yuan [9] explored translation strategies of Chinese time-honored brands, arguing that multimodal positive discourse analysis can mediate cultural elements in cross-cultural communication. Yao and Zhuo [10] further demonstrated how multimodal discourse, particularly through visuals and narration, frames urban identity in city promotional videos. Collectively, these studies point to the significance of multimodal design in shaping brand identity; however, they rarely focus on lifestyle-oriented platforms such as Xiaohongshu, where interactivity and user-generated responses may play a crucial role in identity negotiation.

3. Research questions

This study will address three research questions:

RQ1: What types of multimodal metaphors are used in Chayan Yuese’s advertisements?

Prediction: For RQ1, this work predicts that the advertisements will primarily employ sensory and cultural metaphors, integrating visual, verbal, and occasionally auditory modes. These metaphors are likely to draw on source domains such as nature (e.g., mountains, rivers, plants), traditional art forms (e.g., calligraphy, classical painting), and everyday lifestyle imagery to construct appealing brand narratives.

RQ2: How do these metaphors convey traditional Chinese cultural elements?

Prediction: For RQ2, this work predicts that the metaphors will operate as a strategic mechanism for embedding traditional Chinese cultural elements into the overall brand discourse. Specifically, they are expected to foreground recurrent references to nationally recognizable symbols, to classical aesthetic traditions, and to canonical literary quotations, each contributing to the reinforcement of cultural continuity across time. When these cultural signifiers are deliberately integrated with contemporary design practices, the advertisements are likely to rearticulate cultural heritage in a form that becomes both approachable and appealing for younger consumer groups.

RQ3: How do multimodal metaphors match people's cognition and influence consumers' cultural identity?

Prediction: For RQ3, this work predicts two possible outcomes.

1. Positive: Consumers are likely to interpret the multimodal metaphors as deeply aligned with their existing cognitive schemas and cultural memory. As a result, such alignment may heighten feelings of cultural pride, further consolidate identification with the emerging discourse of the “new Chinese style,” and ultimately contribute to the cultivation of stable brand loyalty.

2. Negative: Conversely, if the metaphors are regarded as excessively stylized or lacking in cultural authenticity, consumers may experience a sense of symbolic dissonance. This dissonance could undermine cultural identification and may also diminish the level of consumer engagement with the brand.

4. Methods

4.1. Materials

The research corpus will be composed of thirty officially released advertisements produced by Chayan Yuese and disseminated across two major Chinese social media platforms, namely WeChat official accounts and Xiaohongshu posts. Each advertisement will be documented and coded with its publication date, platform, and format (text, image, or video). For each advertisement, systematic documentation and coding will be conducted, including the publication date, the platform of distribution, and the communicative format (text, image, or video), so that comparative analysis becomes feasible. As Figure 1 [11] demonstrates, the poster entitled “From Plum Rains to Summer” metaphorically signals the transition between seasons while simultaneously foregrounding Bayberry Iced Tea as its promotional focus, and Figure 2 [12] foregrounds Dahongpao in the footer section of the poster, with both examples integrating multiple semiotic elements that collectively generate promotional as well as interactive meaning. In addition, user-generated comments affiliated with these advertisements will be collected in order to examine audience responses connected to cultural identity. As Figure 3 [13] indicates, such comments reveal audiences sharing narratives related to summer and articulating personal associations with the Chayan Yuese brand, which suggests active and ongoing engagement between the brand and its consumer community. Furthermore, official market survey reports and statistics published by Chayan Yuese will be used as supplementary data to substantiate and verify the relationship between advertising strategies and consumer engagement.



Figure 1. Poster “From Plum Rains to Summer”

Notes: This advertisement adopts a traditional Chinese ink-wash aesthetic to promote a summer tea beverage line called Real Juice Bingo. The title “出梅入夏时” (“When the Plum Rains End and Summer Begins”) metaphorically evokes seasonal transition and emotional nostalgia. The text blends poetic imagery and product information, presenting the drink as both refreshing and culturally refined.



Figure 2. Dahongpao Poster

Notes: The poster highlights Dahongpao tea as a featured product. This promotional poster features a hand-drawn style inspired by classical Chinese art, advertising a limited-edition Da Hong Pao Apricot Fruit Tea. The slogan “今天要把「幸运值」倒满” (“Fill Your Luck to the Brim Today”) combines traditional tea culture with modern internet vernacular, creating a playful, auspicious marketing tone.



Figure 3. Comments at the end of the post

Notes: This screenshot captures user-generated nostalgic reflections on summer memories shared under a tea brand’s social media campaign. Participants recount personal stories linking tea drinking to emotional warmth, youth, and companionship. The conversational tone and attached memes illustrate how brand interaction fosters emotional resonance and collective memory among consumers.

4.2. Procedure

All advertisements in the corpus will undergo a standardized and comparable multimodal analysis process. First, the multimodal resources of each advertisement will be systematically examined, encompassing linguistic elements (such as slogans and literary allusions), visual elements (such as color schemes, symbols, and images), and applicable auditory elements (such as background music), thereby achieving a holistic interpretation of their expressive patterns. Second, the analysis will identify metaphors embedded within these multimodal resources and classify them according to

their source and target domains, with particular attention to sensory metaphors, event metaphors, and cultural metaphors. Third, the strength of each metaphor will be evaluated on a five-point scale (1 = not salient, 5 = highly salient). Ratings will be independently assigned and averaged to ensure consistency. Finally, user reviews and official survey data will be analyzed to assess whether the identified metaphors relate to expressions of cultural identity or consumer recognition.

4.3. Apparatus

This study will adopt a standard and controlled research setup, consisting of a personal computer configured with headphones and Microsoft Excel, which will be used for the systematic organization and processing of quantitative data. For qualitative and multimodal analysis, the project will make use of ViSMaP, an advanced artificial intelligence video analysis tool designed specifically for large-scale media interpretation. ViSMaP employs unsupervised learning techniques to summarize extensive video material without the need for manual annotation, a process that substantially reduces both analytical time and financial expenditure. Such a capability proves particularly valuable when aiming to identify recurring visual and auditory patterns embedded within advertising materials in a systematic manner. By integrating Excel for statistical evaluation together with ViSMaP for multimodal content analysis, the overall research setup guarantees both efficiency and precision in handling large volumes of textual, visual, and auditory data.

4.4. Data analysis

Data analysis will be conducted in two stages. In the first stage, descriptive statistics (means, percentages, and frequency counts) will be calculated to provide an overview of metaphor usage and its distribution across the corpus. In the second stage, the relationship between metaphor strength and consumer responses will be examined. Specifically, the percentage of user comments referencing cultural elements will be compared with the metaphor scores of corresponding advertisements. Where applicable, inferential statistical tests (e.g., ANOVA) will be applied to evaluate whether different categories of advertisements (e.g., “traditional style” vs. “modern style”) produce significant differences in metaphor salience and cultural resonance. This mixed approach will enable both qualitative insights into metaphor functions and quantitative validation of their impact on cultural identity construction.

5. Discussion

For RQ1: What types of multimodal metaphors are used in Chayan Yuese’s advertisements? Based on prior research, it is expected that visual–verbal integration will dominate, supported by color schemes, symbolic imagery, and rhetorical headlines. If the analysis shows a significant concentration of visual–verbal metaphors, this would confirm earlier findings in beverage advertising and underscore the brand’s reliance on culturally resonant symbolism. Conversely, if no such concentration emerges and instead lifestyle-driven or globalized aesthetic elements prevail, it may suggest that the brand is shifting toward hybridized or contemporary styles, reflecting broader “Guochao” and lifestyle branding trends.

For RQ2: How do these metaphors convey traditional Chinese cultural elements? Evidence from packaging and symbolic studies suggests that advertisements will frequently embed cultural motifs such as calligraphy, landscapes, or historical references. If cultural symbols are consistently emphasized, the data will support the argument that multimodal metaphors reinforce cultural

continuity and appeal to collective identity. If, however, such elements appear less frequently or only in stylized forms, the result would indicate that cultural references serve more as surface-level decoration rather than as deep carriers of cultural meaning, highlighting a potential gap between intended resonance and actual semiotic depth.

For RQ3: How do multimodal metaphors match people's cognition and influence consumers' cultural identity? Prior work indicates that congruent cultural metaphors can foster identification and pride, while incongruent ones may weaken credibility. If the data reveal that metaphors aligning with shared cultural schemas significantly influence positive cultural identification, this would demonstrate the effectiveness of multimodal strategies in shaping consumer perception. If no significant influence is observed, or if metaphors appear overly abstract, it would suggest that cultural identity construction may require more direct experiential cues and consumer engagement beyond symbolic representation.

6. Conclusion

This proposal sets out to investigate how multimodal metaphors in Chayan Yuese's advertising construct cultural identity on Chinese social media platforms. It is expected that the analysis will show frequent use of visual-verbal integration and traditional cultural symbols, which may function not only as branding strategies but also as tools for reinforcing cultural belonging. The study aims to contribute by shifting attention from purely aesthetic or promotional functions of advertising toward its role in shaping cultural cognition.

Certain limitations are anticipated. The proposed dataset of 30 advertisements may restrict the generalizability of findings, and reliance on AI-based video analysis could reduce interpretive nuance compared with manual annotation. Further research could broaden the scope to multiple platforms or brands, include larger-scale audience studies, and employ mixed methods for triangulation. By addressing these directions, future work may provide a fuller picture of how multimodal metaphors mediate cultural identity in the emerging new tea beverage industry.

References

- [1] Erge, A., & Guohong, L. (2023). A Multimodal Cognitive Approach to the Conceptualization of Coffee.
- [2] Hu, B., Zelenko, O., Pinxit, V., & Buys, L. (2019). A Social Semiotic Approach and a Visual Analysis Approach for Chinese Traditional Visual Language: A Case of Tea Packaging Design. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 9(2), 168. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0902.06>
- [3] Shao, Z. (2024). A Comparison of Multimodal Metaphors in Chinese and Foreign Liquor Advertisements. *OALib*, 11(09), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1111935>
- [4] LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network. (2022). <https://doi.org/10.70730/learn>
- [5] Ye, Y. (2024). Visual rhetoric in advertising of China's new tea beverage industry, using HEYTEA as an example. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 185, 03010. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202418503010>
- [6] Huang, Y. Y., & Chan, A. K. K. (2005). The role of language and culture in marketing communication: A study of Chinese brand names. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 15(2), 257–285. <https://doi.org/10.1075/japc.15.2.04hua>
- [7] Yu, H., Zhang, H., & Liu, W. (2025). Visual metaphors in current Chinese ideological promotion: A multimodal analysis of public service advertisements. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2480883>
- [8] Wang, Z. (2022). Implementation of Chinese-styled branding in global fashion: 'Guochao' as a rising cultural identity. *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture*, 9(1), 149–183. https://doi.org/10.1386/fspc_00111_1
- [9] Yuan, Y. (2024). A Study on the English Translation of Shanghai Time-Honored Brands' Names from the Perspective of Multimodal Positive Discourse Analysis. *OALib*, 11(04), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1111392>

- [10] Yao, Y., & Zhuo, Y. (2018). A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Promotional Video of Hangzhou. *English Language Teaching*, 11(10), 121. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v11n10p121>
- [11] Chayanyuese:Drinking Juice and Enjoying the Air Conditioner. (2025, August 8). When the Plum Rains End and Summer Begins] [Poster]. WeChat Official Account. [“Challenge 'Sunny Every Day': The Real Juice Series — Bayberry Is Coming”]. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/TU_O6wIAPwHc5jrmtWUQOg
- [12] Chayanyuese:Drinking Juice and Enjoying the Air Conditioner. (2025, August 8). New Release: Dahongpao Apricot Fruit Tea [Poster]. “Challenge 'Sunny Every Day': The Real Juice Series — Bayberry Is Coming”. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/TU_O6wIAPwHc5jrmtWUQOg
- [13] Chayanyuese:Drinking Juice and Enjoying the Air Conditioner. (2025, August 8). [Comments]. [“Challenge 'Sunny Every Day': The Real Juice Series — Bayberry Is Coming”]. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/TU_O6wIAPwHc5jrmtWUQOg