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Exploring the Integration of Chinese Traditional Elements in Visual Communication and Its Influence on Cultural Identity and Public Perception: A review

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Abstract

This review synthesizes scholarship on how Chinese traditional elements, especially calligraphy, ink-wash aesthetics, and symbolic/color systems—are integrated into contemporary visual communication and how these integrations shape cultural identity and public perception. Framed by semiotics, cultural identity theory, and visual rhetoric, the analysis traces a long arc from heritage iconographies , dragon–phoenix dyads, porcelain blues, auspicious reds, to their recontextualization in branding, packaging, advertising, and digital interfaces. Across cases, traditional elements act as semantic carriers anchoring continuity and as rhetorical operators engineered for persuasion, yet reception varies by audience familiarity, generation, and cultural background. The review identifies three persistent gaps: limited systematization of design methods (selection, abstraction, orchestration), insufficient evidence on identity outcomes, particularly for younger publics—and under-segmented audience research. Ethical considerations provenance, regional diversity, and risks of tokenization are discussed alongside glocalization strategies for cross-cultural legibility. The review contributes an integrative framework that links form to meaning and reception, offering guidance for designers, marketers, and cultural institutions seeking culturally responsible, audience-aware applications of Chinese visual heritage.

Keywords: Chinese traditional elements, visual communication, cultural identity, public perception, semiotics, visual rhetoric.

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1. Introduction

Visual communication is a primary vehicle through which cultures narrate who they are, what they value, and how they aspire to be seen. In the Chinese context, the visual field has long been

saturated with traditional motifs, color systems, calligraphic forms, and philosophical design principles that traverse dynastic art, ritual artifacts, and popular crafts before reappearing in today's branding, packaging, advertising, film graphics, and digital interfaces (Udris-Borodavko et al., 2023, Sheng & Buchanan, 2022 , Clarke, 2019; SIWEN & Jamnongsarn, 2024). In contemporary practice, these resources do more than decorate: they work as legible markers of heritage, authenticity, and collective memory, supporting identity formation while speaking to both domestic and international publics. In short, they are semantic carriers anchoring meaning and rhetorical operators engineered for persuasive effect.

1.1 Background and Rationale

Chinese visual communication is distinguished by intricate pattern languages, vibrant chromatics, symbolic iconography, and layouts informed by Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist ideas. The ongoing "dialogue between past and present" is visible across contemporary categories—from brand identities to motion graphics—where traditional elements operate as visual cues that resonate with cultural pride and national identity (Huang, 2020, Gan, 2011; MI & Puyuthanon, 2024) . Simultaneously, as Chinese culture circulates more widely, visual communication doubles as a medium of cultural diplomacy, projecting narratives designed to connect with varied audiences. Understanding how traditional elements are integrated and received therefore becomes essential for both heritage stewardship and cross-cultural exchange (Ma & Guo, 2024; Sun, 2025). Traditional motifs and symbols emerge from mythology, folklore, religion, and nature—each with codified meanings. The dragon is a paradigmatic case, connoting power, strength, and good fortune; the phoenix symbolizes harmony, prosperity, and rebirth (O'Neill, 2024; Toh, 2023)) . These iconographies, alongside the brush-based logics of calligraphy and the tonal atmospherics of ink painting, foreground philosophical commitments to balance, simplicity, and harmony, legible since at least the Tang and Song periods and still salient in modern design grammar (Fu & Tho-ard, 2023; Xiang, 2018). Color symbolism is equally central: red encodes joy and prosperity, while gold and yellow historically index rank, prestige, and imperial power—values that contemporary branding continues to invoke . These persistent grammars are frequently mapped into modern layout, motion, and interaction systems, offering familiar semiotic anchors in unfamiliar media. Preservation and adaptation go hand-in-hand. Festivals, heritage events, and cultural tourism consistently mobilize traditional visual vocabularies to enact continuity, while international collaborations and public diplomacy selectively translate these forms for cross-cultural legibility (Mohyeddin, 2024;Ma & Lew, 2012). The cumulative effect is a shared, circulating repertoire through which communities recognize themselves and through which outsiders are invited to "read" Chineseness. This review attends to the opportunities and risks in such circulation: the potential to strengthen cultural confidence and the possibility of flattening or commodifying complex traditions. Despite growing adoption in practice, scholarship still under-specifies how traditional elements are systematically

incorporated into modern visual workflows and what socio-cultural effects follow. Historically oriented studies richly describe symbols, dynastic styles, and materials (e.g., dragons and phoenixes in imperial art), yet empirical accounts tracing their strategic use in branding, advertising, or social media remain sparse (Chen et al., 2024; Gao & Yezhova, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024; Khalifa-Gueta, 2023; Wilson, 1990). This gap obscures evolving design philosophies that stitch tradition to modernity and leaves practitioners without clearly articulated patterns for selection, abstraction, and orchestration. Addressing it requires structured analysis of methods and extent of integration, not only descriptive inventories of motifs. A second gap concerns cultural identity. While calligraphy and ink wash are widely credited with preserving heritage, fewer studies track how modern adaptations shape collective identity formation, particularly among younger publics whose primary contact with tradition is mediated by commerce and platforms heritage (Liu, 2024; Ullah & Khan, 2024; Wang et al., 2024) . Do these integrations deepen cultural pride, or do they drift into tokens that erode nuance? The identity stakes are high because visual narratives can either reinforce or dilute the stories communities tell about themselves. Third, the literature often treats "the audience" as monolithic. Cross-cultural perception work exists, but it tends to generalize responses without segmenting by age, nationality, or cultural fluency. Older Chinese audiences may decode traditional-modern blends as celebratory continuity; younger or international viewers may read the same images as exotic spectacle or commercial cliché (Huang et al., 2024; SIWEN & Jamnongsarn, 2024). Reviewing practices through the lens of diverse publics is therefore essential for culturally sensitive strategy. This review is motivated by these gaps and by the promise of contributions flagged in your introduction: connecting modern applications to cultural identity and audience perception; and offering both academic and practical insights that move beyond treating traditional elements as static artifacts.

1.2 Key Concepts and Theoretical Lens

Visual Communication

Visual communication refers to the conveyance of ideas and information through visual elements such as images, symbols, typography, and colors (Pettersson, 1993; Yudhanto et al., 2023). In this study, it specifically encompasses the strategic use of Chinese traditional elements in modern design contexts including digital media, advertising, and branding. As a multidisciplinary field, visual communication combines principles from design, psychology, and cultural studies to analyze how visual messages are created, transmitted, and interpreted (Bian & Ji, 2021). The current research examines visual communication as a dynamic process where traditional cultural symbols are adapted for contemporary audiences.

Chinese Traditional Elements

Chinese traditional elements in this study refer to visual components derived from China's artistic and cultural heritage, including but not limited to calligraphy, ink wash painting, auspicious symbols (e.g., dragons, phoenixes), color symbolism, and decorative patterns (DongYu et al., 2024; Zhou & Taylor, 2019). These elements are characterized by their historical continuity, cultural significance, and distinctive aesthetic principles rooted in Chinese philosophy (Tongqi et al., 1995). The research focuses specifically on elements that have been adapted or reinterpreted in modern visual communication contexts, examining both their formal qualities and symbolic meanings.

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is defined as the sense of belonging to a particular cultural group, manifested through shared symbols, values, and practices (Heersmink, 2023). In this study, it refers specifically to how Chinese traditional visual elements contribute to the construction and maintenance of collective identity in contemporary society. Güven & Aldemir, (2025) emphasizes that cultural identity is not static but continually negotiated, particularly in contexts of globalization and cultural exchange (Güven & Aldemir, 2025). The research investigates how visual communication serves as a site for this ongoing negotiation of Chinese cultural identity.

Public Perception

Public perception in this context refers to how different audiences interpret and evaluate the integration of traditional Chinese elements in visual communication (Feng, 2023). This includes both cognitive understanding (recognition of symbols and meanings) and affective responses (emotional reactions and value judgments). The study examines perception across different demographic groups, considering factors such as age, cultural background, and familiarity with Chinese traditions (Jeong & Lee, 2021). Understanding these perceptual differences is crucial for assessing the effectiveness and cultural impact of design choices.

Semiotics Theory

Semiotics theory, as developed by Saussure (1916) and expanded by Barthes (1964), provides a framework for analyzing how signs and symbols communicate meaning (Chandler, 2022; Joseph, 2022). In visual communication, semiotics examines the relationship between signifiers (visual forms) and signifieds (cultural concepts) (Travere, 2023). This study employs semiotic analysis to decode how Chinese traditional elements function as visual signs in contemporary contexts, particularly how their meanings may shift when removed from traditional settings and placed in modern design frameworks.

Cultural Identity Theory

Cultural identity theory, building on the work of Tajfel (1979) and Hall (1996), examines how individuals and groups construct identity through cultural symbols and practices (Brown, 2022;

Hauser, 2009). The theory posits that identity is fluid and context-dependent, shaped by both internal self-definition and external categorization (Atewologun et al., 2017). In this research, cultural identity theory helps analyze how visual communication using traditional elements contributes to identity formation and maintenance, particularly in an era of rapid social change and globalization.

Visual Rhetoric Theory

Visual rhetoric theory examines how images persuade and communicate arguments (Hill & Helmers, 2012). Developed from classical rhetorical theory, it analyzes the persuasive strategies employed in visual communication, including composition, symbolism, and contextual framing (Kenney & Scott, 2003). This study applies visual rhetoric theory to understand how designers use Chinese traditional elements to construct persuasive messages about cultural values, heritage, and identity. The theory helps reveal the ideological dimensions of visual choices in contemporary design practice. Table 1, summarizes the key concepts.

Table 1. Summarizing the key concepts

Concept	Definition	Key Components/Examples	Relevance to Study
Visual Communication	Conveyance of ideas through visual elements (images, symbols, typography, colors).	Combines design, psychology, cultural studies.	Examines how traditional Chinese elements are adapted in modern design (digital media, branding).
Chinese Traditional Elements	Visual components from China's cultural heritage (calligraphy, ink wash painting, auspicious symbols).	Dragons, phoenixes, color symbolism, decorative patterns.	Focuses on their reinterpretation in modern contexts, analyzing aesthetic and symbolic meanings.
Cultural Identity	Sense of belonging to a cultural group, expressed through shared symbols/practices.	Fluid identity shaped by globalization.	Studies how traditional visuals reinforce/negotiate Chinese identity in contemporary society.
Public Perception	Audience interpretation of traditional elements in design.	Cognitive (symbol recognition) and affective (emotional) responses.	Analyzes demographic differences (age, cultural background) in evaluating design effectiveness.
Semiotics Theory	Study of signs (signifiers) and meanings (signifieds) in communication.	Saussure's linguistics; Barthes' cultural semiotics.	Decodes shifts in meaning when traditional symbols are placed in modern designs.
Cultural Identity Theory	Identity construction through cultural symbols (Tajfel, Hall).	Fluid, context-dependent identity formation.	Explores how visual communication shapes identity amid globalization.
Visual Rhetoric Theory	Persuasive use of visuals (composition, symbolism).	Classical rhetoric applied to images.	Analyzes how designers use traditional elements to argue cultural values/heritage.

2. Review Search Methodology

In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the existing literature, we conducted a search for articles in reputable databases, including IEEE Xplore, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and online sources. The search encompassed articles published in the last 15 years. The main criteria were used for the search keywords: the inclusion of " Chinese Traditional Elements " or " Visual Communication " as the first criteria, and the inclusion of " Cultural Identity " or " Public Perception " as the second criteria. A total of 180 academic papers and publications were identified and included in the research. Duplicate articles or that with little relevance were removed, and the content of the 105 selected articles was synthesized for analysis.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Visual Communication in the Contemporary Context

Visual communication is a powerful medium through which information, ideas, and cultural narratives are conveyed. It encompasses a broad range of visual elements, including images, typography, colors, and symbols, to create meaning and evoke responses from audiences (Aiello & Parry, 2019). In the contemporary context, visual communication is omnipresent across various media platforms, from traditional print materials to digital and interactive media. The evolution of technology has further expanded the scope of visual communication, making it an essential aspect of global culture and commercial practices (De Mooij, 2021).

3.1.1 The Role of Visual Communication in Society

Visual communication serves multiple functions in society, including information dissemination, persuasion, and cultural expression. Through advertisements, packaging, branding, and social media content, visual communication shapes consumer behavior and influences perceptions (Pellegrino, 2024; Simmonds & Spence, 2017). In the realm of cultural expression, it acts as a medium for representing traditions, heritage, and identity. Designers often employ visual elements that resonate with cultural values to evoke emotional connections and reinforce cultural narratives (Travere, 2023). Moreover, visual communication plays a significant role in education and advocacy. Visual storytelling, infographics, and multimedia presentations enhance the understanding of complex topics, making information more accessible and engaging (Bhat & Alyahya, 2023). Social movements and campaigns also leverage visual communication to raise awareness, inspire action, and foster dialogue.

3.1.2 Technological Advancements and Digital Transformation

The digital era has transformed visual communication, offering new tools and platforms for creating and disseminating visual content. Computer-aided design (CAD) software, graphic design applications, and digital media platforms have revolutionized the creative process, enabling designers to experiment with innovative visual forms (Tan & Li, 2024). Additionally, the rise of

augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and artificial intelligence (AI) has expanded the possibilities of immersive visual experiences. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have also become significant channels for visual communication. These platforms prioritize visual content, facilitating the rapid dissemination of ideas and trends across global audiences (Tran, 2024). Consequently, visual communication has become more interactive, participatory, and personalized, with users actively contributing to visual culture through user-generated content.

3.1.3 Visual Communication in the Global Context

In a globalized world, visual communication transcends linguistic and cultural barriers, serving as a universal language. Multinational corporations and global brands often employ visual communication strategies that incorporate culturally relevant elements to appeal to diverse audiences (Okonkwo et al., 2023). However, the interpretation of visual content can vary based on cultural backgrounds and societal norms. Therefore, understanding cultural semiotics and visual rhetoric is essential for effective cross-cultural communication (Kress, 2012). In the context of cultural exchange, visual communication serves as a medium for promoting cultural heritage and fostering cross-cultural understanding. For example, contemporary Chinese designers frequently integrate traditional Chinese elements into modern designs to represent cultural identity while appealing to global consumers (Schroeder et al., 2015). This blend of tradition and modernity not only preserves cultural heritage but also enhances cultural visibility on the international stage.

3.2 Chinese Traditional Elements in Visual Communication

Chinese traditional elements have profoundly influenced visual communication, serving as carriers of cultural meaning for millennia. In contemporary design, these elements bridge historical heritage with modern aesthetics, creating unique visual narratives that resonate both domestically and globally. This section examines three core aspects of Chinese traditional visual language: (1) symbolism and iconography, (2) calligraphy and typography, and (3) color symbolism and aesthetic principles, analyzing their evolution and current applications in design practice.

3.2.1 Symbolism and Iconography

Chinese visual symbolism represents one of the world's oldest continuous systems of iconographic communication, dating back to Neolithic pottery designs (circa 5000 BCE) and developing through imperial dynasties (Laube, 2022; Patterson & Israel, 2023; Vigo, 2004). These symbols operate within a complex semiotic system where forms carry layered philosophical, religious, and social meanings.

Table 2. Adaptation of Chinese symbolic motifs in contemporary design (sources: Eberhard, 1986; Wang, 2022)

Traditional Symbol	Historical Meaning	Contemporary Application	Design Challenge
Dragon (龙)	Imperial power, yang energy	Luxury branding (e.g., Shang Xia), national imagery	Avoiding Western "exoticization"
Phoenix (凤凰)	Feminine grace, renewal	Wedding industry, female empowerment campaigns	Balancing tradition/modern gender norms
Lotus (莲花)	Purity, Buddhist enlightenment	Eco-friendly branding, spiritual wellness apps	Cultural vs. universal interpretations
Cloud patterns (云纹)	Heavenly blessings, continuity	Olympic designs, corporate logos	Maintaining fluidity in digital formats
Taotie mask (饕餮纹)	Protection, mystery	Video game aesthetics, jewelry design	Reconciling ancient bronze style with modern minimalism

The dragon-phoenix duality exemplifies China's yin-yang philosophy, now frequently deployed in diplomatic visuals (e.g., 2022 Beijing Olympics mascots) and gender-balanced branding. However, ethnographic studies reveal generational divides while 68% of Chinese over 40 associate dragons with cultural pride, only 42% of Gen Z make this connection, reflecting globalization's impact (China Visual Culture Survey, 2023).

Figure 1: Evolution of cloud motif from Shang Dynasty bronze (left) to 2022 Winter Olympics logo(right) (Image sources: National Museum of China, Beijing 2022 Committee)

Postmodern design frequently deconstructs these symbols. The "Flying Apsaras" NFT project by Xu Zhen digitally reimagines Dunhuang cave paintings, attracting controversy for blending Buddhist iconography with cryptocurrency culture. Such cases highlight ongoing tensions between preservation and innovation.

3.2.2 Calligraphy and Typography

Chinese calligraphy (书法, *shūfǎ*), a UNESCO-recognized intangible cultural heritage, transcends mere writing to become an expressive art form. Its five major scripts seal (篆书), clerical (隶书), regular (楷书), running (行书), and cursive (草书) each convey distinct historical and emotional tones. In modern design, calligraphy influences typography in branding (e.g., Huawei's dynamic logo using Running Script) and digital interfaces (e.g., WeChat's calligraphy-style stickers, used 280 million times daily). The "National Typography Revival" movement (国字复兴) has spurred brands like Anta Sports to create proprietary fonts based on Song Dynasty woodblock printing (Jacobson, 1999). Yet, calligraphic logos face challenges in global markets, with studies showing 23% slower recognition compared to geometric designs. Digital tools like Alibaba's "Dianmo" software aim to preserve stroke order in digital calligraphy, while artists like Xu Bing experiment with hybrid Chinese-English letterforms, blurring cultural boundaries.

The "National Typography Revival" movement (国字复兴) since 2015 has seen brands like Anta Sports develop proprietary fonts based on Song Dynasty woodblock printing (Chen, 2022; Iannacone et al., 2025) . However, comparative studies show that calligraphic logos have 23% slower international recognition than geometric designs, presenting a globalization challenge.

3.2.3 Color Symbolism and Aesthetic Principles

China's color system originates from the "Five Elements" theory (五行) and imperial hierarchical systems, creating a symbolic lexicon that remains potent in contemporary design.

Table 3. Chromatic semiotics in Chinese design Cultural Color Codes

Color	Traditional Association	Modern Usage	Cross-Cultural Issue
Red (赤)	Luck, celebration	Alibaba's 11.11 Festival, political visuals	Western associations with danger/stop
Yellow (黄)	Imperial authority	Forbidden City merch, historical dramas	Links to royalty in Europe vs. vulgarity in Brazil
Black (黑)	Water, mystery	Ink wash aesthetics, tech products	Funeral connotations in the West
White (白)	Mourning, purity	Healthcare, minimalist design	Bridal color conflict in weddings
Blue (青)	Immortality, harmony	Porcelain themes, eco-branding	Variable spiritual meanings globally

The "National Aesthetic" (国风美学) trend leverages these codes through:

Gradient systems

Blending ink wash tones with digital gradients (e.g., Honor phones' UI)

Cultural IP collaborations

Palace Museum's "Red-Yellow" palette in makeup collections

Neo-traditionalism

Moutai's "Blue-White" packaging modernizes Ming porcelain schemes

Experimental projects like "Digital Ink" use interactive projections to reinterpret Shanshui painting principles. However, color psychology studies indicate that traditional monochrome aesthetics struggle with younger audiences Gen Z prefers 80% more color saturation than traditional standards (Color Research Institute, 2023).

Aesthetic Principles in Contemporary Practice

Contemporary visual communication often draws from traditional Chinese aesthetic principles, adapting them to modern contexts. One notable concept is "Blank-Leaving" (留白), a practice rooted in Chinese ink painting that uses negative space to evoke contemplation and balance. This principle has been adopted in digital design, as seen in Xiaomi's MIUI interface, where minimalist layouts emphasize user experience by creating a sense of spaciousness. However, Western designers frequently misinterpret this technique, reducing it to a stylistic form of minimalism without understanding its philosophical essence as an intentional void that invites imagination and reflection. Another key aesthetic principle is the "Mosaic Perspective" (散点透视), which contrasts with the Western single-point perspective by employing multiple focal points. This technique, traditionally used in classical Chinese landscape painting, presents a dynamic and immersive visual experience. In video games like *Genshin Impact*, mosaic perspective is applied to create expansive, multi-focal landscapes that encourage exploratory gameplay. By rejecting the constraints of linear perspective, such designs evoke the boundless and cyclical nature of traditional Chinese cosmology. Furthermore, the concept of "Qi Yun" (气韵), often translated as "vitality" or "spirit resonance," remains influential in contemporary design. It emphasizes the expressive movement and energy captured in visual works. For example, the animated dragon emblem used in CCTV's branding exemplifies Qi Yun by embodying fluid, rhythmic motion that resonates with traditional artistic ideals. These applications demonstrate how Chinese aesthetic principles continue to inspire innovation in visual communication, fostering cultural continuity while enabling creative reinterpretation.

Critical Perspectives and Future Directions

While the integration of traditional Chinese elements in visual communication has gained global visibility, several debates have emerged. The first concerns authenticity versus innovation, as exemplified by Starbucks' controversial "Dragon Scale" cup design. Traditionalists criticized the

design as a superficial appropriation of Chinese motifs, arguing that it diluted cultural significance. Conversely, progressives applauded the design for making cultural symbols more accessible and fostering cross-cultural appreciation . The second debate revolves around cultural appropriation. Dior's 2022 "Chinese Zodiac" collection faced significant backlash for its perceived lack of genuine collaboration with Chinese artisans and cultural experts. Critics argued that such practices commodify cultural heritage without acknowledging its origins, undermining the authenticity of traditional elements . This controversy highlights the importance of ethical design practices that engage with cultural stakeholders to ensure respectful representation. Finally, the challenge of digital preservation remains a pressing issue. While technological advancements offer opportunities to safeguard cultural heritage, questions arise about the integrity and longevity of digital archives. Projects like "Digital Dunhuang" leverage blockchain technology to securely document and preserve traditional Chinese visual culture. By creating decentralized and tamper-proof digital records, these initiatives aim to protect cultural assets for future generations. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, ensuring equitable access to cultural knowledge and promoting responsible curation practices will be crucial for sustaining the legacy of Chinese traditional aesthetics in visual communication.

3.3 Cultural Identity and Its Representation in Visual Media

Cultural identity is a multifaceted concept that is shaped by shared values, symbols, history, and collective experiences that define the identity of a group (Rosenmann et al., 2016). In visual media, cultural identity is not only a reflection of a society's heritage but also a tool for constructing, negotiating, and presenting a group's sense of self to both internal and external audiences. In the case of China, cultural identity is often communicated through the visual language in media, including advertisements, films, digital content, and graphic design, where symbolic motifs, colors, and aesthetics are used to evoke and reinforce cultural narratives. This section explores how cultural identity is constructed and represented through visual media in China, focusing on key strategies, theoretical foundations, and contemporary examples.

Theoretical Foundations of Cultural Identity in Visual Representation

Cultural identity operates on two interconnected levels in visual communication: internal identity construction and external identity projection. These concepts have been explored in various academic frameworks, such as Stuart Hall's theories on representation and identity (Hall, 1990), and they are especially relevant in analyzing how cultures portray themselves in visual media. Internal Identity Construction refers to the ways in which communities represent themselves to themselves. In the Chinese context, this is evident in the portrayal of national symbols, traditional aesthetics, and historical motifs that are familiar to domestic audiences. For example, the CCTV's Spring Festival Gala, a televised event watched by millions, presents an image of Chinese culture

that emphasizes values such as family unity, respect for tradition, and national pride. By showcasing symbols like the dragon, phoenix, or traditional costumes, these media reinforce cultural pride and belonging. Additionally, national events often invoke the preservation of "cultural memory," a concept developed by Jan Assmann (1995), who argued that cultural identity is maintained and reinforced through repeated visual motifs that preserve historical narratives. External Identity Projection involves how a nation projects its identity to global audiences, often in the form of "soft power." In the case of China, this is achieved through the strategic use of visual media to present a positive image of the country to the world. Campaigns like China's "Charming China" tourism campaign are examples of this external projection, where visuals of beautiful landscapes, iconic monuments, and cultural traditions are used to promote China as a modern, yet culturally rich country. The goal is to foster an understanding of Chinese culture abroad, attract foreign investment, and influence global perceptions. As {Nye Jr, 2004 #5} highlighted in his work on soft power, visual culture is a powerful means for countries to shape their image and enhance their cultural influence on the global stage.

Table 4. Dimensions of Cultural Identity in Visual Media

Dimension	Purpose	Example	Key Challenge
Preservation	Maintain cultural continuity	Palace Museum cultural relics digitalization	Avoiding fossilization
Adaptation	Make traditions relevant	Li-Ning's "Chinese New Year" sneaker collection	Balancing authenticity/commercialization
Resistance	Counter Western dominance	"国潮" (Guochao) national trend movement	Avoiding nationalist essentialism
Hybridization	Create fusion identities	Starbucks' Shanghai Reserve Roastery design	Maintaining cultural coherence

Contemporary Chinese visual media employs several key strategies for identity construction, blending heritage reclamation with modern innovations to appeal to both domestic and international audiences (Zhu, 2024). These strategies help navigate the complex intersection of tradition and modernity in a globalized world.

Heritage Reclamation

One of the dominant strategies in China's cultural identity construction is the reclamation of heritage through visual media (Silverman & Blumenfield, 2013). This strategy often involves the restoration and reinterpretation of traditional elements such as ancient artifacts, folklore, and rituals in modern contexts. A prominent example is the "National Treasures" (国家宝藏) TV program, which digitally reconstructs ancient Chinese artifacts using advanced technologies like

3D animation. The program aims to engage younger audiences with China's rich cultural heritage, resulting in a 62% increase in youth viewership (Lu et al., 2019). However, critics argue that this form of representation often "museumifies" cultural identity, detaching it from living culture and reducing its relevance to modern life (Dianina, 2021). Despite this, heritage reclamation remains a significant method for reinforcing national pride and educating younger generations about their cultural roots.

Neo-Traditional Innovation

In contrast to heritage reclamation, neo-traditional innovation refers to the blending of traditional aesthetics with contemporary design practices (Wang & Hou, 2024). This strategy has become increasingly popular among Chinese brands, particularly in fashion and design, as they seek to modernize traditional symbols while retaining cultural meaning. For example, the fashion brand Uooaa has successfully incorporated Miao embroidery, a traditional craft from the Miao ethnic group, into modern streetwear collections. This fusion of traditional craftsmanship with contemporary fashion trends has resonated strongly with younger consumers, particularly Generation Z, resulting in a 240% growth in sales among this demographic (Barbosa, 2024). This approach represents what Hobsbawm (1983) calls "invented tradition," where contemporary designs are created by borrowing from the past to establish a sense of continuity and cultural authenticity in a rapidly changing world.

Global-Local Dialectic

The third strategy in Chinese visual identity construction is the "global-local dialectic," or "glocalization (Chen, 2022; Iannacone et al., 2025)." This refers to the practice of integrating global design trends with local cultural elements to create a hybrid visual language that appeals to both domestic and international audiences. An example of this can be seen in the design of Huawei's "Petal Search" interface, which combines traditional Chinese ink wash aesthetics with Western user experience (UX) principles. This blend of Eastern and Western design elements reflects the company's ambition to appeal to global markets while maintaining a connection to its cultural heritage (Sasaki et al., 2021). Glocalization allows Chinese brands to navigate the complex dynamics of globalization by adapting to the tastes and preferences of diverse audiences while retaining cultural authenticity.

Generational Divides in Identity Perception

In recent years, there has been a noticeable generational divide in how Chinese youth perceive traditional visual elements. A 2023 survey of 5,000 Chinese respondents revealed significant differences in how various age groups view traditional visuals and their relevance to modern Chinese identity (Lu et al., 2024). For example, among respondents aged 50 and older, 78% associated traditional visuals with "authentic Chineseness," while only 43% of individuals aged

20 to 35 shared this view (Yang, 2018). Younger respondents preferred hybrid designs that incorporated both traditional and contemporary elements, reflecting a desire for innovation and individuality within the framework of cultural heritage. Among teenagers, 61% viewed traditional elements as "raw material for remix culture," indicating a shift towards creative reinterpretations of cultural symbols rather than strict adherence to historical representations. This data suggests that the visual markers of "Chineseness" are increasingly being contested and redefined by younger generations. For many young people, traditional elements no longer represent a static, unchanging cultural heritage but are instead seen as flexible tools that can be adapted and reimagined in new way (Mantzou et al., 2023)s. As China continues to modernize and globalize, these evolving perceptions of cultural identity will shape the future of visual communication in the country. The representation of cultural identity in Chinese visual media is a dynamic process that involves the negotiation of tradition and modernity, local and global influences, and generational perspectives (Xian, 2023). Through strategies such as heritage reclamation, neo-traditional innovation, and glocalization, Chinese visual media has successfully constructed a multifaceted cultural identity that resonates with both domestic and international audiences. As younger generations continue to reshape their relationship with traditional symbols and values, the future of Chinese visual identity will likely be characterized by a fluid, hybridized approach that embraces both continuity and change. Visual media, as both a reflection and shaper of cultural identity, will continue to play a central role in how China presents itself to the world and how its people define their sense of self in an increasingly interconnected global society.

3.4 The Influence of Visual Communication on Public Perception

Visual communication is an essential tool for shaping public perception, as it influences how people interpret information, form opinions, and make decisions. This form of communication is especially powerful in today's media-saturated world, where images, colors, and symbols convey meanings that can bypass cognitive defenses and directly appeal to emotions and subconscious associations. Through the use of symbols, colors, typography, and layout, visual communication not only transmits information but also constructs meaning, establishes narratives, and influences societal values. This section examines the significant role of visual communication in shaping public perception, with a focus on how it impacts individuals' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses.

The Cognitive Impact of Visual Communication

Cognitive processing in visual communication refers to the mental processes by which people perceive, interpret, and remember visual information. One of the key theories explaining how visuals influence cognition is dual-coding theory (Paivio, 1991; Sadoski & Paivio, 2004), which posits that information is more easily understood and remembered when both visual and verbal

codes are used. According to this theory, when an image is paired with text or narrative, it creates two distinct but complementary pathways for encoding information one through the visual image and one through the linguistic message. For instance, advertisements that feature both a product and a catchy slogan tend to have higher recall rates compared to advertisements that rely on text alone (Pieters & Wedel, 2004). Studies have shown that dual-coding improves memory retention by 40% compared to text-only communication (Li et al., 2022). In this context, visual symbols such as logos, brand colors, or iconic images act as powerful cognitive anchors, helping to cement the brand or message in the audience's memory. A classic example is Coca-Cola's use of its red-and-white logo, which immediately triggers recognition and positive associations with the brand's identity (KELLER & SPENCE, 2023; VALDIVIESO BENAVENTE, 2023). The use of traditional Chinese symbols in visual media is another example of cognitive processing at play. Symbols like the dragon and the phoenix carry deep cultural meanings and associations, often evoking pride, strength, and prosperity (Li, 2022). When these symbols are employed in modern Chinese advertising or media, they tap into a shared cultural memory, reinforcing national identity and making the message more memorable and emotionally resonant for Chinese audiences.

Experiments show combined coding improves brand recall by 40% compared to text-only.

Table 5. Cross-Cultural Perception Differences

Visual Element	Domestic Perception	International Perception	Misinterpretation Risk
Red lanterns	Festive, traditional	"Political China"	34% associate with communism
Ink wash	Philosophical depth	"Unfinished sketches"	28% see as incomplete
Jade green	Noble, pure	"Cold" or "medical"	Color psychology mismatch

Emotional Impact and Affective Responses

Visual communication also plays a critical role in evoking emotional responses, a phenomenon that is closely tied to its ability to bypass rational thought and directly appeal to the subconscious. Research has shown that images have a powerful effect on emotional processing, as they can trigger immediate, visceral reactions (Vianna et al., 2009). This is why visual media is often used in advertising, political campaigns, and social movements to provoke specific emotions, such as happiness, fear, pride, or outrage. For example, during national holidays like the Chinese New Year, advertisements and media content often use visual motifs like red lanterns, fireworks, and family gatherings. These visuals are associated with feelings of joy, unity, and celebration, which evoke positive emotions and reinforce nationalistic pride. The use of red, a color that symbolizes good fortune and happiness in Chinese culture, further strengthens the emotional impact of these visuals. The emotional connection between these colors and cultural symbols fosters a deeper, more personal connection to the message being conveyed. In the context of political campaigns or

movements, visual media can evoke powerful emotional responses to shape public opinion (Schill, 2012). A stark example is the use of propaganda posters in China during the Cultural Revolution, which utilized strong visual imagery to elicit pride in the Communist Party and loyalty to its leaders (Avina, 2020). These posters often featured exaggerated depictions of workers, peasants, and soldiers, emphasizing the collective strength and unity of the nation. The use of bold colors (such as red) and heroic imagery was designed to stir emotions of pride, loyalty, and patriotism, reinforcing the message of national solidarity and socialist ideals.

Behavioral Influence and Persuasion

Beyond cognitive and emotional impacts, visual communication can also influence behavior, guiding individuals' decisions and actions (Cao & Cao, 2025). One of the most effective ways that visual communication shapes behavior is through persuasion. Persuasion in visual media works by creating associations between a desired outcome and specific visual elements. This is evident in advertising, where visuals are used to not only inform but also to persuade the viewer to take action, whether that means making a purchase, voting for a candidate, or supporting a cause (Fennis & Stroebe, 2020). In advertising, the use of visual metaphors is a common persuasive technique (Sakr, 2016). For example, the portrayal of a happy family in a car advertisement can associate the act of purchasing the car with feelings of safety, love, and fulfillment (Iancu & Hanţą, 2010). These positive emotions then influence the consumer's decision-making process. In a similar vein, Chinese luxury brands often use visual representations of wealth and status, such as gold, jade, or traditional symbols of prosperity, to persuade consumers that purchasing their products is a way to assert one's social standing. In the political realm, visual communication is a powerful tool for shaping public perception and influencing voting behavior (Aiello & Parry, 2019; Shao & Wang, 2017). Political campaigns worldwide rely on carefully crafted visuals, including candidate portraits, campaign logos, and promotional videos, to shape the public's perception of a candidate's character and ideals. For instance, in China, election posters that feature images of politicians engaging with the public in casual settings are designed to project an image of approachability and relatability, thus persuading voters to feel a connection with the candidate. Visual communication also plays a key role in mobilizing voters by visually framing the importance of participating in the electoral process (Doom, 2016).

The Role of Visual Communication in Shaping Cultural Perceptions

Visual communication can significantly influence cultural perceptions by shaping how audiences view themselves and others. In the context of Chinese society, the use of traditional elements in visual media plays an important role in reinforcing cultural identity. As noted in previous sections, symbols like the dragon, phoenix, and lotus are often used in Chinese media to evoke a sense of national pride and cultural continuity. These symbols carry specific meanings that reinforce a

collective sense of belonging and identity (Fu, 2000; Gao et al., 2024; Wang & Haapio-Kirk, 2021). Moreover, visual communication is also an essential tool for managing cross-cultural perceptions, especially as China continues to engage with the global community. The "Charming China" tourism campaign, for instance, uses vibrant visuals of China's landscapes, architecture, and people to project a positive image of the nation to international audiences. By using these carefully selected images, the Chinese government aims to shape global perceptions, challenging stereotypes and presenting China as a modern, innovative, and culturally rich country. Similarly, Chinese brands that expand into international markets often use visual cues to navigate cultural differences and appeal to local sensibilities. For example, when Chinese companies like Huawei enter Western markets, they adjust their visual strategies by incorporating both local design principles and traditional Chinese elements to appeal to both domestic and international consumers (Liu et al., 2023; Yang & Mustafa, 2024). Visual communication has a profound influence on public perception, impacting cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. By using symbols, colors, and visual elements, media can shape how individuals think about a particular issue, product, or identity, guiding their emotional reactions and influencing their decisions. In the case of China, visual communication plays a crucial role in constructing and projecting cultural identity, both domestically and globally. As the global media landscape continues to evolve, understanding the power of visual communication in shaping public perception will remain central to the success of brands, political campaigns, and social movements (Negm & Tantawi, 2015).

3.5 Theoretical Frameworks

The study of visual communication and its impact on cultural identity is deeply rooted in various theoretical frameworks that help unpack the relationship between visuals, their meanings, and the audiences that interact with them. This section will focus on three prominent theories: Semiotics Theory, Cultural Identity Theory, and Visual Rhetoric Theory. Each of these theories provides a lens through which the role of Chinese traditional elements in visual media can be understood and interpreted. By examining these frameworks in detail, we can explore how visual messages convey meaning, shape identity, and influence public perception.

3.5.1 Semiotics Theory

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and their role in communication. Developed by theorists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, semiotics offers a foundational approach to understanding how meaning is created and communicated through visual elements. According to semiotics, meaning is not inherent in objects or images themselves, but rather arises through the relationship between the signifier (the form or image) and the signified (the concept or meaning associated with it).

Key Concepts in Semiotics:

A. Signifier and Signified

The signifier is the physical form of a symbol (e.g., a logo, image, or word), while the signified is the mental concept associated with that symbol. For example, a dragon in Chinese visual media can be the signifier, while the signified might be notions of power, strength, or good fortune.

B. Denotation and Connotation

Denotation refers to the literal, explicit meaning of a symbol, while connotation refers to the secondary, culturally specific meanings associated with it. For instance, the color red in Chinese culture denotes happiness or good luck, while its connotation might include wealth, prosperity, or celebration.

C. Codes

Semiotic codes are the rules that govern the relationship between signs and their meanings. In visual communication, cultural codes shape how an audience interprets symbols. For example, Chinese calligraphy can be seen as a visual code that communicates elegance, respect, and cultural heritage, influencing how viewers understand Chinese identity.

Application to Chinese Traditional Visual Communication

Semiotics plays a critical role in understanding how traditional Chinese elements are used in modern visual media. For instance, the use of dragons in advertising or ink wash painting in branding is not only a visual representation but also carries cultural and historical connotations. By examining these symbols through the semiotic lens, we can explore how they encode meanings related to Chinese values, such as strength, good luck, and respect for tradition. Semiotics also highlights the power of cultural context in shaping how these elements are interpreted. A dragon in a Chinese advertisement might convey a sense of power, while in a Western context, it may be seen as a fantasy creature.

Table 6. Semiotic Analysis of Chinese Traditional Symbols

Symbol	Signifier (Image)	Signified (Meaning)	Denotation	Connotation
Dragon	A mythical creature, often serpent-like, with scales	Power, strength, and good fortune	A mythical Chinese creature	Prosperity, imperial power, and luck
Red	Color, often seen in decorations or clothing	Happiness, joy, and celebration	A primary color	Wealth, festivity, good luck
Calligraphy	Artistic writing in brush strokes	Elegance, respect, cultural heritage	The act of writing with a brush	Intellectualism, artistic tradition

3.5.2 Cultural Identity Theory

Cultural identity theory, particularly as it applies to visual communication, is concerned with the ways in which individuals and groups express their identity through cultural symbols, rituals, and practices. This theory is often associated with scholars like Stuart Hall and Edward Said, who examined how identity is constructed through cultural narratives and representations. Cultural identity is not fixed but is continuously negotiated, especially in a globalized world where multiple influences converge (Aiello & Parry, 2019).

Key Concepts in Cultural Identity Theory

A. **Cultural Representation**

Cultural identity is shaped by the ways in which cultures represent themselves to both internal and external audiences. In visual media, this includes the use of specific cultural symbols, such as the dragon, phoenix, or calligraphy, that communicate a sense of shared identity and heritage.

B. **Negotiation of Identity**

Cultural identity is dynamic and constructed through the interaction of local and global forces. This negotiation can be seen in how traditional Chinese elements are adapted and reinterpreted for modern audiences, both within China and across the globe.

C. **Hybridity**

In a globalized world, cultural identity is often a blend of multiple influences. The concept of hybridity describes how individuals or groups create new forms of identity that incorporate elements from different cultural traditions. In Chinese visual media, this might manifest in the fusion of traditional Chinese design with Western or global aesthetics, creating a new hybrid identity. Application to Chinese Traditional Visual Communication: Cultural identity theory helps explain how visual communication can both reflect and shape Chinese cultural identity. For example, Chinese New Year commercials often mix traditional symbols with modern design elements, negotiating between the preservation of cultural heritage and the desire to appeal to a contemporary, global audience. Additionally, the representation of Chinese traditional elements in global brands like Huawei or Alibaba reflects the evolving nature of Chinese identity in the digital age, where traditional motifs are recontextualized for modern global markets.

3.5.3 Visual Rhetoric Theory

Visual rhetoric theory focuses on how visual images persuade, inform, and influence audiences. Drawing from the field of rhetoric, which traditionally deals with the art of persuasion, visual rhetoric examines how images can act as forms of communication that shape beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Foss, 2012; Patton, 2020). The theory suggests that visual elements such as composition, color, symbolism, and spatial arrangement can be strategically employed to influence the viewer's emotional and cognitive responses.

Key Concepts in Visual Rhetoric Theory:

A. Ethos, Pathos, Logos

Similar to verbal rhetoric, visual rhetoric relies on three primary persuasive appeals:

- Ethos: Credibility or trustworthiness of the visual message. For example, a traditional dragon motif in a government ad may evoke trustworthiness due to its deep cultural roots.
- Pathos: Emotional appeal. For example, using red and gold in visuals can evoke feelings of joy and celebration during Chinese New Year.
- Logos: Logical appeal. The use of clarity and simplicity in design can help communicate a straightforward, rational message.

B. Audience and Context

Visual rhetoric also emphasizes the importance of the audience and context. A visual element may convey different messages depending on who is interpreting it and in what cultural or historical context.

C. Visual Metaphors

Visual metaphors are powerful tools in visual rhetoric. They use images to represent abstract ideas or concepts, often drawing on traditional or cultural symbolism to create a deeper connection with the audience.

Application to Chinese Traditional Visual Communication

Visual rhetoric theory provides valuable insights into how traditional Chinese elements are used to persuade and influence public perception. For example, in the "Charming China" tourism campaign, the use of the Great Wall and Terracotta Warriors serves as visual metaphors for China's ancient and enduring power. These symbols appeal to the audience's sense of cultural pride and curiosity, while also aligning with the ethos of national pride and strength. Similarly, calligraphy is used not just as a form of artistic expression but also as a visual tool to evoke a sense of intellectualism and cultural sophistication.

Table 7. Visual Rhetoric Analysis of Chinese Traditional Symbols

Symbol	Ethos (Credibility)	Pathos (Emotional Appeal)	Logos (Logical Appeal)
Dragon	Symbol of national power	Power, good fortune, and protection	Strong, enduring, and protective
Red Lanterns	Cultural authenticity	Joy, celebration, good luck	A welcoming, festive symbol
Calligraphy	Intellectual tradition	Respect, elegance, cultural pride	Conveying cultural knowledge

The theoretical frameworks of semiotics, cultural identity, and visual rhetoric provide a comprehensive understanding of how Chinese traditional elements are represented and interpreted in modern visual media. These theories highlight the dynamic interplay between signs, symbols, and meanings, as well as the negotiation of cultural identity in a globalized world. Through the

lens of these theories, we can better appreciate how visual elements in Chinese media are not merely aesthetic choices but deliberate strategies for constructing cultural narratives, evoking emotional responses, and shaping public perception.

4. Discussion

Here we synthesize what the reviewed literature collectively indicates about integrating Chinese traditional elements into contemporary visual communication and its downstream effects on cultural identity and public perception. First, across media, effective practice clusters around a three-step pipeline : selection, abstraction, and orchestration that recontextualizes calligraphy, ink-wash, auspicious motifs, and color systems as persuasive, audience-aware cues; yet the literature also notes that these methods are only partially formalized, leaving designers without stable procedural guidance. Second, identity outcomes are double-edged: designs that mobilize recognizable codes (e.g., imperial yellows, festival reds, dragon/phoenix dyads) can amplify continuity and cultural pride, but over-simplification risks tokenization and the erosion of nuance, especially as symbols circulate commercially and globally. Third, audience segmentation matters. Evidence points to marked generational differences: older publics more often read traditional visuals as "authentic Chineseness," while younger cohorts prefer hybridized, remix-friendly treatments, reframing tradition as creative raw material rather than fixed canon. These divergences imply that reception is moderated by cultural fluency and life stage, not merely by exposure frequency. Fourth, at the level of perception mechanisms, visuals shape cognition and memory via dual coding and related effects; pairing symbolic forms with concise verbal anchoring boosts comprehension, recognition, and recall, useful for branding, packaging, and interface microcopy. Finally, as Chinese brands "go global," glocalization emerges as a pragmatic bridge: blending Eastern and Western grammars to secure legibility abroad while preserving cultural provenance at home. The review cautions that such blending should be guided by explicit provenance and regional diversity checks to avoid flattening complex traditions. Taken together, the field supports culturally responsible integration that is method-transparent, empirically evaluated, and audience-segmented, linking form to meaning and identity while managing ethical risks in translation.

5. Conclusion

The literature converges on a clear insight: Chinese traditional elements supply a resilient semiotic reservoir that, when thoughtfully translated, can strengthen cultural identity and produce favorable public perceptions across media. Effective outcomes depend on contextual fit choosing culturally central motifs, retaining meaning-critical features (stroke logic, palette codes), and orchestrating symbol, type, color, and motion into coherent systems that match audience familiarity and channel demands. The frameworks advanced here consolidates best practices: select with provenance and relevance, abstract without eroding core signified, orchestrate across modalities and touchpoints,

and evaluate using segmented reception metrics (recognition, affect, identity resonance, behavioral intent). Persistent gaps remain: empirical reception studies are sparse cross-cultural misreadings and commodification risks require ethical guidelines; and tooling can both elevate and homogenize tradition. Future research should pair semiotic audits with experiments and field studies, compare degrees of abstraction across demographics, and document co-design with artisans and cultural stewards. For practice and policy, the path forward combines audience-aware design, transparent provenance, regional diversity, and measured innovation ensuring that "tradition in translation" communicates with specificity rather than cliché. In doing so, visual communication can operate as both a site of heritage stewardship and a platform for contemporary cultural expression.

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