

Exploring Differences in Automotive Logo Design Between Chinese and Western Cultures Based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

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Abstract: This paper, based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, provides a cultural perspective on understanding domestic automotive design by comparing the differences between Chinese and Western cultures. The analysis of cultural dimension indexes in both Chinese and Western contexts reveals significant differences in IDV (individualism), MAS (masculinity), and LTO (long-term orientation). Through the comparison of three aspects: individualism vs collectivism, long-term vs short-term orientation, and long-term orientation vs short-term orientation, this paper explores the differences in automotive logo design resulting from variations in design form, aesthetic, and concept due to cultural disparities between China and the West. Additionally, well-known automotive brand cases in the market are cited for analysis. Based on the disparities in Chinese and Western cultures, this paper proposes that through cultural cross-pollination, domestic automotive logo designs can break away from homogeneity, offering insights for domestic automotive brands to expand into overseas markets through distinctive logo designs.

Keywords: Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, Chinese-Western cultural differences, automotive logo design

1. Introduction

Automotive logos represent the essence of automobile brands and serve as core promotional images in the automotive market. They are integral to automotive design. However, Chinese automotive companies have primarily focused on product appearance and functionality, neglecting the importance of logo design. The backwardness in logo design has hindered the expansion of automobiles into overseas markets [1]. French thinker Jean Baudrillard once remarked that in the consumption of goods, there lies a deeper level of "symbol" consumption. Automotive logos are part of this symbolism [2]. People no longer merely consider the functional aspects of cars when making choices but emphasize the social attributes, namely symbolic value.

2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and Differences between Chinese and Western Indices

Geert Hofstede is a leading figure in contemporary cross-cultural studies. In 1980, his seminal work "Culture's Consequences" elaborated on the differences between Eastern and Western cultures.

Conducting cultural difference surveys and analyses among over 70 subsidiaries of IBM globally, he later incorporated the contributions of scholars like Michael H. Bond to supplement his theory [3]. He summarized six dimensions for measuring national cultural differences: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint.

According to official data, as shown in Table 1, the most significant difference lies in the Individualism average index (IDV). China’s index is 20, while the West’s is as high as 73. This stark contrast indicates the Western pursuit of individualism, while China emphasizes collectivism. The Western Masculinity (MAS) index is slightly lower than China’s, suggesting that Western culture may possess slightly softer qualities compared to Eastern cultures. Furthermore, the Long-Term Orientation (LTO) index also shows a significant difference, with China’s index reaching 87. This underscores China’s emphasis on long-term perspectives, while the West prioritizes short-term benefits [4].

Table 1: Hofstede Cultural Dimension Indices

Country	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO
United Kingdom	35	89	66	35	51
United States	40	91	62	46	26
Canada	39	80	52	48	36
Australia	38	90	61	51	21
France	68	71	43	86	63
Belgium	65	75	54	94	83
Germany	35	67	66	65	83
Netherlands	38	80	14	53	67
Switzerland	34	68	70	58	74
Western Countries’ Average	37	73	48	56	49
China	80	20	66	30	87

3. Differences in Logo Design under Chinese and Western Cultural Variations

The differences in Chinese and Western cultures inevitably lead to different designs, whether in design thinking or in form. This is vividly demonstrated in automotive logo design. The following text will analyze the differentiation of automotive logo design between China and the West from three aspects: design form, design aesthetics, and design concepts under Hofstede’s cultural dimensions.

3.1. Differences in Design Form: Individualism vs. Collectivism

Geert Hofstede defines individualism and collectivism in his book “Culture and Organization: Software of the Mind” as the emphasis on individual interests or group interests in social relationships [5]. The degree of individualism or collectivism in society affects people’s ways of thinking, which inevitably influences the form of design.

In the West, individual interests are typically the starting point, emphasizing self-expression and freedom. Since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the mainstream values in the West have been individualism. Adam Smith’s “An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations” laid the theoretical foundation for the free market, emphasizing the autonomy of individuals and the

equality of social relations [6]. Western individualistic thinking is evidently reflected in various design creations. Diverse Western automotive logo designs showcase differences, with unrestricted forms and various contours. For example, the shield-shaped Cadillac, the letter logo of Land Rover, the wing-style Aston Martin, and the animal-shaped Jaguar (see Figure 1) all pursue uniqueness to establish brand personality and differentiation.



Figure 1: Logos of Western countries' automotive brands, from left to right: Cadillac, Land Rover, Aston Martin, Jaguar

However, in contrast, China has had a very distinct collectivist notion since ancient times. Confucius' concept of "ren" describes a concept of social collective relations [7]. The "Book of Rites · Fang" states, "A noble person values others over oneself, prioritizing others before oneself," placing collective interests first and sacrificing personal interests for the greater good. This pursuit of "collective interests" greatly influences the form of design. Currently, China has over 100 automotive brands, and the vast majority of automotive logos are unable to break away from oval-shaped frames and simple geometric designs. This adherence to conventions and the phenomenon of homogenization are particularly severe. Examples include FAW GROUP, GAC MOTOR, CHERY, and others (see Figure 2). This design form pursues the collective aesthetic of the domestic market.



Figure 2: Logos of domestic Chinese automotive brands, from left to right: FAW GROUP, GAC MOTOR, CHERY

3.2. Differences in Design Aesthetics: Masculine vs. Feminine Traits

Hofstede suggests distinct differences between masculine and feminine traits in creative work. Taking painting creation as an example, due to cultural differences, Chinese ink wash paintings and Western oil paintings exhibit stark contrasts between masculine and feminine traits. These aesthetic differences also influence the field of design.

In Western art, there is a tendency towards femininity. Historically, Westerners believed in the "divine human resemblance," with many paintings depicting the goddess of beauty, Venus, as the subject. The concept of female beauty during the Renaissance had a profound impact on subsequent generations, evident in works like "The Birth of Venus," "Mona Lisa," and "The Triumph of Galatea." [8] From numerous classical and modern art pieces, it is apparent that Western painters prefer human subjects, skillfully employing curves to express beauty with delicate brushwork and exquisite compositions and colors, all reflecting the feminine style inherent in Western traditional aesthetics. This aesthetic preference also influences design, with automotive logo designs incorporating graceful

curves (see Figure 3). For example, the iconic Rolls-Royce logo featuring the image of a goddess and intricate cursive lettering exudes a graceful femininity, as does Bentley's "angel wings," all reflecting unmistakable femininity.



Figure 3: Logos of Western countries' automotive brands, from left to right: Rolls-Royce, Bentley

Comparatively, Chinese traditional landscape paintings emphasize the four forces of "tendons, flesh, bones, and qi" in brushwork, which reflects the aesthetic of masculine art. During the late Tang Dynasty and Five Dynasties period, the renowned painter Jing Hao summarized the creation experience and theory of ink wash paintings, pioneering a majestic painting style characterized by bold brushstrokes and grand compositional perspectives. These paintings seemed to be infused with boundless upward momentum [9]. This enduring preference for masculine aesthetics also influences the field of design. For instance, in the design of logos for domestic Chinese automobiles such as Great Wall Motor, HAWTAI MOTOR, and BAIC MOTOR (see Figure 4), sturdy straight lines and geometric shapes are used to convey stability, while sharp metallic colors express a sense of robustness. This reflects the masculine beauty in the logo designs of domestic Chinese automobiles.



Figure 4: Logos of domestic Chinese automotive brands, from left to right: Great Wall Motor, HAWTAI MOTOR, BAIC MOTOR

3.3. Differences in Design Concepts: Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Orientation

The opposition between "long-term orientation" and "short-term orientation" refers to the orientation towards time in specific cultures, including attitudes towards time and how time is utilized. Societies with a long-term orientation focus on the future, while cultures with a short-term orientation are more concerned with immediate benefits, considering the present crucial. This cultural deviation also leads to differences in design concepts [10].

The West tends to have a short-term orientation, prioritizing short-term goals and profits. In consumer societies, people consume not the functional attributes of goods but their social attributes, namely symbolic value [11]. In this "fast food" culture context, logo designs aim for rapid consumer recognition to expand consumption possibilities. Most Western automotive logos adopt dynamic streamlined forms to quickly catch consumers' attention, such as the horse of Ferrari, the bull of Lamborghini, and the emblem of Ford Mustang (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: Logos of Western countries' automotive brands, from left to right: Ferrari, Lamborghini, Ford Mustang

However, China emphasizes looking towards the future, manifesting in thrift and frugality. As stated in the “Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government,” “If one takes and uses in moderation and with restraint, one will always have enough.” The philosophy of “upholding heavenly principles and eliminating human desires” further developed from the Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism of the Song Dynasty. During the Ming Dynasty, the implementation of the “Prohibition of Extravagance” required descendants to be thrifty. The practical stance expressed in Song Yingxing’s “Exploitation of the Works of Nature” emphasized a strong practical stance, stating, “Gold, although beautiful, is worth sixteen thousand times less than black iron, yet it does not produce any more effective results in daily use.” [12] This pragmatic approach to creation reduces waste of resources at the source and maximizes efficiency, a design concept that has persisted into modern times. Many domestic car logos in China, such as Hong Qi and JAC GROUP, adopt hollow designs. One significant reason for this is to reduce costs and avoid material wastage (see Figure 6). This approach aims to establish a strong brand reputation and foster enduring connections with consumers.



Figure 6: Logos of domestic Chinese automotive brands, from left to right: Hong Qi, JAC GROUP

4. Conclusion

In summary, the cultural differences between East and West have significant impacts on automotive logo design. Understanding these cultural disparities is essential for designers. In today's world of diverse development, although the competition in the automotive markets of China and the West is fierce, mutual cultural penetration enables mutual development between Chinese and Western automotive industries. Therefore, Chinese designers should make more attempts to explore the cultural background of brands when designing automotive logos, break the homogenization dilemma, and better realize the practical and aesthetic values of automotive logos. Continuous innovation and improvement of automotive logos are necessary. In the future, it is crucial to find a balance between differences, further expand the overseas market for domestic automobiles, and create distinctive automotive brands.

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