

# A Visual Semiotic Analysis of Graphic Chinese Character

## City and Provincial Logos

### การวิเคราะห์อักขระภาพจีนในตราสัญลักษณ์เมืองและจังหวัด

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#### Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the forms of graphic Chinese character logos of cities and provincial regions in China from the visual semiotic perspective. Visual grammar proposed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006) is employed to analyze the representational, interactive and compositional resources of 75 graphic Chinese character logos for cities or provincial areas. This paper finds that more of the representational than those of the interactive or compositional resources are employed in these logo designs. Repetition and metonymy coincide with all three semiotic resources for meaning construction. Interestingly, it was found that the two most common cultural elements of Chinese architecture and landscape represented by the resources are meaningfully associated with Chinese philosophical thoughts of the requirement of rite and pursuit of harmony and unity between humankind and nature.

**Keywords:** Graphic Chinese Character City and Provincial Logos; Visual Semiotic Analysis; Representational Resource; Interactive Resource; Compositional Resource.

#### บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์อักขระภาพจีนในตราสัญลักษณ์เมืองและจังหวัดในประเทศจีนจากมุมมองของสัญศาสตร์เชิงภาพ โดยใช้หลักเกณฑ์การใช้ภาษาภาพของกันเธอร์ เครสส์ และธีโอ ฟาน ลีเวน ในการสร้างความหมายจากอักขระภาพจีนในตราสัญลักษณ์เมือง และจังหวัดจำนวน 75 ชิ้นงาน ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ในการออกแบบตราสัญลักษณ์นั้น มีการใช้การแทนความ (Representative Resource) มากกว่าการมีปฏิสัมพันธ์โต้ตอบ (Interactive Resource) และการให้คุณค่าจากองค์ประกอบทางกายภาพ (Compositional Resource) ส่วนการทำซ้ำและการใช้ภาพพจน์เป็นวิธีการที่ใช้ร่วมกับหลักการสร้างความหมายทางสัญศาสตร์ทั้ง 3 ประเภท ที่กล่าวมา นอกจากนี้ผลงานวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นว่าองค์ประกอบพื้นฐานทางด้านวัฒนธรรม 2 ประการ อันได้แก่ วัฒนธรรมด้านสถาปัตยกรรม และด้านภูมิทัศน์ มีการเชื่อมโยงความหมายกับความคิดเชิงปรัชญาของจีนในเรื่องพิธีกรรม และการแสวงหาความกลมกลืนเป็นหนึ่งเดียว

ระหว่างมนุษย์กับธรรมชาติ

**คำสำคัญ:** อักษรภาพจินตตราสัญลักษณ์เมืองและจังหวัด; การวิเคราะห์สัญลักษณ์เชิงภาพ; ภาพแทนความ; การมีปฏิสัมพันธ์โต้ตอบ; การให้คุณค่าจากองค์ประกอบทางกายภาพ



## Introduction

A logo is a symbol or other design adopted by an organization to identify its product. It should resonate with targeted audience (Logo, n.d.; Vos, 2022). Symbols, stylized texts or both are used in logos (TechTarget Contributor, 2017). Compared with images, texts are more direct and readable, and have thus become a key element in the logo designs of new brands (Wang & Wu, 2020, p. 40). Texts in logos can also help create a classic look and traditional quality (Morr, 2018). From the perspective of semiotic principles, Chinese characters are special two-dimensional figure designs and conventional social signs originated from images (Liu & Wang, 2017, p. 163). With visual features in the beginning, characters have undergone a transformation from images, symbols to a writing system, bearing the progression of Chinese civilization and containing rich and unique cultural connotation and form beauty. (Zhu, 2020, p. 151) As early as the Warring States Period (BCE 475 – BCE 221), characters were used in the logos of seals and imprints as vouchers for commodity exchanges in China. (Feng, 2006, p. 24) Thus, a semiotic analysis of characters in design is likely to reveal the relationship between formation of character signs and their meaning or representations. This paper aims to study the creative graphic Chinese characters in the logos of Chinese cities and provincial areas with regard to visual grammar and patterns, as well as rhetorical devices and cultural

elements constructed by semiotic resources.

## Research Objectives

This study has two research objectives. One is to apply the visual grammatical framework to the graphic Chinese character city and provincial logos to discover the employed semiotic resources, the meaning construction processes through the resources, and the resources' rhetorical form and style. Second is to discover the particular elements included in the logos and these elements' association with the Chinese cultural practices.

## Literature Review

### Logos as Visual Language: A Means for Universal Communication.

While the use of characters as well as other Chinese elements “is now thoroughly established as one means of expressing Chinese identity and culture in design works”, “the current direction of stylistic expression is more towards a universal language that can be understood internationally in any culture” (Wong, 2001, p. 71). When characters are employed in logo design, their strokes and components are transformed into graphics. Graphics are a common communication mode and visual language. And as a universal language, they are not misconstrued due to the differences in nationalities, cultures or languages. (Liang & Guan, 2021, p. 184)

Logos are visual signs that use images as carrier, to extract an object's spiritual connotation. Logos unite "form" to "meaning" in order to express specific significance, as well as to distinguish themselves from other objects. (Du, 2018, p. 10) Based on a literature search using a phrase, "graphic Chinese character," and a word, "logo," it was revealed that papers and theses on topics of the features of graphical characters in logos, are mainly from the perspectives of visual communication and artistic designs.

### **1. Research on Visual Communication of Chinese Graphic Characters.**

Through analyzing the means and styles of manifestation of graphic characters in a few cases, researchers have pointed out a profound impact of characters, as a key element in logo designs. With an aim to explore creative application of Chinese characters to logo designs, Wang (2019) analyzed characters' application principles and specific design methods based on Chinese character logos' unique advantages. Wang and Wu (2020) aimed to explore how characters as design elements impact logo designs. With an eye on the historical origin of the application of Chinese characters in logo design and characters' structural and aesthetic characteristics, they conducted a case study and summarized four features of characters in logos.

Different from the researchers who analyzed the general characteristics of non-classified graphic character logos, some scholars focused on the attributes of a particular type of logos or just one logo. Their studies are also in the fields of communication and designs. In a one-logo case study, Yang and Huang (2020) discussed the variation of the character forms with regards to incorporated elements, and revealed that using icons of elements to characters is

common in logo designs. Zhu (2020) found strategies and two specific methods of applying Chinese character graphicalization to tourism destination logos. Liang and Guan (2021) discussed expression forms and design approaches of graphic characters in a few logos for tourist areas, and summarized the manifestation, design approaches and innovative application of character graphicalization in designs. Du (2018) summarized the graphicalization methods of applying Chinese characters to city logo design and implemented the methods into the logo design of three Chinese cities. The above-mentioned studies aimed to offer reference for graphic designs of Chinese characters in logos and for the promotion of the visual images of represented places.

### **2. Limited Studies of Graphic Chinese Character Logos from a Social Semiotic Perspective.**

Chinese characters are a typical type of sign which embodies such basic semiotic features as universality, stability, intelligibility, inheritability and creativity (Peng & Ouyang, 2015). However, only five papers containing semiotic and Chinese character graphicalization in their titles were achieved (in October 2022) from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure database after 2000. Semiotic theories of signifier-signified, and metaphor-metonymy, are used only to facilitate the research on character graphicalization in the communication and design fields. Li (2013) introduced the application of Chinese character graphicalization to designs of logos, posters, book binding and other branches of visual communication, and referred to the semiotic theory of "metaphor" (26). Liu and Wang (2017) analysed the connotation and meaning expression means of graphical Chinese characters. Peng and Ouyang (2015) explained that the unity

of form and meaning can be achieved by semiotic design. These studies introduced semiotic theories in general, but did not focus on any particular branch of the discipline.

This research chooses to study graphic Chinese character city and provincial logos from the perspective of social semiotics. A narrow scope of research objects of logos is expected to produce more specific results concerning the graphic character city and provincial logos.

### Conceptual Framework

Representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning are the three key concepts in the analysis framework of this study. Each of these three meanings in the visual grammar framework is constructed by various resources or structures.

The representational meaning is achieved by narrative and conceptual structures. While narrative structures are vectorial patterns and serve to present unstable processes, conceptual structures are stable and reveal timeless quality of an object. Conceptual structures include classificational, analytical and symbolic patterns. Classificational structures bring different people, places or things together in one picture. Analytical structures relate participants to each other in terms of a part-whole structure (Jewitt & Oyama, 2004, p. 14). Symbolic structures define the meaning or identity of a participant.

The interactive meaning is constructed by such resources as contact, distance, point of view and modality. Demand and offer are the two types of contact. In demand pictures, people within the frame look directly at viewers located outside of the frame. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 118) A close-up, a medium shot and a long shot are employed to categorize logos in terms

of the distance between characters within and viewers outside. Involvement and detachment are two points of view. Modality is the reliability of messages.

The compositional meaning is chiefly defined by information value, framing and salience. The information value of any element is decided by its location in the visual design: on the left or the right, in the center or on the margin, or at the top or the bottom. “[T]he elements placed on the left are presented as Given, the elements placed on the right as New” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 181), and “what has been placed on the top is presented as the Ideal, and what has been placed at the bottom is put forward as the Real” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 186). Framing is a resource to disconnect or connect elements in visual representation. Salience is the degree of attractiveness of elements in visual image to viewers.

### Research Methodology

This qualitative research is basically a descriptive and explanatory one, and takes as data the graphical character city logos in general, a type of “found” or pre-existing visuals like advertising or pictures. The descriptive method is used in data analysis and discussion. Interpretations of visual images broadly concur that there are four sites at which the meanings of an image are made: the site(s) of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, the site(s) of its circulation, and the site(s) where it is seen by various audiences. (Rose, 2016, p. 24) The site of the image itself is the focus of this study. The detailed analysis of images will be conducted on a set of collected logos of cities and provincial regions involving graphic Chinese character symbols.

The research aims to answer the following three questions:

1. What are the representational, interactive and compositional resources used in the graphic character city and provincial logos to construct meanings?

2. Are there any rhetorical devices that help to construct the meanings? If so, what and how the meanings are constructed?

3. What are the major cultural elements in the character city and provincial logos? To serve the aim of the current study, the Chinese character city and provincial logos are chosen based on the variety of logos available at the regional level.

### Population and Sample



































Character logos of cities or provincial regions may contain either graphics, or characters, or combination of both in their symbols. This current paper concerns only logos with graphic characters, a hybrid of graphics and words. In addition, the samples must include logos from all provincial areas (the highest level of administrative regions in China). This is to ensure that the logos are from across the whole country. A preliminary search found that the number of logos of cities and provincial regions with graphic Chinese characters is not very large since many logos contain mere graphics. While most designers produce one or two city logos, Shi Chang-Hong, a designer from Guizhou Province of China whose graphic character designs have attracted public attention since 2011 (China National Radio [CNR] 2021, para. 12), has created series of logos of

cities and provincial regions. Shi's works are also recommended by mainstream portal websites in China (namely, People's Daily online, Chinanews, Sina, Sohu and other design-themed websites) and employed in design or communication-related researches (Cao, 2020, p. 47-48; Li, 2020, p. 26; Zhu, 2020) retrieved from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (abbr. CNKI). Thus, it is reasonable to use Shi's two series of graphic character logos covering every provincial region as samples of logos in the current study. However, to increase the variety of samples with the aim to discover more semiotic resources in the meaning construction of graphic character city logos, another seven logos were included in the samples. These seven logos were also selected based on the ratings from mainstream websites and the retrieved literature (Du, 2018, p. 11-12; Jiao, 2019, p. 10; Li, 2010, p. 11; Wang, 2019; Wang & Wu, 2020; Wu, 2009, p. 42; Zhu, 2020).

Finally, the samples of this present study include 75 logos in total. These logos contain one or more graphic characters. The first series of Shi's work released in 2020, as can be seen from Table 1 underneath, contains 34 logos of one-character abbreviations for all provincial administrative regions in China. The second series of his production released in 2016, as can be seen from Table 2 below, contains one- or multi-character image logos designed for regional tourism promotion. In this series, either the provincial region or a city selected from the region is represented. This series also has 34 logos covering all provincial areas.

Table 1
























*One-character logos of provincial regions designed by Shi Chang-Hong*

sequence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
logo							
character	澳 (Ao)	川 (Chuan)	鄂 (E)	甘 (Gan1)	赣 (Gan4)	港 (Gang)	桂 (Gui)
region	Macau SAR	Sichuan Province	Hubei Province	Gansu Province	Jiangxi Province	Hong Kong SAR	Guangxi Province
sequence	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
logo							
character	黑 (Hei)	沪 (Hu)	吉 (Ji2)	冀 (Ji4)	津 (Jin1)	晋 (Jin4)	京 (Jing)
region	Heilongjiang Province	Shanghai City	Jilin Province	Hebei Province	Tianjin City	Shanxi Province	Beijing City
sequence	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
logo							
character	辽 (Liao)	鲁 (Lu)	蒙 (Meng)	闽 (Min)	宁 (Ning)	黔 (Qian)	青 (Qing1)
region	Liaoning Province	Shandong Province	Inner Mon golia Aut. Reg.	Fujian Province	Ningxia Hui Aut. Reg.	Guizhou Province	Qinghai Province
sequence	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
logo							
character	琼 (Qiong)	陕 (Shan)	苏 (Su)	台 (Tai)	皖 (Wan3)	湘 (Xiang)	新 (Xin)
region	Hainan Province	Shaanxi Province	Jiangsu Province	Taiwan	Anhui Province	Hunan Province	Xinjiang Uygur Aut. Reg.
sequence	29	30	31	32	33	34	
logo							
character	渝 (Yu2)	豫 (Yu4)	粤 (Yue)	云 (Yun)	藏 (Zang)	浙 (Zhe)	
region	Chongqing City	Henan Province	Guangdong Province	Yunnan Province	Tibet Aut. Reg.	Zhejiang Province	

Source: Retrieved from <https://www.zcool.com.cn/work/ZNDIwNzAxMjg=.html>.

Table 2

One or multi-character city and provincial logos for tourism promotion designed by Shi Chang-Hong

sequence	35	36	37	38	39	40
logo						
character(s)	澳门 (Ao Men)	重庆 (Chong Qing)	福建 (Fu Jian)	甘肃 (Gan Su)	广东 (Guang Dong)	桂林 (Gui Lin)
region	Macau SAR	Chongqing City	Fujian Province	Gansu Province	Guangdong Province	Guilin City
sequence	41	42	43	44	45	46
logo						
character(s)	贵州 (Gui Zhou)	哈尔滨 (Ha Er Bin)	河北 (He Bei)	河南 (He Nan)	湖北 (Hu Bei)	湖南 (Hu Nan)
region	Guizhou Province	Harbin City	Hebei Province	Henan Province	Hubei Province	Hunan Province
sequence	47	48	49	50	51	52
logo						
character(s)	徽(Hui)	吉林(Ji Lin)	江西(Jiang Xi)	晋(Jin4)	京(Jing)	辽(Liao)
region	Anhui Province	Jilin Province	Jiangxi Province	Shanxi Province	Beijing City	Liaoning Province
sequence	53	54	55	56	57	58
logo						
character(s)	内蒙古 (Nei Meng Gu)	宁夏 (Ning Xia)	青岛 (Qing Dao)	青海 (Qing Hai)	三亚 (San Ya)	山东 (Shan Dong)
region	Inner Mongolia Aut. Reg.	Ningxia Hui Aut. Reg.	Qingdao City	Qinghai Province	Sanya City	Shandong Province
sequence	59	60	61	62	63	64
logo						
character(s)	深圳 (Shen Zhen)	四川 (Si Chuan)	苏州 (Su Zhou)	湾 (Wan1)	西安 (Xi An)	香港 (Xiang Gang)
region	Shenzhen City	Sichuan Province	Suzhou City	Taiwan	Xi'an City	Hong Kong SAR



sequence	65	66	67	68		
logo						
character(s)	新疆 (Xin Jiang)	云南 (Yun Nan)	藏(Zang)	浙(Zhe)		
region	Xinjiang Uygur Aut. Reg.	Yunnan Province	Tibet Aut. Reg.	Zhejiang Province		

**Source:** 48 is taken Retrieved from <https://www.esnpc.com/shichanghong-charm-china-34-provinces-and-cities-logo/>. The rest are from <https://www.zcool.com.cn/work/ZMTgyOTUxNTY=.html>.

Of the remaining seven logos shown in Table 3 below, six are produced by well-known artists or teams from leading design companies in China or of the world. Only the designer of the logo of Shenzhen City is unknown.

**Table 3**

*One- or multi-character city logos by various designers.*

sequence	69	70	71	72	73	74	75
logo							
character(s)	富(Fu)	广州 (Guang Zhou)	汉(Han)	杭(Hang)	庆(Qing4)	深(Shen)	香港 (Xiang Gang)
region	Fuyang City	Guangzhou City	Wuhan City	Hangzhou City	Chongqing City	Shenzhen City	Hong Kong SAR
designer	Zhang Ye-Qing	Cao Xue	Beijing Sheng xing Commu nication Association (China)	Daodao Design (China)	Jin Dai-Qiang	unknown	Landor Design (U.S.)

**Source:** 69, 71, 72 and 73 are taken from <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/90934314>; 70 is Retrieved from [https://www.sohu.com/a/208605638\\_161795](https://www.sohu.com/a/208605638_161795); 74 and 75 are from <http://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/129635024>.



The logos in each table are numbered alphabetically and consecutively based on the phonetic transcriptions, as shown in brackets beside characters in the three tables. If the characters in two logos share the same transcriptions, a number indicating the tone is added to the transcription. The autonomous region is abbreviated as Aut. Region. and Special Administrative Region as SAR. The logos are mentioned by the given sequences for convenient reference in this paper.

## Research Tool

The semiotic and particularly the social semiotic perspectives are employed in the analysis of data. The analytical tools employed in the analysis are chiefly taken from social semiotics to create accounts of the signification process in the images of graphic character city and provincial logos. The visual grammar proposed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006) has been applied to the analysis of the logos. Technological innovation has facilitated the emergence of increasingly popular multimodal texts composed of words as well as graphics and pictures. According to Emanuel (2010, p. 5), visual literacy means the ability to interpret and extract meaning from multimodal texts despite the fact that meanings enclosed in human communication texts, including visual composition, are conveyed with some underlying purposes. Following Halliday's (1978) systemic functional theory to verbal language, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) created a similar model for visual representation of three ramifications, in other words, representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning. Any semiotic modes have to be able to represent objects and their relations to a world outside their representational systems, in order to represent a particular

social relation between the producer, the viewer and the represented object, and to form texts eventually (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 42-43). This established model provides "a systematic and comprehensive account of grammar of visual design" (Truy, 2017, p. 167) and "an invaluable 'tool kit' for comprehending images" (Truy, 2017, p. 168).

## Collect data

The research objects are the graphic Chinese character logos of cities and provincial regions in China targeting people with Chinese background. The procedure of data collection began after the research objects are set. First, two series of Shi Chang-Hong's logos are collected. Then, more graphic character logos are selected based on recommendations and introductions mainly from two websites: Sohu and Zhihu. Sohu offers a multiplicity of services, including information about design, and was selected into the Top 100 list of Internet companies in China by the Internet Society of China and the Information Technology of the PRC both in 2019 and 2021. Zhihu is a high-quality Q&A Internet community in Chinese and original content platform, where discussions about well-designed logos can be found. Logos are selected not only based on the aforementioned recommendations but also based on the scholarly literature retrieved from CNKI which offers such databases as Chinese journal, thesis and dissertation, proceedings, newspaper, books, standards, monographic serials, and yearbook. Only logos with graphic Chinese character symbols are kept in the sample. All the logos are collected from the Internet and their sources have been indicated in Tables 1 to 3 above.

## Statistics

The Representational Resources and Meanings in Graphic Character City and Provincial Logos

Table 1 underneath summarizes representational resources in city and provincial

**Table 1**

*Representational resources in city and provincial logos.*

narrative structure	one-character logo	4, 27, 28, 34		69, 72, 74
	multiple-character logo		35, 37, 40, 42, 48, 56, 57, 61, 66	75
conceptual structure	classificational analytical symbolic	all logos		

As can be seen from Table 1 above, the narrative structures exist in both one- and multiple-character logos with particular strokes or vectors connecting components or characters. The graphic vectors fit into the design and contribute meaning to the logo. In Xiang (27), the vector of the winding shape penetrating vertical shapes are clouds. In Gui Lin (40), the longest horizontal vector resembles a river bank. The narrative structures in graphic characters do not display any processes. The vectors only lead the visual line of viewers.

All three conceptual structures exist in both one- or multi-character logos. A classificational pattern highlights certain local feature with same elements. He Nan (44) uses over 10 grottoes when this province owns one

logos in this study. The analysis examines the narrative and conceptual structures and their meanings in both one- and multi-character logos.

of the four major grottoes in China. An analytical pattern represents a region with a logo. Hu (9) comprises five representative skyscrapers symbolizing the cosmopolis' modernity. In symbolic patterns, every element or form chosen strengthens the regional personality. Qiong (22) uses a coconut palm, a beach pavilion, a vessel and seabirds to express an island style. Compared with the narrative pattern, the conceptual patterns are the mainstay of character logo design.

### 1. Interactive Resources and Viewers' Involvement Demands

The city and provincial logos in the present study use elements of interactive resources to demand for viewers' involvement as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

*Interactive resources in city and provincial logos.*

contact	demand	most logos			
	offer	1	59	74	
distance	long shot	4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 27, 28, 29, 34	35, 36, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 62, 64, 65, 66, 68	70, 73, 74	
	medium shot	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 13, 16, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 30, 33	37, 38, 39, 45, 50, 51, 53, 60, 61, 63, 67	69, 71, 75	
	close-up	31, 32		72	
viewpoint	undecided		52		
	involvement	most logos			
	detachment	vertical perspective	10, 18, 34	37, 48, 59	
		horizontal perspective	1	59	74
modality	shape, color	all logos			

Most logos in this study belong to the “demand pictures,” in which characters facing viewers squarely, and demanding ideas from them, such as preference, yearning, and pride. Three exceptions are Ao (1), Shen Zhen (59) and Shen (74), where the characters face viewers at an angle, and allow viewers to examine the logos in a detached way.

Many logos use long and medium shots. All elements in the logos are manually divided by the authors into natural and cultural ones. A rough calculation reveals that landmark buildings and natural landscape are favorite elements in long shots. Manmade architecture or natural elements or a mix of them are seen in magnificent panorama. Yue (31) is a close-up showing a detailed lion’s head. Medium shots are employed in E (3) with a sword, Hu Bei (45) with the Yellow Crane Tower, Qing4 (73) with two human figures, etc.

Most logos use frontal angle to induce involvement from viewers. Yue (31) uses the theme of lion dancing to remind viewers of

the southern folk custom, and the unyielding national spirit. Some logos however use vertical or horizontal perspectives. Min (18) and Shen Zhen (59) use a downward angle to enable a view of the local earth buildings and the modern sky scrapers respectively. A downward angle offers viewers power while an upward angle bestows the represented object with power. Ao (1), Shen Zhen (59), and Shen (74) have been labeled earlier as offer pictures with slightly horizontal perspective.

Most logos in this study use abstract graphics (shape and color) and probe beyond the visual appearance of things with the naked eye: a roof for a building, suits and cards for the gaming industry, green and blue for hills and water, shades of brown and black for civil residences, etc.

## 2. Compositional Resources and the Value of Logos

The value contained in the city and provincial logos of the current study is exhibited via various compositional resources as shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3**

*Compositional resources in city and provincial logos.*

	left-right placement	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 15, 20, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 34	35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 47, 48, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 64, 65, 68	70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75
	center-margin placement	4, 8, 11, 13, 14, 18	50, 51, 58, 60	
	top-bottom placement	8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 24, 25, 31, 32, 33	38, 43, 45, 46, 49, 50, 51, 58, 60, 63, 64, 66, 67	69
framing	color	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34	35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 48, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68	69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75
	shape	3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34	35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68	69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75
salience	size, color or placement			

Left-right and top-bottom placements dominate the logo design. An example of left-right placement is Chong Qing (36) with the hot pot (transformed from the first character “Chong”) on the left and mountains (from the second character “Qing”) on the right. The native people love eating hot pot, which is known. The right part of the logo explains the reason for this preference, i.e., the damp mountainous living conditions. An example of top-bottom placement is Hu Nan (46). The second character “Nan,” transformed into natural scenery of mountains and rivers at the top, is ideal. The first character “Hu,” turned into artificial local housing at the bottom, is real. An example of center-margin placement is Gan1 (4), in which two roofs of the famous nine-story building at the Mogao Grottoes in this province are placed in the middle, accompanied by flying apsaras on sides.

Color and shape are equally important framing devices to indicate connection or disconnection. The two characters in Guang

Dong (39) use the same color scheme to achieve unity and coherence. The same Mongolian yurt shape for each character in Nei Meng Gu (53) and the parallel fold lines in Shen Zhen (59) unite individual characters and form a whole picture. The components or characters in a logo adhering to one color, the different shades of a color, one color scheme or similar shapes form a unity and expel everything else outside their boundary or frame. The frames of Ning (19) and Han (71) are more salient since they encompass everything else within. Whereas the frame of Ning relies on the strokes or a radical of the character, the seal frame in Han is a red block acting as the ground of the character figure.

Salience of elements are achieved by placement, size, color or other factors. The opener-shaped-top building in Hu (9) is the most salient because of its larger size and the more saturated black color. Kumbum Monastery stands out in Qing Hai (56) due to its thicker strokes. Salience can also be achieved by information

value as is mentioned earlier.

In the discussion of features of graphic character, while previous researches started from the hybrid of forms and meanings and summarized the attributes of the characters in order to inform designers and other researchers of visual communication, this research focuses more on the “syntax” of the logos and bases the semantic analysis on the semiotic resources.

## Result

### 1. Graphic Character City and Provincial Logos and Construction of Meaning

In this study, the analysis of graphic character city and provincial logos is based on visual grammar from the perspective of social semiotics. The logos are decomposed into representational, interactive and compositional resources and the meanings are constructed through these resources. As to research question 1: Narrative patterns of representational resources are not typical in character logos for no real processes are displayed through stroke-vectors, and conceptual patterns are prevalent in character logos since logos select the representative elements to highlight certain features of their represented regions. Of the tools from interactive resources, most character logos choose demand images, long and medium shots, and an involved viewpoint. The other tools are much less reliant on. The modality of logos is mainly constructed by commonly known shapes and colors with few details. Of the tools from compositional resources, left-right and top-bottom placements are widespread and framing is completed by shape and color. In future graphic character city and provincial logo creation, incorporating vectors and designing certain evolving plot might enable more dynamic representation of places.

### 2. Semiotic Resources and Rhetorical Devices

In narrative structures, some vectors connect elements of similar shapes and offer an overwhelming manifestation of the most impressive regional features. The long horizontal vector in the middle of Gui Lin (40) connects green shapes of hills and reflections representing the finest scenery of the city. The horizontal vector in Ji Lin (48) connects three triangles representing Tianchi (a lake on the top of the Changbai Mountains in Jilin Province), although there is only one Tianchi. By connecting repetitive elements, vectors make repetition more salient.

Conceptual patterns are a major tool in designing graphic character logos. And a coincidence is discovered between conceptual patterns and rhetorical devices. Repetition is plentiful in classificational patterns, metonymy in analytical patterns, and repetition, metaphor, pun and antithesis in symbolic patterns.

Using same elements under a subdivision of culture or nature is repetition in classificational patterns. Not only particular items but also colors and shapes can be repeated to achieve coherence: different shades of black on the building shapes in Hu (9), hill and reflection shapes as well as the color green in Gui Lin (40), two human figures in Qing 4 (73) (which is also an example of personification), etc.

Analytical patterns of part-whole relations are in essence metonymy. A logo is not able to offer an all-round representation of a region. Usually, the most representative items are shown in compact graphics to stress one or more native features: the willow branch and leaves in Su (24) for the natural scenery of the south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, the camera and film in Gang (6) and Xiang Gang

(64) for Hong Kong's flourishing movie industry, etc. Compared with the one-character logo Gang, the two-character Xiang Gang offers entails more elements. In addition to the camera and film, a handbag and the Bank of China Tower stand for Hong Kong's status as a shopping paradise and an international financial center. No matter how many elements are contained in a logo, it is a metonymic representation of the region.

A variety of devices are in symbolic patterns. Four cases use special arrangement of lines in their representation. The horizontal strokes and one vertical stroke in Jin1 (12) represent the connections between the prosperous harbor of Tianjin City and the other places all around the world. A connection is created between the crisscrossing of the strokes and the network of transportation. This logo contains a repetition and a metaphor at the same time. The flowing lines in Xin (28) represent both the Silk Road and the cheerful scene of Uyghur people singing and dancing, which is a pun. In Fu (69) a reversal relationship of antithesis is created between the forms of still hills above and flowing water below. Shen (74) also contains a metaphor in which the emanated lines and dots comprising the graphic character manifest the city's temperament of openness, diversity, inclusiveness, greatness, dream and legend.

Modality is the only one of all interactive resources that is related to rhetorical devices: repetition, metonymy, and metaphor. It is common in visual image to use socially conventional colors and shapes to represent objects. For example, green and blue are for hills and water, and cornices are for traditional Chinese styled dwellings and edifices. Modality is also achieved through repeated forms, related elements of intended objects, or connections between two different

fields. Two human figures based on the form of Qing (73) stresses double happiness of people when Qing literally means happiness. The Chinese seal style of Han (71) is a metonymic indication of Wuhan City's central status and its cultural context of Chu and Han period (206 BCE - 203 BCE) in history. The personality of Shenzhen is shown metaphorically through the dots and lines emanating from the center of Shen (74).

Likewise, the association with rhetorical devices is discovered in compositional resources of information value and framing. The balance in the center-margin placement creates repetition. A case in point is the flying apsaras on the left and right of Gan1 (4). Color and shape as framing resources are repeated to enhance unity in a logo. Repetition builds an instant connection between similar forms and is heavily relied on in compositional meaning construction.

Rhetorical devices are an indispensable part of meaning construction through semiotic resources. They are especially powerful in forming conceptual patterns. Previous researches have analyzed the usage of rhetorical devices in graphic character design. Gao (2019) discussed the expression of metaphor/metonymy, hyperbole and personification in character logos. Li (2020) gave a comprehensive study of rhetorical behavior of creative Chinese character design from devices on meaning and form. Rhetorical devices are exemplified sporadically in a few other researches (Li, 2013, p. 26). However, this paper's discussion on rhetorical devices is conducted under each of the three types of semiotic resources. Each type employs a slightly different mix of rhetorical tools. As to research question 2: Repetition and metonymy are two major devices the semiotic resources depend on. While repetition is more related to semiotic resources in form, metonymy

is discovered through a part-whole relation in meaning. Although repetition is intuitive and metonymy is characteristic of logo designs, employing other types of rhetorical devices might give fresh looks to logos and make logos more impressive.

### 3 Semiotic Resources and Cultural Elements

Chinese characters are made up of strokes and radicals combined in different ways. Characters as well as their components in regional logos are transformed into diversified Chinese cultural elements chiefly through representational resources, since interactional resources mainly establish connections between represented regions and viewers, and compositional resources concern the arrangement of elements in images. Architecture and landscape are favorite elements in this study's 75 logos. The preference for them in character logos reflects thoughts in Chinese culture.

#### 3.1 Architecture

Architecture in the logos includes civil dwelling, palaces, temples, skyscrapers, military buildings, towers and archways. These elements of various shapes and colors are blended with the forms of characters. Some logos are sole representation of architecture while others are a mix of architecture and elements of other categories, such as nature and human activities. A symmetric layout is salient in architectural elements.

Semiotic resources such as conceptual structure, distance, modality and framing can be found in architectural elements. Conceptual structures depend substantially on repetition and metonymy. The palace complex in Jing (14) is a long shot with five roofs. Medium shots showing entire traditional constructions with corniced

roofs are seen in Wan (26), Gan Su (38), Hu Bei (45), Xi An (63), Zang (67) and Hang (72). In terms of modality, thicker strokes and color blocks are used in traditional-styled and historic buildings, while thin lines appear more frequently in modern constructions in Shen Zhen (59) and Guang Zhou (70). Thicker strokes and blocks are heavier and convey a sense of historical legacy and cultural heritage.

Symbolic patterns use symmetrical layouts, specific colors and shapes to strengthen regional characteristics. Yellow, the color of land and wealth, assumes the connotation of power. It is used on roofs of palaces and official buildings, and glazed tiles of these grand constructions. Yellow roofs are detected in Jing (14 and 51). Roofs of colors close to yellow are seen in Gan1(4), Ji 4 (11), Jin4 (13), Liao (15), Gan Su (38), Hu Bei (45), Wan1 (62) and Xi An (63), all of which contain non civil buildings. Symmetry, another distinctive symbolic attribute, is found in the above-mentioned examples and other traditional structures. One of the most conspicuous features of Chinese traditional architecture is symmetry (Yan, 2009, p. 3). Most traditional Chinese buildings strictly follow an axis-centered principle with symmetrical wings. In an architectural cluster, the most important building is put on the axis and subordinate buildings are arranged on two sides, which is a manifestation of "priority in rank, i.e., Confucian requirement of rite" (5). Symmetrical architecture of neat formation conveys a style of balance, squareness and sincerity. Cornices - roofs with corners turning upward - are represented in a symmetrical style. As a distinctive feature of Chinese traditional construction, cornices are widely employed in plain civil dwellings, stately houses and palaces. In some cases, corniced



roofs stand for whole building, which is an example of metonymy. Despite the various colors and modestly different shapes, cornices can be easily “recognized as originating from the same cultural root” (Lai, 2018, p. 62). The discrepancies in cornices’ decoration showcase the concept of hierarchy in the traditional ethical code.

Other styles of architecture include religious buildings in He (8), Ning (19), Qing1 (21), Zang (33 and 67), Ha Er Bin (42), Ning Xia (54), and Qing Hai (56), Mongolian yurts in Meng (17), earthen buildings in Min (18) and Fu Jian (37), archway gates in Ao Men (35), and ancient grottoes in He Nan (44). Architecture of different styles reflects the dwelling habits of ethnic groups in China.

### 3.2 Landscape

The other preferable category of elements in character logos is landscape containing mountains and hills, rivers and lakes and seas, as well as plants, animals, clouds and snow. Landscape is represented in long or medium shots. Long shots give full views of features of the land, in which repeated shapes of elements of nature are shown as in Gui (7), Chong Qing (36), Qing Hai (56), etc. This repetition belongs to all three conceptual patterns. It includes elements of the same category of nature or a particular subcategory, which is a classificational representation. Even though elements have repetitive emergence, they are a part of the local landform, which is an analytical representation. The repetitive elements endow the represented place with the feature of green hills and clear waters, or representative meteorological conditions, which is a symbolic representation. Representative indigenous animals and plants are usually displayed in medium shots as in Chuan (2), Yu4 (30), Su Zhou (61), Yun Nan (66) and Xiang Gang (75). Representative animals and plants are

more salient in medium shots than if they were shown in long ones.

A combination of mountain and water are found in Ji2 (10), Gui Lin (40), Qing Dao (55), Qing Hai (56) and Fu (69). Static mountain and dynamic water comprise an antithesis. Confucius said: “The wise men like water while the virtuous like mountain. The wise are flexible while the virtuous are at peace. The wise are happy while the virtuous has longevity.” (Analects, 6.23) The juxtaposition of mountain and water is also a manifestation of symmetry and Chinese dialectic thinking. Such combinations abound in Chinese culture: Yin and Yang (a pair of ancient Chinese philosophical concepts representing two opposing principles in nature), heaven and earth, luck and ill fortune, life and death, firmness and weakness, etc. Harmony and unity are believed to be achieved between mountain and water, or plant and animal, or a harmonious mix of elements in the logos.

The mix of cultural and natural element is conspicuous in character logos. Architecture and natural elements are integrated in Hei (8), Ning (19), Hu Nan (46), etc. A color scheme is used to achieve the unity of the two different types of elements. City logos are symbols representing regional images, history and culture with visual signs as carriers. (Du, 2018, p. 11) They are one tourist resource used in promoting the represented places. Somnuxpong (2020) examined the creative tourism management of Chiang Mai province in Thailand and focused more on the province’s culture consisting of tangible and intangible resources. On the contrary, the integration of cultural and natural elements discovered in the city and provincial logos in this study reveals “the Confucianist ecological view of harmony between men and nature, the Taoist view of harmonious

development of men and nature, and the Zen view of equivalence between environmental protection and cherishing life” (Wen, 2008, p. 13-14). Elements of other human activity and nature are merged in Jin4 (13), Chong Qing (36), Shan Dong (58), etc. The activities in arts, humanity, business, sports, folk customs, diet, and gaming reflect the harmonious coexistence between nature and people from all walks of life.

As to research question 3, the selection of architecture and natural landscape as the most common elements in city and provincial logos express the traditional Chinese thought of requirement of rite and pursuit of harmony and unity between the humankind and nature. Cultural elements in character logos have been dealt with in a few previous researches. Yang and Huang (2020) exemplified the cultural symbols in a particular logo. Wang and Wu (2020) explained the use of the various traditional patterns in the logos respectively: patterns of the face of Taotie (a legendary gluttonous beast), of begonia-shaped window opening, of lucky clouds and of Fangsheng (consisting of two diamonds). While previous researches list cultural symbols in various logos, this study finds two common elements in graphic character city and provincial logos and explores their association with Chinese philosophical thoughts.

## Conclusion

This study uses Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) visual grammar to analyse the representational, interactional and compositional

resources of graphic Chinese character city and provincial logos. Repetition and metonymy are the major rhetorical devices to help to facilitate the construction of representational, interactive and compositional meanings. Architecture and landscape stand out among other elements in semiotic meaning construction and they have associations with traditional Chinese philosophical thoughts. Two previous studies (Du, 2018; Liang & Guang, 2021) on a similar topic concentrated on design methods, whereas this study focuses on the visual grammar of logos.

The graphic character city and provincial logos rely more on representational resources than on interactive and compositional ones. Most logos use a frontal angle. However, an oblique angle is likely to produce more vivid logos. Moreover, graphic character city and provincial logo designs could employ more rhetorical devices than depending heavily on repetition and metonymy. As the current study is intended to gather logos covering all provincial regions in China, the sample is rather concentrated on one designer’s works. Further studies can use a more diversified sample of logos created by a larger group of designers to avoid the limitation of relying on one or few designers. Besides graphic Chinese character city and provincial logos, character logos of various organizations and events are also worth studying from the social semiotic perspective. A comparative study of Chinese character and English word logos could be another direction to explore semiotic resources and meaning building processes in logo designs.



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