

# A Study on Narrative Design for Health Tea Packaging Based on the Culture of the Twenty-Four Solar Terms

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**Abstract:** The Twenty-Four Solar Terms are not only a traditional Chinese system of temporal perception but also embody the practical logic of bodily health preservation in harmony with the seasons.” Currently, health tea packaging commonly suffers from issues such as the excessive accumulation of cultural symbols, narrative fragmentation, and a disconnect between function and meaning. This study uses the “Four Seasons Remedies” health tea brand as a design practice vehicle to explore narrative design strategies for packaging based on solar term culture. By defining three core concepts—packaging narrative design, cultural translation, and the logic of solar term wellness—the study proposes three design strategies: a strategy of structuring time into a narrative grammar, a visual translation strategy based on the symbolization of bodily sensations, and a structural material strategy based on the ritualization of behavior. The study demonstrates that transforming the temporal logic of solar term wellness into a narrative structure for packaging can effectively enhance the semantic depth of cultural products and the continuity of the user experience. This research provides a set of reusable strategic pathways for the packaging design of solar term-based cultural products.

**Keywords:** Twenty-Four Solar Terms; Health Tea; Packaging Narrative Design; Cultural Translation; Design Strategies.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the 24 Solar Terms were inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2016, they have re-entered the public consciousness and become a significant theme in cultural and creative design. Concurrently, the health tea market has experienced sustained growth in recent years, with young consumers’ dual focus on “national trends” and health creating a vast market opportunity for solar term-themed health teas. However, a concerning trend has emerged: a large number of health tea products marketed under the banner of the solar terms often rely on packaging designs that merely appropriate visual symbols. They reduce the solar terms to illustrations, calligraphy, or decorative colors, failing to truly convey the ancient wisdom of nurturing the body in harmony with the seasons. The packaging becomes a visually appealing shell rather than a space that tells a story. This design dilemma—where products bear the name of the solar terms but lack the substance of wellness—stems from a superficial understanding of solar term culture. The solar terms are not merely twenty-four names and corresponding images of seasonal phenomena; they are, at their core, a knowledge system concerning the relationship between time and the human body. The arrival of each solar term signifies a shift in natural rhythms and implies that the human body should respond with corresponding self-care practices. If this logic cannot be effectively translated into packaging design, then so-called “solar term health tea” becomes merely a marketing concept rather than a cultural experience. [1]

This study seeks to answer the following question: How can packaging design undertake the narrative task of solar term wellness culture? Specifically, how can the temporal logic of the solar terms, the bodily logic of wellness, and the material logic of packaging be integrated to form a practical design strategy? To this end, this study uses the original brand “Four Seasons Remedies” as a practical vehicle, distilling three core strategies through the interaction between

theoretical analysis and design practice. [2-4]

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1. Conceptual Definitions

This study involves three core concepts, which the author clearly defines prior to their use. Packaging narrative design refers to a design method that conveys a complete story or theme to users through a comprehensive set of means, including visual symbols, structural forms, material language, and usage behaviors. Unlike traditional packaging design, narrative design no longer views packaging as a mere carrier of protection and information, but rather understands it as a “readable interface” and an “experiential event.” In the context of health tea packaging, the task of narrative design is to transform the functional act of “drinking tea” into the cultural act of “harmonizing with the seasons.” [5]

Cultural translation refers to the process of converting a system of meaning from one cultural context into another medium or context through symbolic transformation, ensuring it is effectively understood and experienced. In packaging design, the core challenge of cultural translation is to avoid two extremes: first, the forced accumulation of symbols; and second, the excessive dilution of meaning. This study employs Peirce’s triadic theory of signs—icons, indices, and symbols—as an analytical tool and operational framework for cultural translation. [6]

The logic of seasonal health preservation refers to the principle of “nourishing the body in harmony with the seasons” embodied in the twenty-four solar terms. Its fundamental premise is that the human body’s physiological rhythms should remain synchronized with natural rhythms. Spring brings birth, summer fosters growth, autumn yields harvest, and winter stores energy—these are not only the laws governing the changes of all things in nature but also the fundamental basis for regulating diet, daily routines, and emotional well-being. In packaging design, the logic of seasonal health preservation does not exist merely as

background knowledge but serves as the organizing principle of the narrative structure.

## **2.2. Research Background and Problem Statement**

In recent years, the convergence of “national trend” culture and health-conscious consumption has made health teas a popular category among young consumers. As a fusion of traditional Chinese temporal knowledge and bodily practices, the Twenty-Four Solar Terms are naturally suited to serve as the cultural core of health teas. However, the packaging of solar term health teas currently on the market generally suffers from several prominent issues.

The overgeneralization of visual symbols is the most readily apparent issue. A vast number of products utilize generic Chinese elements such as landscapes, auspicious clouds, and calligraphy, yet their semantic connection to specific solar terms is extremely tenuous. Consumers find it difficult to discern from the packaging whether a particular tea corresponds to the Start of Spring or the Frost’s Descent. The disruption of narrative logic is equally evident; packaging serves merely as a container, lacking a continuous cultural experience from unboxing to consumption. The absence of wellness knowledge is an even more fundamental issue—consumers struggle to understand from the packaging “why this particular tea should be consumed during this specific solar term.” Cultural significance is reduced to mere decoration rather than comprehensible knowledge.

Based on these observations, this study seeks to answer a core question: How can the health-preservation logic behind the 24 solar terms be transformed into cultural content that consumers can perceive, understand, and experience through packaging narrative design?

## **3. Theoretical Foundation and Analytical Framework**

### **3.1. The Health Preservation Narrative Logic of the Twenty-Four Solar Terms**

The Twenty-Four Solar Terms are, at their core, a temporal narrative. The year is divided into twenty-four distinct points, each corresponding to specific climatic characteristics, phenological phenomena, and physiological responses in the human body. Traditional Chinese wellness philosophy has established the principle of “harmonizing with the seasons” (shunshi yangsheng) based on this framework, which holds that the body’s physiological rhythms should remain in sync with the rhythms of nature. Spring brings birth, summer fosters growth, autumn yields harvest, and winter stores energy—these are not only the laws governing the natural world but also the fundamental rhythms of physical cultivation. From a narrative perspective, seasonal health preservation comprises three progressive layers: first, the temporal rhythm, which tells people “when”; second, bodily perception, which explains “what the body feels” at that moment; and finally, health-preserving practices, which guide people on “what to do.” For example, after the Start of Spring, when yang energy begins to rise, the body is prone to liver qi stagnation, making it an ideal time to soothe the liver and regulate qi; after the End of Heat, as summer heat and humidity gradually subside and autumn dryness begins to emerge, it is appropriate to moisten the lungs and generate body fluids. This logic provides natural content for packaging design. Packaging is no longer merely a static container; it can

become a narrator and guide for seasonal wellness, conveying the concept of “nourishing in harmony with the seasons” at every stage—from unboxing and reading to retrieving the tea and brewing it.

## **3.2. Core Elements of Narrative Packaging Design**

Narrative design originated as a concept in literary theory before being adapted to product and packaging design. When applied to packaging, it implies that packaging no longer serves merely to protect the product and convey information; instead, it uses a combination of visual symbols, structural forms, material language, and user behavior to tell a complete story to the user.

Packaging narrative design encompasses several key dimensions. The narrative theme determines the core content and value proposition of the story, serving as the starting point for the entire design. Narrative symbols are the visual and tactile elements that carry the story’s information, making the story perceptible. Narrative structure defines how the story unfolds in time and space, guiding users to experience the narrative in a specific sequence. Narrative materials convey the story’s atmosphere through the tactile sensations and textures of the materials. In the context of health tea packaging, these dimensions must be systematically organized around the logic of seasonal wellness practices, rather than operating in isolation.

Integrating the aforementioned theoretical resources, this study establishes a design framework that unifies temporal rhythms, bodily knowledge, and packaging. This framework begins with the temporal narrative of the solar terms: first, it extracts the core climatic characteristics and phenological symbols of each solar term; then, it correlates these with changes in the human viscera and wellness principles to form the knowledge content of “why this particular wellness practice is necessary at this time”; finally, it translates this knowledge and these principles into the packaging’s narrative themes, visual symbols, structural forms, and material language.

## **4. “Four Seasons Remedies” Packaging Narrative Design Strategy**

### **4.1. Design Positioning and User Research**

Before proposing specific design strategies, it is essential to clarify the brand positioning of Four Seasons Healing Formula and its target user group. Design positioning determines the strategic direction, while user research ensures that the strategy addresses genuine needs. The core positioning of Four Seasons Healing Formula is “readable solar term health tea.” This positioning carries two layers of meaning. The first is seasonal wellness: the product formulates tea blends based on the wellness logic of the 24 solar terms, adhering to the TCM principle of “nourishing in harmony with the seasons.” The second is “readable”: the packaging serves to convey knowledge of the solar terms, enabling consumers to understand the correspondence between the solar terms and the tea formulas as they use the product. This positioning distinguishes Four Seasons Healing from most health teas on the market: the latter typically emphasize the broad concept of wellness, while the former combines wellness with specific knowledge of the solar terms.

The target audience for this product is urban residents aged 25 to 40, who share two core characteristics. First, they have

a strong inclination toward cultural consumption and are highly receptive to products with cultural significance. Second, they have fragmented schedules; while they may be interested in traditional culture, they lack the energy for systematic study and prefer to engage with solar term culture in the fragmented moments of daily life. When using the product, they seek a low-barrier cultural experience, hoping to gain understandable knowledge and a comfortable user experience in a short amount of time.

Through literature review and informal interviews with typical users, this study identified three core needs. First is the cognitive need: users seek specific explanations regarding the relationship between tea recipes and the solar terms, rather than the vague label of “health tea.” Second is the experiential need: users value the smoothness and ritualistic quality of operational processes such as unboxing, retrieving tea, and brewing. Third are emotional needs: users hope to feel relaxed and cared for while using the product. These three categories of needs correspond to the core issues addressed by the subsequent three design strategies: cognitive needs relate to the clarity of narrative themes; experiential needs relate to the tactile experience of structural materials; and emotional needs relate to the gentleness of the brand’s tone.

## 4.2. Design Strategies

### 4.2.1. Temporal Structuring: Constructing the Narrative Mainline Through the Sequence of Solar Terms

“Nourishing in harmony with the seasons,” as a branch of the philosophy of “unity between heaven and humanity,” reveals the connection between the human body’s cycles of vitality and decline and seasonal changes. This is also the core logic of seasonal wellness: the body’s physiological rhythms should remain synchronized with natural rhythms. In the temporal dimension, this logic manifests as the sequential succession of solar terms—from the Beginning of Spring to the Great Cold—with each term corresponding to specific climatic characteristics and bodily nourishment needs. However, current packaging for solar term health teas on the market often reduces the solar terms to mere labels, lacking an organized presentation of the temporal sequence. As a result, users struggle to perceive the connection between specific solar terms and the corresponding tea formulas.

To address this issue, this study proposes a narrative strategy based on temporal syntax, using the chronological sequence of the solar terms as the central narrative thread of the packaging. This allows users to experience the passage of the solar terms and the rhythm of wellness practices as they use the product. In the packaging design for “Four Seasons Remedies,” a distinct tea blend is developed for each solar term, totaling twenty-four varieties. These twenty-four teas are organized chronologically within an outer packaging structured like a tea book. When users open the tea book, they see the sequence of solar terms from Start of Spring to Great Cold. Each page corresponds to a specific solar term, and users can remove the tea bag for that term. This design transforms the abstract concept of a year into a tangible, interactive experience, allowing users to embark on a journey through time as they retrieve and brew the tea.

In terms of narrative content, each tea is designed to address the specific health needs associated with its corresponding solar term. For example, the “Spring Breeze Whistling Tea” corresponds to the beginning of spring, when yang energy first rises and all things revive, focusing on tonifying qi, raising yang, and warming the meridians; the

“Sweat-Relieving Refreshing Tea” corresponds to the summer solstice, when heat is at its peak, focusing on clearing heat, relieving summer heat, and promoting fluid production to quench thirst; the “Moisturizing Rain Tea” corresponds to the end of summer, when autumn dryness first appears, focusing on nourishing and moisturizing to alleviate dryness; and “Warm Heart Hulu Tea,” which warms the body and dispels the cold during the biting winds of “Great Cold.” Each seasonal tea is not merely a beverage but also offers guidance on how to practice wellness during that specific time. The tea book packaging includes educational content on wellness practices for each solar term. By incorporating knowledge of the Twenty-Four Solar Terms into the narrative structure of the packaging, the strategy of temporal grammatization transforms the solar terms from abstract concepts of traditional culture into a rhythm of life that users can personally participate in and experience step by step.

### 4.2.2. Sensory Symbolization: Constructing a Visual Language Based on Solar Term Phenomena

In the packaging of seasonal health teas, visual symbols constitute the first layer of information users encounter. The brand logo serves as the starting point of this layer. The Four Seasons Healing Formula logo features a stylized variation of the character “愈” (heal) at its core, abstracting the base of the character “心” (heart) into the curve of a smiling mouth, with smooth, rounded strokes to convey a gentle, healing brand tone. The color palette employs deep brown and warm yellow, maintaining consistency with the overall packaging visual system. Currently, a vast number of packaged products utilize generic Chinese elements such as landscapes, auspicious clouds, and calligraphy, resulting in a weak semantic connection to specific solar terms. Consumers often struggle to discern from the packaging whether a product corresponds to the Beginning of Spring or the Frost’s Descent. The root of this problem lies in the failure of cultural translation: concrete elements such as solar term phenomena and health-promoting ingredients have not been effectively transformed into recognizable visual language.

To address this issue, this study proposes a visual translation strategy based on the symbolization of bodily sensations. This involves extracting visual elements from the typical meteorological and climatic characteristics of each solar term and employing a combination of graphic design and color schemes to enable users to perceive the physical experience of the solar term through visual observation, rather than merely seeing its name. In the design of “Four Seasons Remedies,” visual translations were completed for a total of 24 solar term teas. This paper uses one example from each season—Spring Breeze Whistling Tea (Start of Spring), Sweat-Relieving Refreshing Tea (Summer Solstice), Moisturizing Rain Tea (End of Heat), and Warm Heart Hulu Tea (Great Cold)—to demonstrate the specific translation methods; the design logic for the remaining twenty varieties follows the same principle.

The design centers on the sensory experience of each solar term, establishing a comprehensive system that encompasses the extraction of phenological elements, symbolic translation, and the conveyance of sensory experiences. The graphic design employs a flat vector style, extracting iconic phenological symbols from each solar term and transforming them into visual motifs. The Start of Spring design features a combination of solid and translucent swallows and weeping willow branches to simulate the dynamic sensation of spring winds rustling through the willows, echoing the effects of

invigorating yang energy and strengthening the spleen to dispel dampness. The Summer Solstice design uses a pale mint green background paired with lotus flowers and dragonfly silhouettes. The cool color palette conveys a refreshing sensation, visually translating the product's ability to clear heat and relieve summer heat. The End of Summer design features a warm beige background with caramel-brown chrysanthemums and bees. The warm tones and petal gradients convey a soothing sensation, aligning with the need for moisturizing and nourishing care. The Great Cold design features an icy blue background paired with winter plum branches and cute, fluffy birds. The color contrast—a cool base with warm accents—conveys a sensation of warmth amidst the cold, echoing the function of warming the body and dispelling cold.

The color system employs a low-saturation, high-compatibility coding logic to integrate with the sensory experience of the solar terms and their health-preserving functions. The Start of Spring design uses pale yellow paired with soft pink and light green to simulate the visual sensation of spring's warming return. The Summer Solstice design uses mint green accented with soft pink to create a visual cooling effect. The End of Summer design uses warm beige paired

with caramel brown to convey the gentle, nourishing tone of autumn. The Great Cold edition uses icy blue paired with pale yellow to balance the need for winter's coolness with the desire for warmth and nourishment. In terms of information hierarchy, a three-tier structure—comprising the main visual symbol, the solar term and tea name, and functional descriptions—is employed. The main visual evokes a sensory experience, vertically arranged text reinforces the meaning, and corner text supplements the functionality, thereby constructing a translation pathway from visual symbols to bodily perception.



Figure 1. Brand Logo



Figure 2. Tea Bag Outer Packaging Cover

#### 4.2.3. Ritualizing Behavior: Constructing a Narrative of Use Through Structural Elements

Packaging narratives unfold not only on the visual level but also through user behavior. Currently, many health tea packages are discarded immediately after opening, and the process from retrieving the tea to brewing lacks a continuous cultural experience; users perform merely functional operations rather than meaningful, ritualized acts. How to transform the everyday act of drinking tea into a narrative event that aligns with the solar terms and heals both body and mind is one of the core questions of this study. This study proposes a design strategy for structural materials that ritualizes behavior, whereby the structural design and material properties of the packaging make the act of use itself part of the narrative. Through each action—retrieving the tea, hanging the package, and brewing—users can experience an emotional transition from a negative state to recovery, thereby completing a small-scale self-healing ritual.

In "Four Seasons Remedies," this strategy is embodied in the "tea hanger" structure, designed to be suspended over the rim of a cup. The tea hanger consists of three layers, each serving distinct narrative and functional roles. The outermost layer is made of rigid cardstock, shaped after the ingredients found in the seasonal tea formulas, with a circular cutout in the center. The stiff cardstock provides structural support,

allowing the tea hanger to sit securely on the rim of the cup, while the circular cutout acts as a frame, guiding the user's gaze to focus on the changing symbols within. The second layer is made of water-permeable filter paper, printed with emojis representing negative emotions such as frustration, exhaustion, and anxiety. The filter paper is absorbent, and its semi-transparent texture allows the colors of the layer below to faintly show through when dry. This layer carries the narrative of the initial state; the negative emotion patterns visible to the user symbolize the psychological burdens accumulated by contemporary people in their fast-paced lives. The third layer, located beneath the filter paper, uses colored cardstock with cutouts representing positive emotions, such as smiling, reassurance, and warmth. The background color of the colored cardstock contrasts with the filter paper, and the cut-out sections become clearly visible once the filter paper absorbs water and turns translucent.

The process of using the tea bag forms a complete narrative arc. The user unfolds the tea hanger and secures it around the rim of the cup. At this point, the negative emojis on the filter paper are visible through the circular cutouts in the outer layer—this marks the starting point of the narrative, corresponding to the user's state of fatigue or anxiety before use. After pouring water into the cup, the filter paper begins to absorb the liquid. As the water permeates, the pigments on the filter paper are pushed into the fibers of the outer layer of

stiff cardstock. Due to the thickness of the cardstock, the pigments gradually dissipate. Once the negative emojis fade away, the filter paper becomes transparent from absorbing water, and the positive emojis cut out in the colored cardstock underneath gradually appear. Eventually, the negative symbol disappears completely, and the positive symbol becomes clearly visible. This marks the narrative's conclusion, symbolizing the dissipation of negative emotions and the restoration of mind and body within the time it takes to drink a cup of tea.

This design transforms the functional act of drinking tea into a series of rhythmic actions: hanging, pouring water, observing, waiting, and sipping. Each action is part of the narrative; the user is not passively drinking tea but actively participating in a ritual of transformation from a negative state to healing. The structure and materials of the tea hanger are no longer mere accessories to the packaging but the core carriers of the narrative itself.

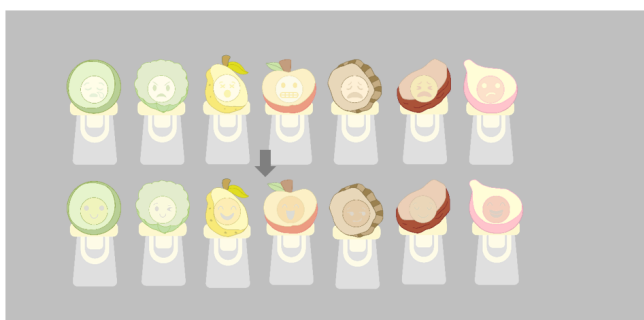


Figure 3. Tea Hanger Before and After Brewing



Figure 4. Cover of the Tea Book

## 5. Conclusion and Outlook

This study uses "Four Seasons Remedies" as a practical vehicle to explore how packaging design can undertake the narrative task of solar term wellness culture. The research found that the design dilemma of solar term health tea packaging stems from the failure of cultural translation; many products simplify the solar terms into visual decorative symbols, failing to convey the bodily wisdom of nurturing oneself in harmony with the seasons. The essence of this problem lies in the disconnect between temporal logic, bodily logic, and material logic.

To address this dilemma, the three strategies proposed in

this study constitute a set of actionable translation pathways. The strategy of structuring time into a narrative grammar uses the sequence of solar terms as the narrative backbone, transforming abstract time into concrete, leafable actions. The strategy of the symbolization of bodily sensations extracts visual elements from the phenological characteristics of the solar terms, constructing a unique symbolic system through graphics and color schemes to facilitate the transmission of perception from the visual to the bodily. The strategy of the ritualization of behavior utilizes the structural and material design of the tea hangers to transform the daily act of brewing tea into a narrative arc that progresses from a negative state to healing. These three strategies respectively address cognitive, experiential, and emotional needs, collectively forming a comprehensive packaging narrative system.

This study has certain limitations, including the fact that the design practice focuses primarily on conceptual development and has not yet been tested in the real market, and the applicability of these strategies to other traditional cultural themes remains to be verified. Future research could be deepened in areas such as real-market validation, expanding the scope of themes, exploring the integration of digital technologies, and establishing a quantitative evaluation system.

The modern transformation of traditional cultural resources is a significant theme in design research. As the interface connecting products and users, packaging serves a unique function in conveying cultural significance. Using "Four Seasons Remedies" as a case study, this research explores methodological approaches to narrative design for solar term health tea packaging, with the aim of providing a reference for similar design practices.

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