

# Packaging and Brand Visual Design of Agricultural Specialty Products Empowered by Regional Tea Culture: A Case Study of Bingdao Pu'er

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**Abstract:** Local tea culture is frequently mentioned in agricultural product branding, but taking Pu'er tea as an example, its packaging design is often unsatisfactory. Symbols are overused, visual identity is unclear, and regional characteristics are difficult to reflect. This study focuses on Bingdao Pu'er tea, exploring how to integrate local tea culture into packaging and brand design. First, we reviewed the ancient tree resources related to this tea, the traditions of the Tai and Lahu ethnic groups, and the history of the Tea Horse Road. Based on this, we proposed three design methods. First, we don't simply paste symbols, but delve into local symbols. Second, we construct a coherent brand visual system, rather than a collection of scattered elements. Third, we cleverly integrate information and functionality around the actual user experience. Our research found that cultural empowerment is not simply a matter of piling up materials, but only when symbol extraction, brand structure construction, and experience integration form an interconnected cycle can it truly be effective. We believe this framework can provide practical reference for building other agricultural product brands using local cultural resources.

**Keywords:** Regional Tea Culture; Bingdao Pu'er; Brand Visual Design; Packaging Design; Cultural Transformation.

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## 1. Introduction

The Pu'er tea market has been booming in recent years, yet packaging designs seem stuck in a rut. Generic Chinese motifs—misty mountains, lucky clouds, brushwork characters, red seals—keep turning up on wrapper after wrapper. Walk into any tea shop, and you'd be hard pressed to tell whether the cake in front of you is from Bingdao, Banzhang, or Yiwu just by looking at the package. This overuse of "symbolic shorthand" does two things at once: it blurs brand identities and drains the regional distinctiveness out of the tea itself. If regional culture is truly going to empower a product, it can't mean slapping a few clichéd "Chinese-style" visuals on the outside. It has to start from the ground up—with the specific ecology, the local people's ways of life, the historical layers that make one place different from another—and turn those into a visual language that actually tells a story.

Bingdao Pu'er makes for a particularly telling case. The area still holds cultivated ancient tea trees that are centuries old. The Dai and Lahu communities along the Lancang River have passed down their own tea customs for generations. And the place itself once sat on a key stretch of the Yunnan-Tibet Tea Horse Road. All of that adds up to rich material for design—yet if you look at the Bingdao Pu'er packaging out there today, you'll find the same old problem: the name "Bingdao" gets thrown around loosely, and genuinely site-specific designs are few and far between. That gap is exactly what this study sets out to address. The core question is straightforward: how can the regional tea culture tied to Bingdao Pu'er be systematically translated into packaging and brand visuals? And what kind of step-by-step path does that translation actually need to follow?

## 2. Research Status and Competitive Product Analysis

### 2.1. Research Status of Regional Culture and Packaging Design of Agricultural Specialty Products

In recent years, the integration of agricultural products into local culture has become a research hot spot in the field of packaging design and development.[3] Major domestic research centers are located in three regions. The first layer is the cultural coding method. Researchers universal recognition, successful operation of local cultural elements, primary demand for local nature, humanities and Japanese historical resources, there is a basic analysis code of the language. The second layer is the culture road. How to find out the identity of a researcher, how to write a code, learn local culture code, and write a language. The ternary division of the code (title, indicator, code) is available for use in the area [4]. However, there is currently a large amount of research and review, and there is a complete review of aspects such as visual inspection, structure, and materials handling. The third layer is a visually appealing structure. Researcher's focus, quality review system, source of local culture, non-external addition. However, the research on the structure of the tea products in China has been relatively small. The majority of research has focused on the practical aspects of packaging design, and there is a lack of comprehensive methodologies that can be expanded upon. Currently, there are three main points in the research: first, the code is given, the design is written, the time is limited and the translation is clear; the second is the code. A case study of a specific area (such as Bing Island) is not required. Third, a strategy to eliminate poverty has been established and a complete method for use has been developed. There are some minor limitations to this research.

2.2. Current Status Analysis of Bingdao Pu'er and Competitive Product Packaging Design

To clarify the positioning and differentiation direction of this study, the author conducted a systematic competitive product analysis of Pu'er tea packaging currently on the market, focusing on the packaging design status of Bingdao Pu'er and related products from famous mountains and villages.

Table 1. Competitive Product Analysis Table

| Competitive Product Type            | Representative Brand/Product         | Advantages                                            | Existing Problems                                                        |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Traditional Established Tea Company | Dayi · Famous Mountain Pu'er         | High brand recognition, stable and premium texture    | Conservative style, severe homogenization, weak regional characteristics |
| High-End Famous Mountain Tea        | Bingdao Old Village Pure Material    | Emphasizes premium and rare qualities                 | Overemphasizes luxury, thin cultural connotation                         |
| Locally Ethnic Characteristic       | Yunnan local tea company Bingdao tea | Distinct regional characteristics, natural and rustic | Rough craftsmanship, lack of premium feel, weak brand identity           |

3. Analysis of Local Symbols of Bingdao Pu'er

3.1. Natural Symbols: Ancient Tea Trees and the Landscape

Bingdao Village is located in Shuangjiang County, Lincang City, Yunnan Province, at an altitude of approximately 1600 to 2200 meters. It is home to several ethnic minorities, including the Dai, Lahu, Wa, and Bulan peoples. The region's most unique natural heritage is its centuries-old tea trees. Their robust trunks, gnarled branches, dense foliage, and bark covered in moss and lichen are breathtaking. The tea trees are not only the source of tea leaves but also symbolize "time" and "nature." From a design perspective, these twisted branches, layered leaves, and weathered bark can serve as primary materials for graphic design.

Beyond the tea trees themselves, the entire ecosystem of the Bingdao tea-producing region also embodies a deeper natural symbolism. High-altitude mists permeate the forests, ferns and moss cover the ground, and the soil's color changes from reddish-brown to grayish-brown—these elements collectively constitute the "natural landscape" of Bingdao Pu'er tea. When choosing a color scheme, these natural tones more accurately reflect the essence of Pu'er tea than popular color schemes.

3.2. Ethnic Symbols: Visual Traditions of the Dai and Lahu

The Dai and Lahu peoples have lived in Bingdao and its surrounding areas for generations, cultivating their own unique visual traditions through centuries of tea cultivation. Let's first look at the Dai. Their most distinctive patterns are found on brocade. These patterns feature elephant motifs, peacock patterns, diamond patterns, wave patterns, and serrated edges, exhibiting a strong sense of rhythm and often arranged in two- or four-way repetition. Their use of color is also bold, frequently employing vermilion, bright yellow, emerald green, and deep indigo—colors that strongly reflect the climate of their tropical river basin.

On the other hand, the Lahu people possess a different visual language. Their traditional clothing features cross patterns, eight-petaled flowers, and canine-tooth-shaped bands, with strong color combinations, primarily using a contrast of black, red, and white. However, the Lahu's connection to tea goes far beyond patterns. They are one of the oldest tea-cultivating ethnic groups in the Lancang River basin. According to a legend, the Lahu's ancestors originated from the tea tree. This identity as "tea ancestors" provides designers with a captivating narrative perspective.

These ethnic visual elements should not be regarded as ready-made decorative materials that can be simply cut and pasted. They are cultural resources that need to be truly understood and carefully interpreted. For example, the orderly logic of Thai brocade weaving can inspire grid structures in packaging design. Lahu patterns can be developed into auxiliary graphic systems. In addition, the color perceptions of the two ethnic groups can be combined to create a unified overall tone. [5]

Table 2. Comparative Survey Table of Dai and Lahu Visual Traditions

| Survey Dimension             | Dai                                                                                                                  | Lahu                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Core Patterns                | Elephant patterns, peacock patterns, diamond geometric patterns, wave patterns, tooth-shaped patterns                | Cross patterns, eight-petal flower patterns, dog tooth patterns                                                                                          |
| Arrangement Method           | Two-directional continuous, four-directional continuous, emphasizing sense of order and rhythmic repetition          | Scattered distribution, emphasizing compositional balance and symmetry                                                                                   |
| Color Preferences            | Vermilion, bright yellow, emerald green, indigo; rich and full-bodied, echoing the tropical river valley environment | Black, red, white; high contrast, simple yet intense                                                                                                     |
| Color Symbolism              | Wealth, auspiciousness, natural vitality                                                                             | Dignity, life, purity                                                                                                                                    |
| Relationship with Tea        | Inheritors of tea drinking culture; tea is a premium hospitality item in Dai villages                                | Among the earliest tea farmers in the Lancang River basin; legend holds that ancestors emerged from tea trees, giving them the identity of tea ancestors |
| Visual Style Characteristics | Highly decorative, gorgeous and delicate, orderly                                                                    | Simple and powerful, geometric abstraction, high degree of symbolization                                                                                 |

3.3. Historical Symbols: The Ancient Tea Horse Road and Caravan Culture

Lincang, the origin of Bingdao tea, was once a vital hub on the Ancient Tea Horse Road connecting Yunnan and Tibet. Historically, Bingdao tea departed from Mengku, passing

through Lincang, Dali, Lijiang, and Zhongdian (present-day Shangri-La), transported by horse to Tibet. This route was not only a transportation channel for tea but also a conduit for cultural, religious, and commercial exchanges across the plateau. The material traces left along the way—hoof prints on stone slabs, copper bells of caravans, bamboo tea utensils, post stations, and piles of Mani stones—carry multiple

meanings: migration, trade, hardship, and hope. In the packaging design, these traces of caravans are transformed into a visual narrative structure, guiding the viewer's eye from "harvesting" to "processing," then to "transportation," and finally to "tasting," much like a mule caravan traversing mountains.

### 3.4. Hierarchical Relationships and Transformation Potential of the Three Symbol Types

The three categories mentioned above (natural, ethnic, and historical) are not merely interchangeable decorative elements, but a system of meaning with a clear internal logic. Natural symbols connect the product to material reality and indicate the tea's origin; ethnic symbols connect it to cultural

life, showcasing the tea growers and drinkers; historical symbols give the product temporal depth, demonstrating the geographical and temporal spread of tea. Together, these three construct a complete narrative arc about place, people, and time. In actual design, each plays a crucial role. Natural symbols enhance the product's authenticity, telling consumers that this is genuine, ancient tea from Bingdao; ethnic symbols create uniqueness, giving the packaging an inimitable or counterfeit visual identity; historical symbols evoke emotional resonance, allowing drinkers to feel the sedimentation of time and the charm of stories in every sip of tea. The skillful combination of these three avoids monotonous design. In monotonous design, simply piling up one type of symbol can numb the visual senses, leading to a loss of meaning.

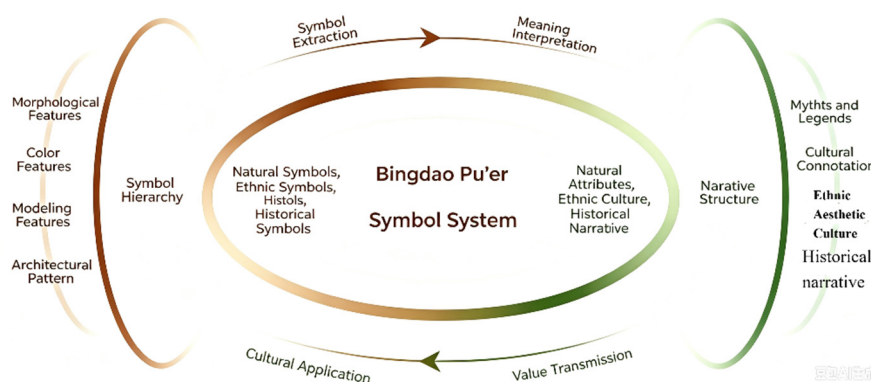


Figure 1. Hierarchical Logic Diagram of the Three Types of Symbols of Bingdao Pu'er

## 4. Design Positioning

### 4.1. Brand Value Proposition

Based on the above, this study proposes the brand value proposition: Tracing the origin of the product and tasting the spiritual world behind the tea. This proposition aims to respond to consumers' thirst for exploring the various symbols represented by "Bingdao Pu'er," moving from simple tea tasting to a higher pursuit of the spiritual world.

Specifically, the brand value proposition includes three levels. At the functional level, through "Bingdao" (a transliteration of the local dialect), consumers learn about the thousand-year-old ancient tea trees, trace their origin, visualize the form and origin of the ancient tea trees, and establish a deep trust connection with consumers. At the emotional value level, it conveys a sense of "gift of nature," allowing consumers to empathize with the vigorousness of the ancient tea trees, the sound of caravan bells, and the warmth of ethnic culture. At the cultural value level, it adheres to pure natural, pollution-free, and hand-picked practices. The tea leaves also carry the warmth of traditional tea pickers. Thus, the brand gains emotion, becoming not only a seller of tea but also a storyteller and disseminator of the natural and humanistic stories of Bingdao.

### 4.2. Target User Positioning

The first category is seasoned tea enthusiasts, aged 25-55. As core users, they are the main consumers. They are predominantly male, have considerable knowledge of tea culture, have a habit of drinking tea, and have a deeper pursuit of spiritual levels. For them, tea tasting involves not only the tea itself but also the culture behind it, resonating with their

own experiences. They have some understanding of Bingdao Pu'er tea, pursue the drinking experience of authentic mountain charm, are tired of homogenized packaging, and hope to see designs that more reflect the essence of the tea and cultural depth.

The second category is culture-exploring middle-class consumers, as secondary users. For them, tea serves as a status symbol, reflecting elegant personal taste. They are aged 30-45, with a balanced male-to-female ratio. For them, experienceable cultural narratives and aesthetic lifestyles are highly attractive. The unique and interesting stories behind "Bingdao" in the design appeal precisely to their tastes.

The third category is gift purchasers, who represent a distinct scenario-based user group. These include corporate buyers and individual consumers purchasing for high-end gifting occasions, whose primary concerns are the packaging's presentability, distinctiveness, and cultural depth—they want the gift to convey thoughtfulness and good taste.

### 4.3. Design Strategy Framework

Strategy 1: A Thorough Transformation of Regional Symbols – From Appropriation to Conversion

This strategy aims to address the widespread misuse of symbols and cultural misunderstandings in Pu'er tea packaging design. Instead of simply pasting common Chinese patterns and ethnic motifs, we employ a systematic transformation method to convert symbols representing Pingdao's unique natural landscape, ethnic culture, and history into a design language with modern aesthetic sensibilities. This study proposes a four-stage transformation model: extraction, abstraction, reconstruction, and metaphor.

In terms of color, we break away from the traditional Pu'er

tea packaging design's dominant color scheme of gold, brown, and white. The main colors are directly extracted from the visual characteristics of the ancient tea trees themselves: the grayish-brown of old branches, the deep green of mature leaves, and the yellowish-green of new buds. These three colors constitute the main color scheme, accounting for approximately 70% of the overall tone, giving the concept of "ancient trees" visual credibility. The secondary colors are inspired by the ochre and gold of Dai brocade, and the deep black and vermilion of Lahu clothing. The use of color is perfectly balanced, with reduced saturation, adding a subtle touch of ethnic charm without being overpowering.

In terms of design, it doesn't directly imitate the patterns of Dai brocade or Lahu embroidery, but rather extracts and abstracts their inherent structural logic—the repetition and variation of diamond geometric patterns in Dai brocade, and the symmetry and rotation of the eight-petal flower pattern in Lahu embroidery—and integrates them into a set of auxiliary graphic systems and a layout grid. Furthermore, the brushstrokes of the brand logo are inspired by the winding lines of ancient tea tree branches, while the embossing on the packaging surface is inspired by the concave surface of a horseshoe.

In terms of materials and structure, the outer packaging's binding system uses the binding techniques of bamboo ropes and leather containers used on the Ancient Tea Horse Road. Additionally, by incorporating the woven patterns of Thai bamboo houses into the embossing on the packaging surface, consumers can experience traces of regional culture through touch when opening the package. Through these three steps, the unique regional symbols are elevated from decorative stickers to an inherent formal language of the design itself.

**Strategy Two: Building a Brand Visual System – From Fragmentation to Holism**

This strategy aims to address the fragmentation and lack of consistency prevalent in current Pu'er tea brand presentations – namely, the use of different visual languages for logos, packaging, and promotional materials, resulting in a lack of a unified brand image. We will build a complete visual identity system from the core logo to its application deployment.

Regarding the core logo design, we propose two feasible future development options. The first option is to use a unique font for the characters "Bingdao", incorporating the shape of ancient tea tree branches into the strokes, making the characters themselves a medium for visually representing natural symbolism. The second option is to extract key structural units from Thai brocade and Lahu patterns to maintain a high degree of brand visual consistency and recognizability across various media.

**Strategy Three: Experience-Driven Integration of Information and Functions**

This strategy aims to address the challenges of "single-function packaging" and "information overload," transforming packaging from a mere tea container into an

integral part of the overall experience. Information is divided into three levels. The first level is the product name Bingdao Pu'er Tea, presented in the most prominent way. The second layer contains basic product information, such as origin, year, and net weight. The third layer, printed in smaller print on the back of the packaging, tells the story behind the tea and its production process.

The packaging's narrative structure creates an experiential path, like "an open book." Upon opening the outer box, the inner box unfolds a series of continuous illustrations and scroll-like structures, telling the complete story from the harvesting of ancient tea leaves to handcrafted processing, caravan transport, and finally, the careful enjoyment of the tea. The tea cake itself is cleverly placed at key points in the narrative, allowing consumers to naturally experience the progression of the visual story as they remove it.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study takes Bingdao Pu'er tea as an example to systematically explore how regional tea culture influences agricultural product packaging and brand visual design. The study found that empowering regional culture is not simply piling up elements. Effective design begins with in-depth and multi-layered investigation of the unique natural, ethnic and historical symbols of a specific region, and the construction of a three-dimensional semantic network of "place-people-time". On this basis, true empowerment is not just the isolated piling up of decorative elements, but requires collaborative design on three levels: extraction of cultural symbols, construction of brand system and integration of functional experience. The case of Bingdao Pu'er tea shows that when these three levels work together, regional culture transcends surface decoration and becomes the structural basis of brand visual identity, giving the product authenticity and narrative depth, thereby arousing consumer resonance.

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