

# Symbolic Semantic Analysis of Tile End Cap Patterns and Brand Image Design Practice

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**Abstract:** Within the context of cultural confidence and national trend design, this paper aims to transform static traditional cultural heritage into dynamic brand symbols with market competitiveness. Using ancient Chinese tile end cap patterns as elements and the “Wa Yun” souvenir brand as a practical case study, it comprehensively demonstrates how the extracted symbolic semantics of tile end caps can be applied through logo design, “IP cuteness adaptation,” “geometric poster design,” “ceremonial packaging,” and “physical pre-production.” Employing semiotic theory, it constructs a three-tiered symbolic analysis framework—“extended form, intrinsic meaning, and emotional value”—for creative translation and systematic construction. This paper elucidates the semantic transformation from sacred totems like phoenixes and azure dragons into approachable IP characters. Guided by symbolic semantic analysis, the design methodology transforms traditional cultural elements from museum “historical specimens” into brand image designs circulating within consumer spaces—capable of resonating emotionally with contemporary consumers. It provides a reference for the brand innovation of traditional cultural resources, combining theoretical depth with practical value.

**Keywords:** Tile-end ornamentation; Symbolic semantics; Symbolic translation; Brand image; Design practice

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## 1.Introduction

Roof tiles, commonly known as tile ends or barrel tile ends, serve as protective caps at the front ends of barrel tiles on ancient building eaves. As a distinctive component of Chinese architectural systems, they shield eave rafters from wind and rain while enhancing the aesthetic appeal of structures, earning them the title of “art on the eaves” in ancient China.

As dual treasures—both architectural elements and artistic carriers—ancient Chinese tile ends harbor rich symbolic value and aesthetic potential within their pattern systems. Yet this heritage remains underutilized in contemporary design. Designers confront the tourism souvenir market's shift from homogenized products toward branded, symbol-driven consumption. This article positions itself at the intersection of semiotic theory and brand identity design practice, exploring how to deeply decode the cultural semantics of tile pattern motifs and effectively transform them into a comprehensive set of modern brand visual symbols capable of resonating with contemporary consumers. The research will conduct a theoretical review of semiotic interpretation and translation of tile patterns, combined with the design practice of the “Wa Yun” brand, aiming to enrich design theory and provide empirical references for cultural and creative brand development.

## 2.Literature Review

Tile ends represent a significant traditional symbol in Chinese culture, carrying profound cultural connotations. Amidst the current revival of national trends, integrating tile end elements into brand imagery transcends mere surface decoration, forming a visual symbol system rich in cultural information.

Li (2022) notes that tile end patterns are commonly regarded as a symbolic system composed of visual forms as “signers” and cultural imagery as “dignified.” Research by Li (2022) and Shi (2023) demonstrates that the evolution of tile pattern designs—from Qin Dynasty cloud and sunflower motifs, to Han Dynasty lotus and inscribed tiles, and later composite geometric patterns after the Wei-Jin period—clearly reflects the social beliefs and aesthetic preferences of each era. Feng & Wang (2024) quantified the cultural characteristics of patterns into semantic vectors, enabling structured interpretation and cross-cultural comparison of their connotations. Cheng (2022) demonstrated

through case studies that character-inscribed tiles can imbue brand names with historical weight, while natural motifs like cloud and animal patterns effectively enhance a brand's cultural depth. Chang and Cong (2023) explored how shape grammar and digital restoration support modular innovation and precise reference for ornamental patterns. Feng and Wang (2024) further demonstrated that the Extensible Semantic Model transforms traditional ornaments into modern visual language, significantly enhancing a brand's emotional value. These studies affirm the immense potential of tile ornamentation in design applications while also identifying practical shortcomings.

### 3.Semiotic Analysis of Tile End Cap Elements

Tile end cap patterns serve not only as protective components for ancient architectural eaves but also as miniature symbolic systems where the “signifier—graphic” and “signified—concept” are tightly interlocked. During the extraction and redesign process for the “Wa Yun” brand, this system was continuously deconstructed, translated, and reassembled, forming a pathway connecting traditional semantics to contemporary brand assets. The tile end pattern continuously shifts across three semantic layers: extension, connotation, and emotion. The extension—curves, skeletal structures, and typography—provides recognizable visual hooks. The connotation—auspiciousness, authority, and philosophical thought—imparts cultural depth. The emotional layer translates collective memory into individual sentiment through personification, color schemes, and modularization, ultimately achieving a sustainable cycle from “cultural symbol” to “brand asset” (see Table 1).

Table 1: Symbolic Semantic Analysis of Tile End Cap Patterns





Tile End Cap Elements	Legend	Symbolic Meaning	Brand Translation
Belladonna Glazed Double Phoenix Pattern Tile End Cap	 (Figure 1)	The phoenix, an auspicious bird, symbolizes good fortune, happiness, and fulfillment; the twin phoenixes signify “good things come in pairs.”	The brand emblem transforms into “Four Phoenixes in Conjunction,” symbolizing “a succession of joyous events” and conveying contemporary blessings and emotional resonance.
Celadon Glazed Azure Dragon Pattern Tile End Cap	 (Figure 2)	It represents cardinal directions and cosmic order, embodying protection, warding off evil, and authority.	IP characters “Dragon Wa wa” and “Tiger Pupu” are anthropomorphize, reinterpreted as affectionate, protective, and companionable emotional figures
Cloud Pattern Tile End Cap	 (Figure 3)	The swirling, cyclical form of cloud patterns symbolizes the enduring force of life.	Modular 重组 in auxiliary graphics conveys a modern vision of “auspiciousness and fulfillment,” enhancing visual rhythm
Inscription Tile End Cap	 (Figure 4)	The text directly conveys ancient people's aspirations for “joy in life and the perpetuation of civilization.”	Refined into a brand slogan, strengthening brand cultural recognition and emotional resonance

Table source: Author's own creation

The blue-glazed double phoenix design (Fig. 1) forms a circular tension through graceful, intertwined curves. The rhythmic and symmetrical extension of its form first conveys a sense of balance and fluidity to the viewer. As auspicious birds symbolizing “peace throughout the land when seen,” phoenixes carry collective memories of ‘pairing’ and “good fortune.” When designers expanded this motif into the “Four Phoenixes Encircling” emblem using the symbiotic structure of the “Four Joyful Children,” its meaning subtly shifted toward the modern blessing of “endless joyous occasions.” This transformation activated its emotional value as consumable sentiment capital. Similarly, the Four Divine Beasts motifs like the Azure Dragon and White Tiger (Fig. 2) originally proclaimed

authority over the four directions through their formidable contours and compact skeletons. Their sharp, angular “signifier” and the cosmic order they “signified” jointly constructed a ritual atmosphere of warding off evil and safeguarding. Brand IP simplifies these mythical beasts into rounded forms that emit “Phoenix-like charm,” “Dragon-like whispers,” and “Tiger-like purrs.” By reducing aggression and increasing interactivity, these majestic totems transform into companion-like emotional partners, completing a semantic drift from ‘awe’ to “affection.” Cloud-patterned tile ends (Fig. 3) depict the circulation of “qi” through curling, ascending fluid lines. Their outward form mimics the dynamic movement of mist-shrouded clouds, while their inner layer carries the auspicious concept of “endless vitality.” The design process dissects and reconfigure cloud-pattern modules, enhanced with high-saturation gradient colors, translating traditional cosmology into lighthearted contemporary blessings that resonate with young consumers' emotional needs for “good fortune” and “growth.” The character-patterned tile (Fig. 4) directly embeds the seal script characters for “Everlasting Joy” and “Endless Prosperity” into a circular composition, where signifier and signified nearly overlap, forming the most direct symbolic anchor; The brand distilled these into slogans and auxiliary graphics. Through modern typography and geometric layout, it preserves the charm of ancient inscriptions while infusing contemporary flair, allowing these ancient blessings to radiate instant consumer appeal on product packaging.

#### 4.The Practice of Constructing the “Wa Yun” Brand Symbol System

Semiotics emphasizes that the signifier-signified relationship must be continually reevaluated and receded within specific contexts to maintain its cultural vitality. Chapter Three has demonstrated that tile-end ornamentation possesses triple semantic plasticity encompassing “extension, connotation, and emotion.” This chapter takes the “Wa Yun” commemorative brand as its practical case study, systematically presenting how these meanings are continuously translated into modern visual language. Through a series of tangible, interactive, and communicable sensory touch-points, a closed-loop of meaning is achieved. All design outputs of the “Wa Yun” brand are regarded as vehicles for the ‘internationalization of brand symbols. Their mission extends beyond mere “aesthetic enhancement” to enable traditional symbols to speak anew within contemporary consumer contexts.

##### 4.1 Symbiotic Translation of the Four Phoenixes Logo

The brand logo serves as the “first touching” in the symbolic translation chain. Its function lies in instantly transitioning “traditional sacredness” into “contemporary recognizable” through the most concentrated graphic energy.



Figure 5 “Wa Yun” Brand Logo

Image Source: Original design by the author

The core motif of “Tile Rhythm” is derived from a Western Han Dynasty green-glazed double-phoenix tile end (see Figure 5, left). The original design, featuring “two phoenixes following each other head-to-tail,” inherently embodies the auspicious meaning of “good things come in pairs.” The design adopts the shared contour syntax of folk “Four Joy Babies” motifs (see Fig. 5, right), cleverly mirroring and nesting the twin phoenixes to generate a closed totem of “four phoenixes encircling” (see Fig. 5). Within the same circular field, the phoenix crown, wings, and tail feathers form positive-negative relationships, creating a “1=2=4” progressive multiplication. This grants the signifier rhythmic visual surprise while shifting the signified from “pairing” to the modern celebratory discourse of “endless continuity,” expanding the meaning from ‘auspiciousness’ to “consecutive joyous events.” On the color front, the collision of high-saturation green and pink draws inspiration from roof tile glazes and contemporary color trends. This not only echoes the classical heritage of blue-green hues but also injects a “photogenic” quality suited for the social media era through its fluorescent texture. The outer brown ring anchors the design with the seal-carving “seal knob” motif, grounding it in cultural depth and countering any potential cheapness from high saturation.

#### 4.2 The “Cute-notification” of Sacred Totems in IP Imagery



Figure 6: “Wa Yun” Brand IP Character Design

Image Source: Original Design by the Author

As shown in Figure 6, the design centers on “Phoenix Charm,” a core IP inspired by phoenix-shaped roof tiles. Through geometric cutting and softened curves, the originally aloof auspicious totem is transformed into an approachable anime-style face. The Azure Dragon and White Tiger respectively spawn “Dragon WaWa” and “Tiger Pupu.” The curvature of their brow ridges and teeth echoes the formal beauty of the phoenix crown's curves, ensuring the “signifier” retains historical DNA. Meanwhile, their rounded forms and flat coloring shift the ‘signified’ from “awe-inspiring guardianship” to “protective companionship.”

#### 4.3 The Geometric Context of the Phoenix Tail Feather Symbol in Posters



Figure 7: “Wa Yun” Brand Poster Design

Image Source: Original Design by the Author





introduces hidden IP variants, triggering a “collect-swap-socialize” behavior chain that sustains the symbols' value appreciation in secondary markets. All products adhere to a unified green-pink-brown color palette, ensuring the “signifier” remains consistent across materials (metal, silk, PVC) to reinforce brand recognition. The “Wa Yun” logo is embossed in negative seal script on select items' backs, completing the “symbolic signature” and transforming consumers into mobile cultural ambassadors during use.

From IP cuteness, geometric posters, and ritualized packaging to physical merchandise, this chapter presents a complete symbolic translation chain: “semantic extraction—form simplification—scenario regeneration—experience commodification.” This chain validates semiotics as a “leading methodology” rather than “post-hoc annotation”: Traditional roof tiles are first deconstructed into certifiable semantic units, then reintegrated through modern design techniques and consumer scenarios to form tangible, shareable, and reproducible brand assets. Thus, tile patterns transcend their status as “dead symbols” confined to museum display cases, evolving into “living media” that circulate through fingertips and self-replicate across social platforms—achieving a two-way convergence of cultural memory and commercial logic.

## 5. Discussion

The construction process of the “Wa Yun” brand reveals a clear chain of translation. At the signifier level, the design lowers the cognitive threshold of ancient symbols by geometrically simplifying the original tile finials, employing contrasting colors, and adopting a cute aesthetic, making them compatible with modern visual aesthetics. At the signified level, this translation does not abandon meaning—the Azure Dragon and White Tiger shift from “imposing guardians” to “friendly companions”; while the “Four Phoenixes in Conjunction” motif retains its auspicious core while amplifying the contemporary blessing of “endless joyous occasions”; cloud-patterned and character-inscribed roof tiles transform from abstract philosophical concepts into embodied, experiential manifestations of “good fortune” and “aspirations.” This process successfully converts weighty cultural capital into light, consumable emotional capital.

The research designs brand touch points themselves as generators of meaning. Whether it's the “unveiling tile” ritual of opening packaging or the collecting joy of blind boxes, these transform the consumption of symbols into embodied experiences. This enables consumers to unconsciously accept and internalize cultural symbols. It demonstrates that contemporary brand symbol construction has evolved from two-dimensional visual communication to multidimensional, integrated meaning-building orchestrated throughout the user journey.

## 6. Conclusion

This study deconstructs tile-end ornamentation into a multi-layered system of meaning within a semiotic framework. Through the comprehensive design of the “Wa Yun” brand, it systematically demonstrates how this semantic system can be reconfigured into a modern brand symbol system—one that embodies cultural distinctiveness, contemporary relevance, and commercial vitality—via a series of carriers including brand logos, IP characters, visual graphics, packaging, and physical products. The conclusion explicitly states that the core of traditional culture's modern transformation lies in the effective translation of symbols. This process demands designers possess both the depth to decode historical culture and the ability to encode contemporary contexts. The “Wa Yun” brand demonstrates that when the majesty of mythical beasts transforms into the warmth of companionship, and the philosophical essence of “cloud patterns” is reinterpreted as blessings for growth, traditional tile decorations cease to be mere cold, static motifs confined to historical texts. Instead, they become living brand assets that integrate into daily life and evoke emotional resonance.

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