

**Design Guidelines of Applying Regional-Cultural Factors in Creating Visual Brand  
Language**

by

Hao Tian

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Approved by

Tin-Man Lau, Chair, Professor of Industrial Design  
Christopher Arnold, Associate Professor of Industrial Design  
Shea Tillman, Associate Professor of Industrial Design

## Abstract

Applying cultural factors in product design is an attractive topic worthy to study. Regional culture, which affects people's daily life from many respects, is one of the decisive factors for design directions. However, during the process of design research and concept generations, many designers have not noticed that their works are based on a certain culture, or the cultural factors they use are not matching their design target. To solve this problem, many designers from different countries and regions conducted much valuable researches regarding regional-cultural design. On the basis of their personal experience and years of local cultural infiltration, those designers explored methods of regional-culture learning and cultural-factor, applying results in one direction. Those research results provide precious reference value and research directions for this research.

To provide a distinct idea, this research will start from a new respect and introduce a popular concept-- Visual Brand Language-- as an advanced carrier of regional-cultural factors. Visual Brand Language will help designers to manage design target and show off the final design result in perfect order.

The foundational idea of this research is to match the regional-cultural factors with the design target. To make this happen, the final guidelines will alternatively focus on the design target, which is under the management of Visual Brand Language, and regional culture. It will

also provide a way to for designers to define their cultural tools based on the design target learning. Another important function of this research is providing a new way to analyze regional culture in the design area-- a culture stratification which is a learning and application frame for designers to learn and use regional culture.

## Acknowledgement

Since the first day I learn Industrial Design, culture and design are two of my passionate learning areas. Creative thinking is always important to designers, and so is persistently catching up with latest design events. During the finishing process of this thesis, the thing I really wanted to do is learn how to calm down and taste the beauty of design and culture even in a rapid design process, as well as how to make sure my design passion is always rational and emotional. I would like to thank all my professors and friends who helped and encouraged me during the past three years. With your support, I feel powerful and confident going forward on my design path.

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## CHAPER 1

### Introduction

#### **1.1 Problem Statement**

Nowadays, most people use GPS as their navigation tool during travel. GPS provides very reliable information, which helps users get to their destination directly and quickly. However, GPS reduces the possibilities of meeting unpredictable but beautiful scenery on the way. When people still relied on paper maps or road signs for their trips, they had more opportunities to travel alternate ways, as well as discover new roads and unknowns.

The same thing goes for art and culture. Beautiful art normally happens without a guide. That's why inspiration is so important for artists and designers. The essences of one culture are usually hard to be understood by another culture. Most time, they can be very freestyle, mysterious, intricate, or even contrary to mainstream aesthetics. Some of the cultural features are hard to explain. But people treat those features as treasures. They develop cultural identities from them. That's the most precious part of culture.

An industrial designer is often defined as both an artist and a technologist, as they use both rational thinking and affective thinking to brew up design ideas. However, it is not easy for industrial designers to create regional-culture-based design. There are three reasons:

Firstly, the process of designing industrial products is rigorous, which is very different

from the creation process of traditional handcrafted products or artworks. Industrial Design focuses on products manufactured through techniques of mass production. The production process is open repeated and automated (“Industrial Design”, 2017). As industrial products are designed before production, designers have more limitations. They must prove the feasibility of their inspirations before production. Therefore, for a regional-culture-based design research, industrial product is not a suitable carrier. Comparatively speaking, a series of products or a brand is more appropriate because products of a brand lead by its brand value and belief, just like culture. Therefore, the concept of Visual Brand Language (VBL) is appropriate. Visual Brand Language is an effective toolkit to build core brand values and transfer design elements into design procedures. As a kind of language, VBL is created to help products transmit their values and personalities visually. However, a review of recent research shows a lack of clear analysis of VBL that can be accepted by all designers, as well as related theories and case studies.

Secondly, many current cultural-design studies start with certain cultures and use cultural elements either superficially or unmatched with their design targets. Some designers think only using cultural signatures is enough. But it will bring preconceived notions into design process. Changes triggered by cultural evolution do reflect and determine developments in design (Moalosi, Popovic, & Hickling-Hudson, 2010). Culture is a key factor that gives meaning and value to inanimate objects. It involves color themes, signature patterns, as well as lifestyle, customs, and spirit inheritance. Many designers and scholars make great efforts to definite culture at a design level, but most of the works are superficial. As Kun-Pyo Lee (2004) claimed, in the design field, designers still place national shape and color as the major topic. For example,

in 2010, there was research studying how participants transformed a socio-cultural factors characteristic into product design feature (Moalosi et al., 2010). It was limited to a certain region (Botswana) and created a valuable research method based on local folktales. It is a great attempt to give rational analysis among collected cultural factors from social culture. However, not all design objects are appropriate for the socio-cultural factors from folktales. Applying factors mechanically would only make the study outcome weak.

Thirdly, most industrial designers are educated similarly in design but are short of cultural ones. Since globalization pushes the world's culture to evolve and develop, there is a lack of cultural diversity in today's design area. This situation places ever greater burdens on product designers. Don Norman (2012) mentioned that when he visited the top design schools over the world, he found that their curricula and methods are similar. Very few programs introduce how to learn cultures and how to use cultural elements in design. Most culture-based designs rely on designer's individual cultural background and learning ability. Only relying on personal intuition to accomplish cultural thinking in design is not enough.

In conclusion, to help industrial designers develop better regional-culture-based designs, Visual Brand Language and regional-cultural design are the two main entry points of the current research.

## **1.2 Need for Study**

Designers' job is not only publicizing the symbols of culture, but also creating cultural identities through products. Industrial products can talk with users and transmit emotions and

belief as well. Kenya Hara (2007) claimed in his book that Japanese culture has a craftsman inspired sense of aesthetic that is so focused that they miss the impact of the bigger picture. To create a representative and influential cultural design, designers should be concerned about how to balance traditional culture and industrial civilization. This is not easy.

All the three problems mentioned in this Problem Statement should be solved. Firstly, a clear definition of VBL is needed. There are many companies using VBL to serve their brands, but they all use different VBL structures which only fit themselves. There should be a standard. What is VBL? What is its structure like and what is in each level? Who does VBL serve? In this research, all these questions should be answered before the work goes on. Besides the VBL itself, the relationship between brand, products and consumer needs should also be managed.

Secondly, after defining the VBL idea specifically, the concept of regional culture needs to be clarified too. As claimed earlier, only using regional culture on a surface level is not the true meaning of cultural design. An evaluative standard of regional culture is needed for this part. But as culture is always a blurry concept, so is regional culture. The good thing is that there are plenty of multi-perceptive views that explain both culture and regional culture. In this research, some of these views will help designers find the connections between culture and design, and develop a stratification of regional culture. As a new way to analyze regional culture in design area, this stratification will be a tool for designers to learn and use regional culture.

Thirdly, a logical way of learning and using regional culture is needed. Although designers are recommended not to rely too much on a “GPS” when going for inspiration, it is still necessary to have a map. Thus, besides research on VBL and cultural design, it is necessary



to think about how to use that scattered information. As mentioned earlier, the regional culture evaluative standard will be a powerful tool for designers. Designers can use it as a study frame during cultural research, and as a sorting assistant for concept generation. The time and position of using it in the guideline are flexible.

### **1.3 Objectives of Study**

The main objectives of this study are providing a learning and applying frame of regional culture, and use it as a tool in the final guideline of creating VBL. The relationships between culture, brand product, brand language, and design procedure will be clarified. An intensive cultural factor collecting method, which corresponds directly with VBL elements, will be used for the culture research work. The guideline will provide designers the principles for analyzing design targets, establishing culture research scope, developing design concepts, and creating a more relevant VBL. The following is a summary of what this study will focus on:

- Analyze the concepts of product, brand, and VBL
- Determine the relationship between those concepts
- Summarize the VBL structure and do case studies to test it
- Analyze the concepts and characteristics of culture, regional culture, and cultural design
- Determine the relationship between those concepts
- Summarize regional-culture stratification and do case studies to test it
- Organize the guidelines of applying regional-cultural factors in creating VBL

### **1.4 Definitions of Terms**

Brand - a set of marketing and communication methods that help to distinguish a company from competitors and create a lasting impression in the minds of customers (Ghodeswar, 2008).

Color - the aspect of the appearance of objects and light sources that may be described in terms of hue, lightness, and saturation for objects and hue, brightness, and saturation for light sources (“Color,” n.d.).

Culture - the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group (“Culture”, n.d.).

Emotion - a conscious mental reaction subjectively experienced as strong feeling usually directed toward a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes in the body (“Emotion,” n.d.).

Finish - the final coating on a surface or the appearance produced by such a coating (Erlhoff & Marshall, 2008).

Logo - a graphic mark, emblem, or symbol commonly used by commercial enterprises, organizations and individuals to aid and promote instant public recognition (“Logo,” n.d.).

Material - the elements, constituents, or substances of which something is composed or can be made (“Material,” n.d.).

Package - a commodity or a unit of a product uniformly wrapped or sealed (“Package,” n.d.).

Perception - the way that one notices or understands something using one of their senses (“Perception,” n.d.).

Regional Culture – one relatively homogeneous human activity or complex of activities from one geographical area (Otmazgin, 2014).

Shape - a standard or universally recognized spatial form or contour (“Shape,” n.d.).

Visual Brand Language (VBL) - a unique alphabet of design elements – such as shape, color, materials, finish, typography and composition – which directly and subliminally communicate a company's values and personality through compelling imagery and design style. Sometimes it is termed design DNA (Brunner, Emery, & Hall, 2009).

## **1.5 Assumptions**

To establish a culturally relevant design procedure based on Visual Brand Language elements, this research makes several assumptions, as follows:

First, the new design procedure mentioned in the objectives of this study is aimed at building a Visual Brand Language. The basic design procedure is a foundation. This means the outcome is a design language, not one or several tangible or virtual products.

Second, the basic design process used in this study is based on "The Seven Universal Stages of Creative Problem-Solving" (Kaufmann, 1991), which were outlined by Don Koberg and Jim Bagnell and helps designers formulate their product from ideas. Designers often use various design methodologies in their creative design process. In this theory, design process follows the order of Access Situations, Analyze, Define, Ideate, Select, Implement, and Evaluate. To simplify the seven steps to suit product design, in this research, the basic design procedure used in this research is separated into four parts: establish project initiation brief, research, build

concepts and refinements, and prototype and test (Figure 1.1).

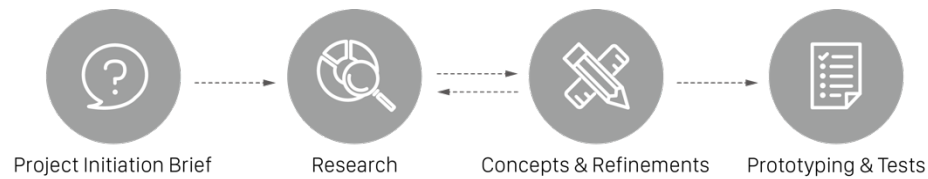


Figure 1.1 Basic Design Procedure

Third, the final design objects for the VBL creation include brand personality, product attributes, design principles, and signature elements. Those components will be used to classify cultural factors, analysis design target and re-define the design procedure.

Last, although commonly the concepts of Brand and VBL are intended to be used generally, the brand language constructed in this study will not belong to any specific corporation. This will expand product categories and inspire more design thinking regarding product details.

## 1.6 Scope and Limits

All the culture related to design area in this study refers to regional culture. This research focuses on an understanding of how regional cultural meaning influences user experience. This focus on the regional-cultural factors relates to human's physical and psychical responses toward product activities, such as usage, appreciation, social communication, psychic identification, etc. Most of the cultural factors used in this research revolve around social aspects but not economic ones. Meanwhile, some other elements are limited to a single category, such as pure literature, music, films, or sports, will not be discussed as topic factors.

Furthermore, the scope of VBL will be only limited to the visual area, which can be narrowed to the definition of VBL in Building Strong Brands (Aaker, 2010). Other elements, like sounds or touch, will not be included in the research or used in the culture analysis part, although they can be considered broadly as part of VBL.

Due to the emphasis of this thesis, the design target of the Visual Brand Language will be a brand that includes industrial products. The category can also include graphic design, package design, interface design, or service design.

Additionally, as shown above, the basic design procedure used in this study includes four parts: establish project initiation brief, research, build concepts and refinements, and prototype and test. However, the study of culture factors and VBL building will just be limited to the first steps, which means prototyping and test will not be covered in this research.

## **1.7 Procedures and Methodology**

### Part 1 Concepts overview

Step 1 Identify the basic concepts of brand, VBL, culture, and regional culture

Step 2 Study the elements and relationships between concepts

- Online resources and library
- Videos and lectures
- Research results
- Examples of cases in the market

### Part 2 Theories overview and sorting

Step 3 Learn the basic design process and research methods of creating a culturally-based VBL

Step 4 Study cases of logical VBL work and appropriate culture-based design

Step 5 Find the connections among VBL elements, cultural factors, and design procedures

- Online resources and library
- Research results

Part 3 Guideline building

Step 6 Build a new culture-friendly design research procedure

Step 7 Build the VBL principles

Step 8 Finish the guideline

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

#### **2.1 Brand and Visual Brand Language (VBL)**

##### **2.1.1 Discussions of Brand**

Nowadays, it is hard for a product or an organization to exist without a brand. Landor Associates (Landor, 2010), one of the world's leading strategic brand consulting and design firms, claims that brands help people make an interesting choice, a choice among salts, financial institutions, political parties, and so on. Although some old marketing textbooks talk about brands versus commodities (no-name products), in today's world, very few true commodities are left.

##### **2.1.1.1 Brand and Consumer Behavior**

As Walter Landor claims(Landor, 2010), products are made in the factory but brands are created in the mind. The greatest different between branded goods and no-name products is the spirit of brands. A brand is used to identify and differentiate products or services from other competitors (Ghodeswar, 2008). It does not only satisfy costumers' usage requirements, but also their emotional needs. Beyond products and services, a brand also uses identity, communication, awareness, loyalty, and strategies to delight consumers. It is the emotional bridge between products and consumers. Therefore, to study more deeply how to create an excellent brand, it is

essential to study the relationship between brand and consumer.

Brands and consumers are deeply intermeshed (Figure 2.1). The original brand idea defines the functions and meanings of products. When consumers interact with those products, they have physical and psychological experiences. In turn, these experiences accumulate and transfer into brand perceptions, which are also recognized as brand personalities. Brand personality is the core value of a brand that makes it different from other brands. Thus, brand perceptions become the reason for consumers to make the purchasing choice (consumer behavior) (Landor, 2010). This process would not stop until the brand dies.

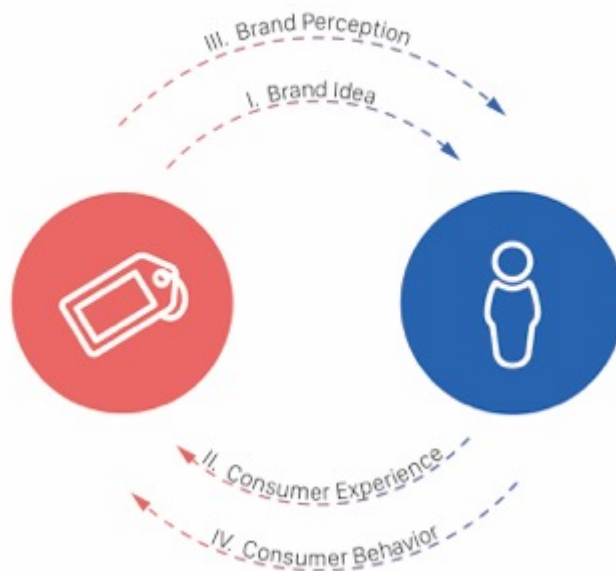


Figure 2.1 Brand and Consumer

### 2.1.1.2 Brand and Consumer Needs



A lot of marketing researchers use Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a framework to analyze consumers' needs of products and services (Figure 2.2). According to the most widespread version of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, people's motivational needs are separated into five parts: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization. People can have more than one need satisfied at the same time. But because the human brain is complex, people will be concerned about one motivation more than others at any given time. And which need it is does not depend on the level it is from (D. Lee, 2015). That means even though physiological needs are the primary motivation for people, it can be to some degree ignored if people obtain physical needs.

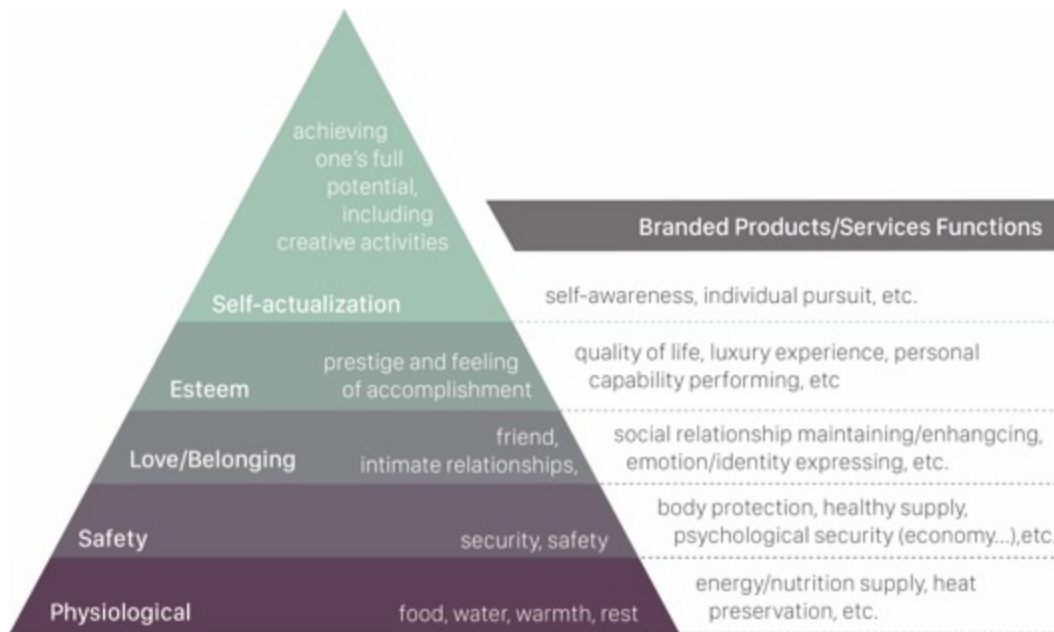


Figure 2.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs & Branded Products/Services Functions

#### 2.1.1.2.1 Consumer Basic Needs

To be specific, each level of human's needs can be linked with consumers' needs towards

different products or services.

First of all, humans' primal need is physiological need. Humans rely on basic life supplies to obtain instinctive needs. Food and water supply energy and nutrition for living. Clothes and house supply heat preservation. Those are the basic and essential goods of consumers' daily life. Most of those products are consumable in daily life. Thus, to stand out from the market, branded consumables have to focus on other needs at the same time.

At a higher level, humans need safety protection for their body, health, perception, and economy. Likewise, many designs ensure people obtain safety needs. Living in a house protects people from environmental hazards. A household water purifier makes sure of the safety of daily drinking water. High quality kitchenware prevents users from being hurt during cooking. Dark colors can make people feel more stable than with light ones. In industrial design, safety is a huge topic. Because industrial design concepts involve most daily activities, designers try hard to ensure users' safety and comfort with design details like special materials and shapes (Figure 2.3).

In addition, physiological and safety needs are also called basic needs. Compared with the other three needs, these two focus more on substantial requirements of consumers, which commonly are satisfied by goods usage function, and sometimes also by psychological hints.



Figure 2.3 Safety Design

#### **2.1.1.2.2 Consumer Psychological Needs**

The third level of human need in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is Love and Belonging. This motivation refers to interpersonal relationships and emotional communication. It can happen between family, friends, colleagues, or anyone from a social group. Thus, people rely on tools and articles around them to keep such communications going smoothly and well. We use phone calls and electric messages to transmit information. We use Facebook to share thoughts with people who have similar habits even if they are strangers. People attached to the same brands may share the same spirit or tastes. It is easy to find a bond between brands or signals and belonging need. Just for a simple example, as an organization, each college uses its theme color and strong slogan to embrace all students, alumnus, and faculties as a group. So if a person who graduated from Auburn University sees someone wearing orange and blue, no matter where and when this happens, he or she would like to say "War Eagle!" and feel as if he or she is part of Auburn again.

On top of love and belonging, esteem is the next level of human's psychological needs. It is a need for status, recognition, strength, attention, or mastery (D. Lee, 2015). When faced with

many selections, people choose brands based on their quality of life, luxury experience, and personal capability of earning respect. This is very easy to be explained by people's purchasing experiences. When people select clothes, shoes, housewares, furniture, or anything for themselves, they think about their identities and favorites. Sometimes a famous brand watch helps a person show off his or her social status or sense of aesthetics more than telling time. This also explains the theory mentioned above: people will be concerned about one motivation more than others when they address those needs at the same time.

The highest level of human needs is Self-actualization, which means subjective realization and obtainment of an individual's full potential. To put it simply, it stands for self-pursuit. People want to be better. So do brands. Sometimes brand identity can encourage and motivate consumers. For brands, helping people with their self-pursuit is both a spirit sharing and a development strategy. For example, Nike uses the slogan "Just Do It" to encourage people to go through physical pain and achieve results in their activities. What Nike appeals to helps the brand to be perceived as strong and powerful.

Therefore, an owner of a healthy brand will always be concerned about consumer's mental activity. A brand usually understands its consumers even better than consumers do themselves. The brand will not only give consumers what they already want, but also awaken them to the things they may want.

Brands are tags for people. According to the research, when evaluating a brand, the most important thing consumers care about is how relevant it is to them and how differentiated it is from the other brands in the same category. In other words, there are two key words for the

brand-consumer relationship: similarity and diversity.

First, a brand can provide a sense of belonging and loyalty. A great brand shares personality with its consumers. When selecting a brand from the market, consumers achieve self-identity among their characters, hobbies, taste, life-style, and so on. They feel admitted to a group by products, designers, and other people who choose the same brand. Thus, as time goes by, they become committed to brands and make repeat purchases from the same brands over time.

On the other hand, a brand can also provide a sense of selfhood. This happens frequently in daily life: people love to buy things that others around do not have. It is a way to show off their characteristics and unique attitudes toward events or life. It is just like what a brand does to separate itself from others in the market. Under these two keywords, an emotional link is built between consumers and brands.

This property does also reflect on culture, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **2.1.1.3 Brand and VBL**

Brand is the foundation of VBL. VBL is the design method to manage a brand. A brand is definitely aimed at distinguishing a company from competitors and creates a lasting impression in the minds of customers.

Global ‘Branding’ is the homogenization of brand visual language that people have seen occurring in brand identity design (Ansett, 2010) However, in today’s business environment, the concept of “brand” is overused and misunderstood in the market place. Many companies rely too

strongly on advertising to promote their products, failing in the process to realize that there's more to swaying customers than just the message (Sandu, n.d.). This may create a temporary result, but customers will not respond for long. In comparison, from the standpoint of a company's development strategy, using VBL is a better way to create a coherent whole of a brand's identity. To use VBL effectively, it is necessary to learn its characteristics and its relationship with companies and markets.

As John Murphy said, brand owners must constantly ensure that they maintain the qualities and values of their brand (Hart & Murphy, 1997). It is not short-term work. It is a long-term question for all brand owners and their designers. Among people's efforts to solve this problem, VBL is created to help a brand to speak out. Base on a wealth of branding theory knowledge and academic design research, VBL reorders the former brand structure and provides a clear way to drive a brand.

### **2.2.1 Visual Brand Language**

VBL, which is the acronym of Visual Brand Language, is the unique "alphabet" of design elements, which directly and subliminally communicates a company's values and personality through compelling imagery and design style ("Visual Brand Language," 2015). A VBL is composed of layers of visual considerations, including colors, materials, finishes, form, and icons and colors in the graphic user interface. It helps a brand strengthen emotional connection with customers and leads to higher brand awareness, increased customer retention, and a longer product life.

VBL is the most intuitive and convincing part of brand language. The four-stage strategic pyramid below (Figure 2.4), which consists of Brand Personality, Product Attributes, Design Principles, and Signature Elements, shows the hierarchical process of VBL (Beyond Design Inc., 2012).

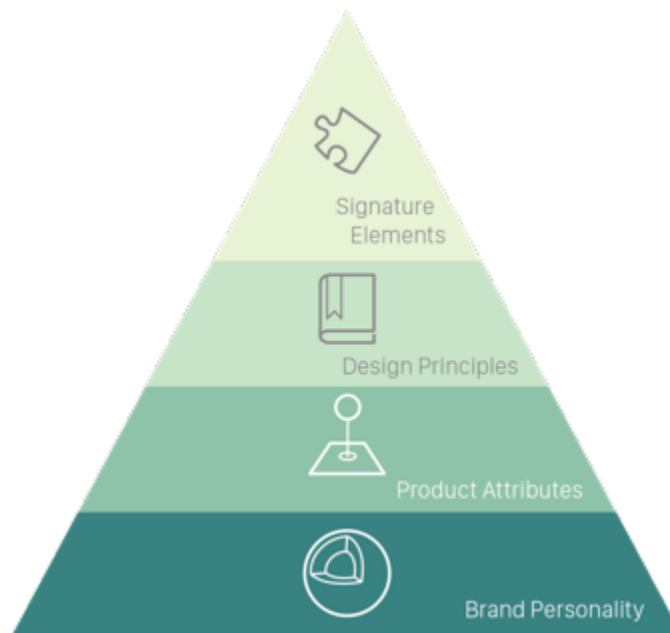


Figure 2.4: VBL Strategic Pyramid

### 2.2.1.1 VBL Components

#### 2.2.1.1.1 Brand Personality

Brand Personality, which is also known as brand identity, personifies the core value of a brand. Robin Landa explained this concept as the visual and verbal articulation of brand (Landa, 2005), which may also include a claim or tagline and advertising. Brand personality gives a brand dimension and depth. It creates the emotional bonds between products and customers. For example, purist is the brand personality of Dove (Figure 2.5). As a personal care brand, Dove

makes efforts to perform its wholesomeness, simplicity and purity to consumers through their products. This successful brand personality makes effective contributions to building brand loyalty and earning market position.



Figure 2.5 Products of Dove, USA

#### 2.2.1.1.2 Product Attributes

Product Attributes are the product's unique characteristics. They are achieved based on brand personalities and are used to distinguish the brand from competitors. Attributes have a direct relationship with a product purchase or usage, which provide both functional and emotional benefits (Aaker, 2010). In other words, product attributes help create a brand culture beyond existing products and services, and show its unique value to win the market. With efforts from all organizational components, including managers, employees, products, and services, product attributes have the same meaning as a strategic differentiation of the brand's image from competitors for a particular target audience.



Besides, the most intuitive way to describe product attributes is by brand language key words (such as precise, smart or engaging). Use coffee shops as examples (Figure 2.6), different brands have very different product attributes. Starbucks, who is the world's No. 1 coffeehouse chain, is described as “comfort, quality, and community”, and aims at creating comfortable store atmosphere. Costa, who is the second place, attempt to be “loyal, environmental, and reading inspired”. It even established the Costa Book Award to encourage reading, especially in their coffee houses.

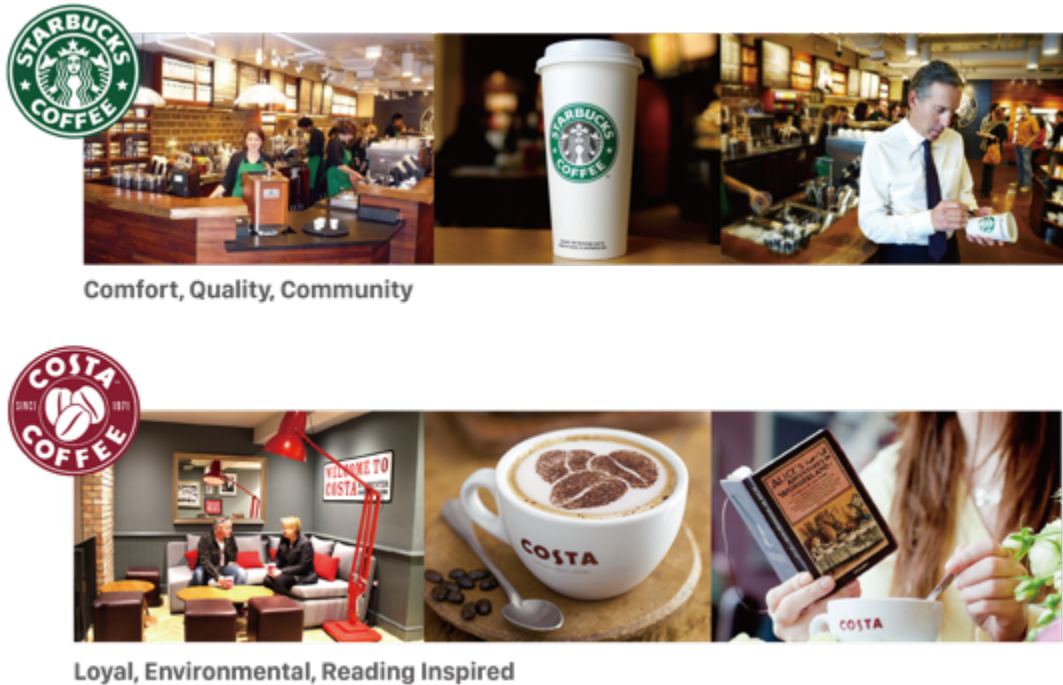


Figure 2.6 Product Attributes of Starbucks and Costa

### 2.2.1.1.3 Design Principles

Design Principles are specific directions created for designers to follow when designing a product or a platform. They are visual concepts of tangible models or service chains. As the third

level of VBL Strategic Pyramid, Design Principles are transferred from Product Attributes and deeper in basic design process.

In general, VBL relies on family rendering ideations to show the brand's Design Principles directly. From the visual perspective, in Design Principle pictures, the strongest design elements of a brand can be easily seen at first glance. People realize the visual common points and the attributive feelings of the whole series or brand of products, like the color theme, characteristic curves, special interface sizes, or visual and sensual feelings of the surfaces.

To give an example, as Figure 2.7 shows, KitchenAid follow unified design principles to design a series of featured kitchen tools. Their classic, streamlined form and wrapping silver logo are their unique signature elements.



Figure 2.7 Products Family Shot of KitchenAid

#### 2.2.1.1.4 Signature Elements

Signature Elements are the translation of VBL through several design toolkits. As the

articulations of design principles, they include all specific elements that attributes to a brand, such as logo, color, material, interface, etc.

Furthermore, signature elements can be classified according to product types. In this research, instead of speaking of services and goods, products are separated into intangibles and tangibles. The intangible part contains logo, interfaces, business cards, letter formats, and even PowerPoint templates. Tangible products differ in that they can usually, or to some degree, be directly experienced - seen, touched, smelled, or tasted, as well as tested.

Under this classification, design principles can be subdivided as in the following figure (Figure 2.8). Going a step further, tangible and intangible products can be separated into three categories: Graphic Design, Package Design, and Industrial Design. This classification will help designers recognize design elements clearly when creating and using a VBL. According to different design targets, the classification of Signature Elements may be different.

As shown in the figure below, some signature elements do not belong to only one category. In particular, the Graphic Design part includes most intangible products like logo, icons, color theme, interface, advertisements, typographies (for business card, company documents, package, PowerPoint format, etc.). The Package Design part includes both tangible and intangible stuff. Generally speaking, in the market, the package is the closest connection between a brand and consumers. A good transfer of VBL to packaging is the most efficient way of showing VBL. All logos, colors, signature shapes, and typographies can strongly influence package design. The Industrial Design part is concerned more about tangible products design details, which include logo, shape, and CMF (Color, Material, and Finish).

It is important to notice that for products, VBL signature elements are more like design symbols or guides. They will not reflect in every product. Designers have a certain amount of freedom to apply and edit them in their design. On some level, this principle ensures products of one brand have multiple development possibilities. In the following review, this viewpoint will be explained further.

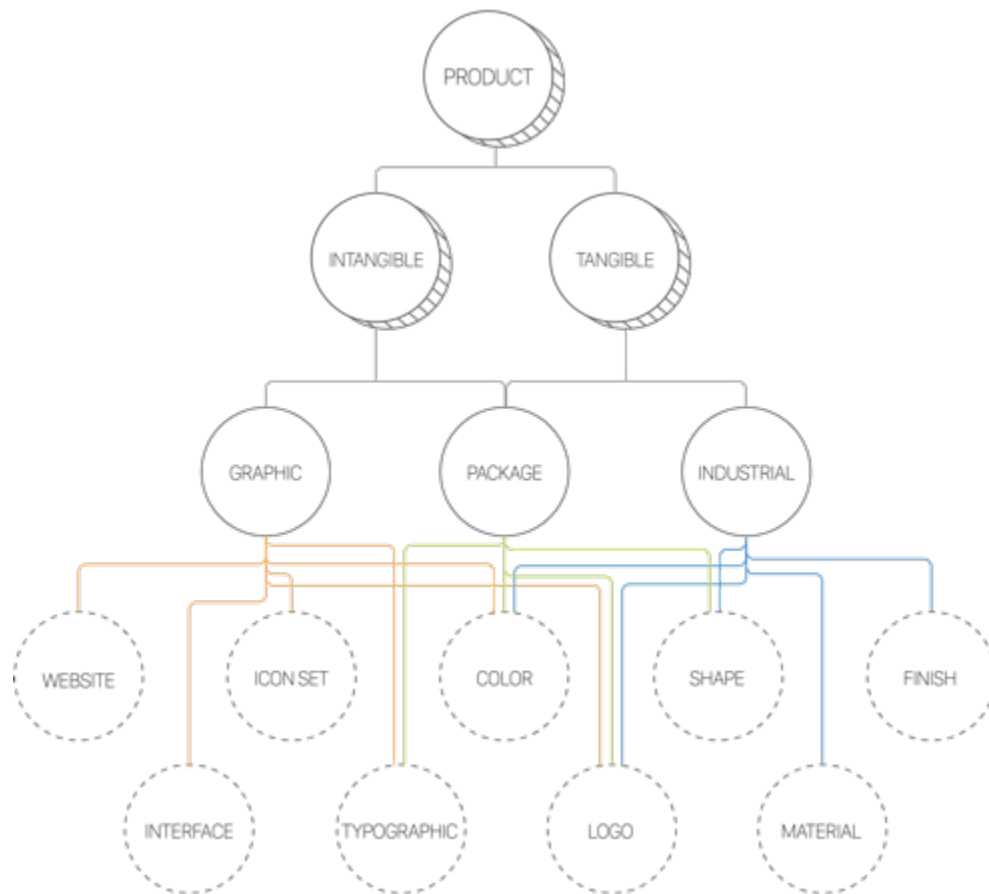


Figure 2.8 VBL Signature Elements

## 2.2.1.2 VBL Characteristics

### 2.2.1.2.1 Hierarchy Property

The hierarchy of Visual Brand Language can be expounded upon on two points.

First, as reviewed above through the four components, the inner structure of VBL is relatively fixed. Each level is based on its upper level. The whole hierarchy grows from spiritual to material: Brand Personality comes first with brand core value and an expected emotional link with consumers; then Product Attributes show a unique brand culture and characteristics. Design Principles, as the bridge of communication between Product Attributes and Signature Elements, transfer and express the brand spirit into visual design details. This stable structure clarifies and balances relationships between all brand components and makes sure the brand core values are prominent in all products.

Second, according to the brand architecture, when a company is managing a parent brand and several sub-brands, it has to create a hierarchical VBL to manage all brands. It can still use one Visual Brand Language to hold the whole architecture, but the more brands it holds, the more complex its VBL can be. At the same time, every sub-brand collects and arranges its own VBL from the company VBL. Furthermore, the whole VBL development relies on the overall type of brand architecture (Figure 2.9). Each VBL component may include several levels to follow the logic of the brand architecture. The parent-brand might be a summary or a lead for the sub-brands. The closer a sub-brand is to the parent one, the more VBL components of that level will inherit from the upper ones.

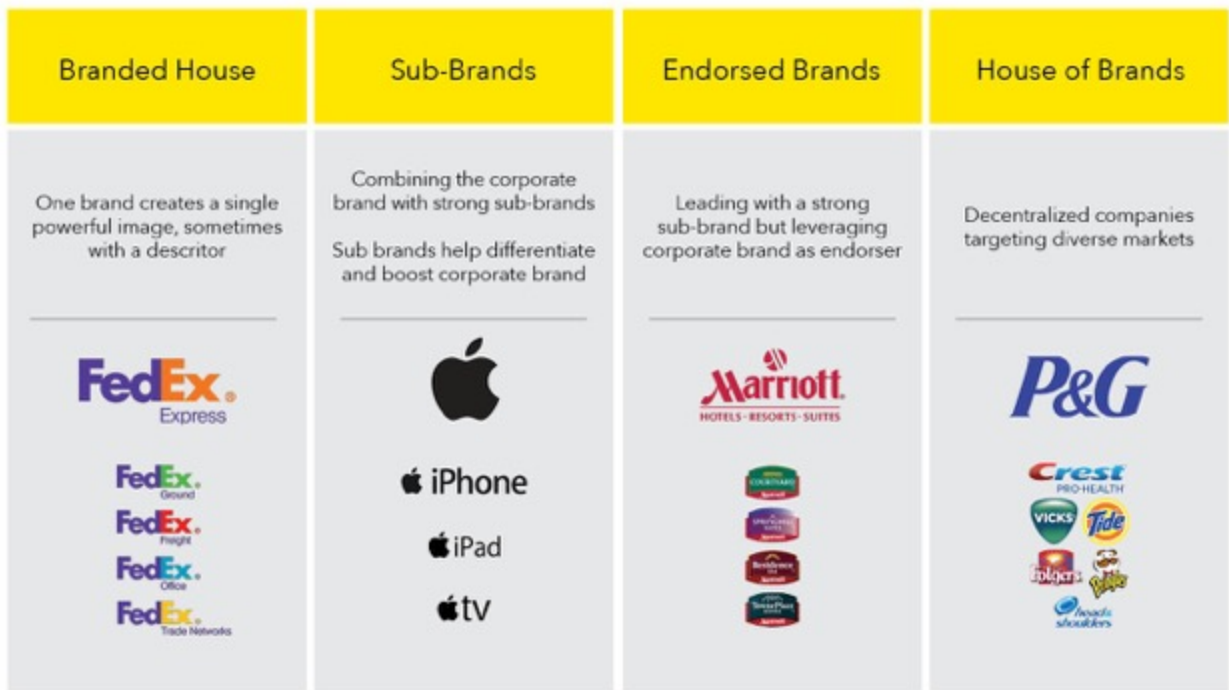


Figure 2.9: Brand Architecture

### 2.2.1.2.2 Language Property

Visual language is a communication system that uses meaningful shapes, structures or signs to show ideas in the mind (“Visual Language,” 2016). Unlike common language, it uses sight instead of speech to accept and express thoughts. Visual language can image the things hard to be explained by words, and transfer them more efficiently than oral description or literary documents.

Therefore, the greatest function of Visual Brand Language is communicating. VBL helps every part of the market, including the buyers (customers), the goods (products and services), and especially the sellers (companies) understand both each other and themselves.

It is more remarkable that a company or an organization uses VBL to communicate to

different aspects. As an entirety, the company uses VBL to show their unique product features and brand propositions. With all tangible products, packages, posters, ads, or any other publicized way, a company can translate its brand personality and attributes to costumers everywhere and anytime. On the other hand, VBL also improves communicating inside a corporation. In more and more modern establishments, one work does not belong to a single person or department. For example, in a design agency, designers may also take part in setting up the brand developing strategy, as well as the research and marketing team giving ideas or design concepts during brainstorming. If all people understand the same VBL, collaboration across departments will go smoothly.

#### **2.2.1.2.3 Evolution Property**

VBL has the property of evolution, which keeps VBL fresh and fashionable. Although under most situations, VBL is like principles or provisions for new brand products to follow, it is neither rigid nor fixed. For guiding both existing and future designs, VBL grows as the brand does. A brand can change design principles or signature elements to follow the latest design trends or new development plans. Even the products' attributes can be updated when a brand wishes to show a new identity or appeal to costumers differently.

This characteristic can be proven by many typical logo design translations. Logos are the most representative brand element to promote instant public recognition. As one of the VBL signature elements, a logo reflects both brand personality and product attributes. With a logo, consumers can recognize the unique color or selling points of a brand with one glance. Some

logos follow a long period of brand growing.

Using Pepsi as an example, every logo it has used in the company's history is remembered by people at that time (Figure 2.10). From the first official trademark in 1903 to now, their logos, packages, posters, and advertisements changed considerably. They all followed a Pepsi design trend and helped people from generation to generation understand Pepsi products and the company itself. And now almost everyone knows the logo.



Figure 2.10: Evolution of Pepsi Logos

Another example for logo translation is Instagram. Instagram is famous for its photo filters and effects that give images a retro edge. Its former logo (Figure 2.11) is a brown and cream Polaroid camera with a rainbow strip. This classic logo has been used for years and liked by many people. But this year, influenced by recent communication trends, Instagram wished to publish its transformation from a photo editing and sharing application to a massive social platform which also supports videos, animations and drawings. It expanded its business work to a larger area, including celebrities and advertisers. The new logo has a sunset color theme and a flatter graphic. With the logo transformation, Instagram also changed color and font for interfaces and supporting apps. Although this change is opposed by many old users, it is



acknowledged that Instagram promotes its development and new brand position. It is a big step for a brand evolution and may lead to excellent work in the future.



Figure 2.11 Instagram Former & Present Look

During VBL evaluation, designers must decide, from among all visual elements, which items are classic or valuable to keep, and what directions updates go in. In general, a slow transition is safer than a fast one. That is why most great brands use years or decades to promulgate their new looks: people will remember them and keep loving their designs and products.

### 2.1.3 Case Study

Although many brands imported Visual Brand Language to strengthen their brand and products, most of those works used different VBL frames. Some of them just focus on design

principles and signature elements but ignore the brand personality and attributes. However, as shown above, the inner structure of VBL is relatively fixed. A complete and strong VBL is based on its outstanding core value.

To study Visual Brand Language in detail, it is efficient to learn mature and professional brands in the market. A good example of VBL building is KitchenAid. Since its founding in 1919, KitchenAid has been known for its craftsmanship and performance. In 2015, KitchenAid kitchens introduced new VBL to match its design aesthetics and make the brand more global. It makes new KitchenAid major appliance suites the ideal choice for homebuilders, remodelers and designers. The new VBL building work started from re-designing the stand mixer, which is KitchenAid's first as well as most classic product. Then other pieces of inspirations and key words came up for both design and performance.

Following its core value "For the way it's made", KitchenAid created a visual definition of a unique, warm and professional kitchen. Iconic elements extracted from the 1919 stand mixer were inserted into new products by designers. The new series applications in 2015 follow design principles of exaggerated scale, softer and warmer surfaces, rounded edges, firm structure, and a large user interface.



### Brand Personality

Kitchen Chef / KitchenEnthusiast



### Product Attributes

Beautiful, Approachable, Softer  
Authentic, Iconic, Well-crafted



### Design Principles

Iconic elements extracted from the 1919 stand mixer were insert into new products by designers.  
The whole series design follows design principles of exaggerated scale, softer and warmer surface, rounded edges, firm structure, distinct control, and large user interface.



 Signature Elements



**KitchenAid®**



**Classic**



Empire Red

**Basic**



Onyx Black

**Option**



Tangerine



Contour Silver



Boysenberry



Ice



Sugar Pearl Silver



Crystal Blue



Watermelon



Lavender



White



Medallion Silver



Green Apple



Majestic Yellow



**Major Applicants**



Soft brushed  
Stainless Steel



Soft brushed  
Black  
Stainless Steel



Chrome  
(details)



Satin-textured  
(handles)

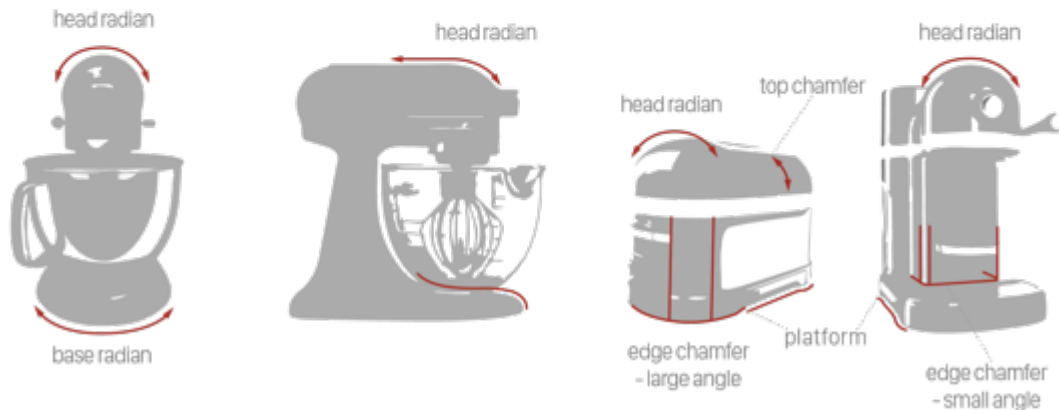
**Countertop Applicants**



High Polish  
Stainless Steel



**Pro Line Series**



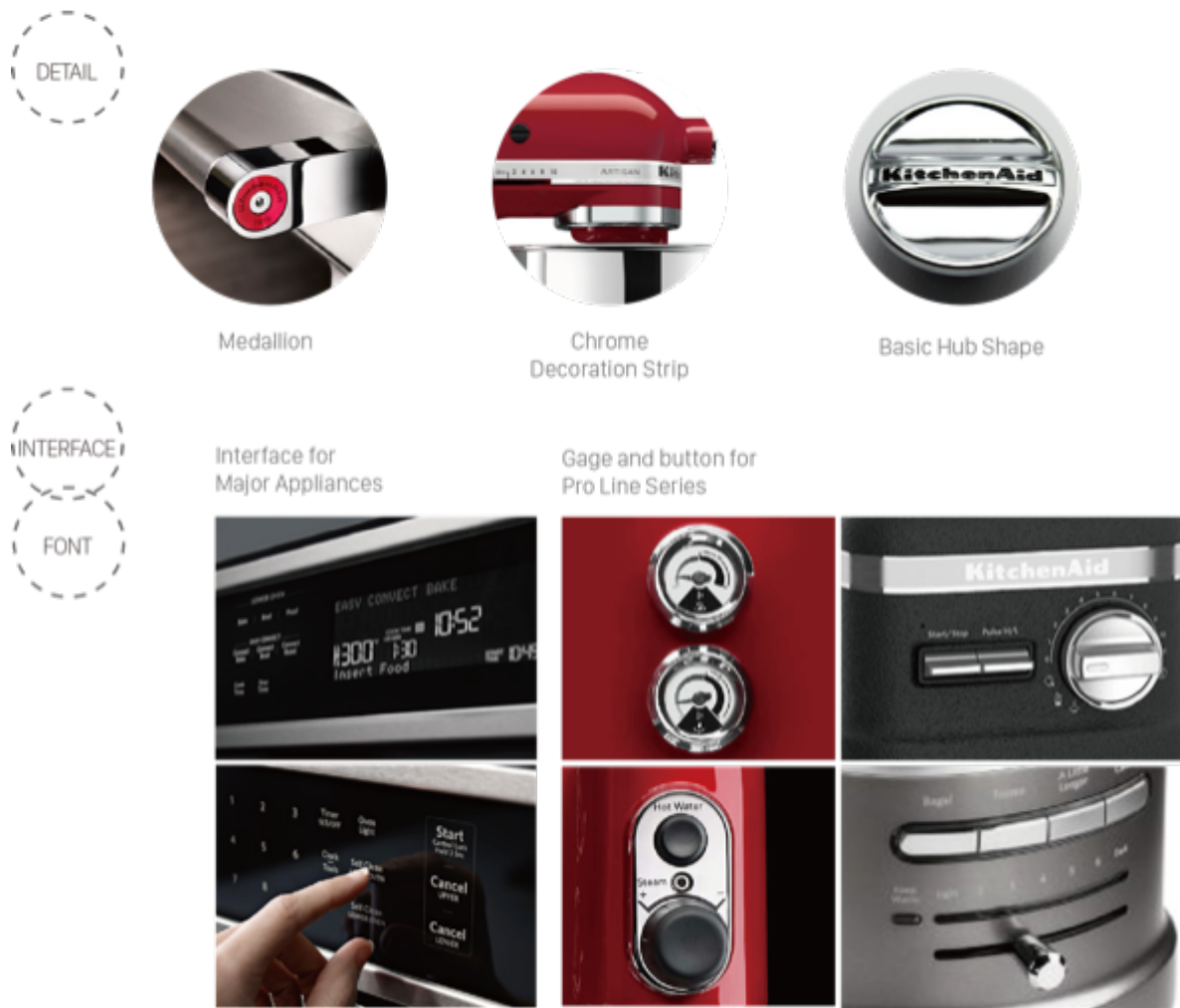


Figure 2.12 Visual Brand Language of KitchenAid

## 2.2 Culture and Design

### 2.2.1 Discussions about Culture

#### 2.2.1.1 Definitions of Culture

The concept of culture is wide-ranging and humanistic. In Merriam-Webster Dictionary, culture is defined as the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group (“Culture,” n.d.). But usually, people from different academic fields or regions

define culture from different angle. It is hard to give one specific definition for it.

Another explanation of culture defines it as the full range of learned human behavior patterns and perceptions. This definition concerns more about common social customs and rules people learn from social intercourses. It was firstly used in 1871 by British anthropologist Edward Tylor. In his book *Primitive Culture*, he claims that culture is a complex whole, which includes capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Although this definition is too summative, it shows the most obvious feature of culture: culture is social. People will learn from culture and achieve culture as long as people live in society.

According to Linda Gerber, culture is the summation of material wealth and spirit wealth created by human beings (Gerber, 2011), which also means material culture and nonmaterial culture. Considering the similar content among several definitions, in this research, culture is seperated into three sections: material culture, institution culture, and psychological culture (Figure 2.12).

Firstly, material culture stands for most concrete, tangible, and observable products people created for existence and development, including foods, costumes, buildings, transportations, production tools, daily essentials, etc. It also covers concepts of human settlements, like cities and countries. People live with and through things. Professor Tim Dant claimed in his book that man-made things were appropriated into human culture in such a way that they re-presented the social relations of culture, standing in for other human beings, carrying values, ideas, and emotions (Dant, 1999). As the main design objects, things belong to material culture and play the most important role in culture-design research. They are examples carrying

history and life essentials supporting human's needs to study.

Institution culture stands for all principles that serve interpersonal or social relationships. It can be laws, municipal administrations, family relationships, or education systems. Nowadays, with the rapid development of human civilization, institution culture runs through most human activities. It influences a person's whole life, from the first time he or she interacts with another person. Institutions assist people participating in social activities, and, at the same time, influence their behavior to ensure the most common principles are enforced successfully.

Lastly, psychological culture is the one most closely linked with individuals. It can be interpreted as common features of human's ideological activities, for example, people's thinking modes, aesthetics sentiments, or religious beliefs. During a long history, people accumulate considerable art wealth like paintings, music, languages, literatures, or philosophies. All of them belong to psychological culture. In this aspect, people separate into different groups according to their individual enthusiasms and spiritual pursuits. Thus, we have various design genres, fashion trends, musical forms, and life creeds. From one certain angle, brands belong to psychological culture. The building of brands shows people's different comprehensions and aspirations of the same design object.



Figure 2.13 Generalized Definition of Culture

In conclusion, culture is the essence of material and spiritual life of a group or society. It carries distinctive features of a certain lifestyle and can be learnt or communicated.

### 2.2.1.2 Regional Culture and Its Characteristics

Regional culture refers to culture from one geographical area with relatively homogeneous human activities. A cultural area has unlimited geographic coverage. It can be a whole or a part of one or several administrative areas. It may overlap in structures with another



culture area.

In 1800s, the concept of culture region was firstly used by museum curators and ethnologists for arranging exhibits (Ashmore & Sharer, 1989). Later on, this concept has been criticized and developed by social scientists during the process of culture globalization. Generally, people from one culture region share the same language, religion, livelihood, or either one or several cultural traits. For example, Scandinavia (Figure 2.13) is a cultural region in North Europe characterized by a common ethno-cultural heritage and mutually intelligible languages. The geographical term Scandinavia Peninsula includes the mainlands of Denmark and Sweden, the northwestern area of Finland, and a narrow western area of Russia. However, due to historical and cultural reasons, Scandinavia includes the mainlands of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, and sometimes includes Iceland, Finland, and Danish Faroe Land. Although Scandinavia has a looser definition and might change meaning in different languages, it shows that culture has considerable influence in a specific geographic area.



Figure 2.14 Map of Scandinavia

### **2.2.1.2.1 Center of Regional Culture**

As cultures overlap and mix, the boundaries of culture regions are usually blurred. Indeed, most cultural regions use boundary areas instead of boundary lines. Although without clear borders, culture regions reveal a center or core where the defining traits are all present. The regional-culture center carries the strongest and most original features of the local culture. The cultural characteristics become weak and even disappear away from this core. Therefore, the regional culture center is an important characteristic for culture scholars and culture-based design researchers to study.

For example, the regional center for Chinese Quadrangle culture is Beijing. As a traditional architectural style with at least two thousand years' history, Quadrangles were built at various regions in ancient China, from north to south. Although due to geographic situations and times transformations, people use different main shapes and sub-room positions for Quadrangles in different areas, it is admitted that Beijing Quadrangles are the most classic and typical architecture among the whole history of China. This is not only because Beijing is the cradle of Quadrangle culture, but also because its best preservation and development work occurs here. Beijing Quadrangles have covered most Quadrangles' common features and are famous for their structured shape and typical color theme. Therefore, now, Beijing is still the best place to learn Quadrangle culture.

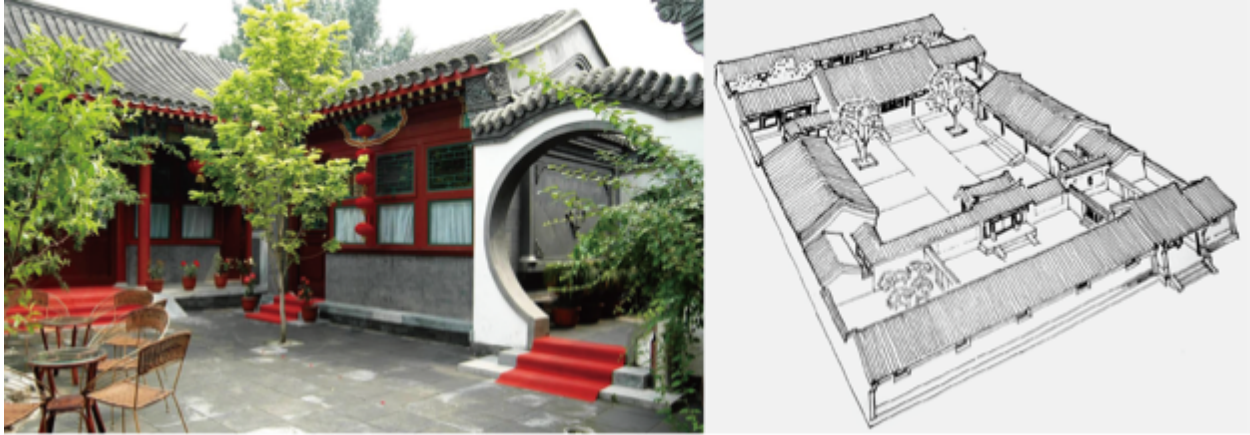


Figure 2.15 Beijing Quadrangle

#### 2.2.1.2.2 Support of Material Culture and Non-Material Culture

Culture may be metaphysical, but cultural elements are perceptible. Material objects help people shape and inherit regional culture and human history. Giorgio Riello claims that in both the object is not a ‘prop of research’ but the very subject matter of analysis. He believes that material culture helps people find out not only visible cultural features but also lifestyle and life-attitude of a certain culture (cited in Harvey, 2009). For example, an eighteenth-century teacup, a snuffbox, or a Hogarth print helps the analysis of the examination of tea service or the culture of politeness in old age. Items are the recorders of regional culture.

Besides, the supporting interpretations of material culture are also significant for regional culture. In most cases, scholars rely on text-based research instead of the built environment or manufactured goods to learn regional identity (Harvey, 2009). Material culture are used to substantiate hypotheses formed from text-records, rather than vice-versa. Thus, many ambiguities and misunderstandings appear. When learning regional culture, either familiar or

unfamiliar, related psychological culture can be more helpful than a singular research method. If possible, real usage scenarios and personal experiences are more helpful when close to the real culture, which may also reduce the errors of different languages. Moreover, humanistic works like movies, documentaries, paintings or speeches would all be powerful supporting for regional culture research.

### **2.2.2 Regional Culture and Design Thinking**

David Carlson (Carlson, 2011) claimed in his report that design is the symbolic totem for showcasing culture. As he said, design has become a means to capture ideation, innovation and enterprise and stands in for cultural identity. Design is flaunted more like the true measure of culture than part of the cultural context of the society.

The concept of culture in design area means a lot: personality, emotionality, regionalism, identifiability, uniformity, or diversity. Under the definitions and features above, when speaking about design, culture is more about lifestyle. For most people, lifestyle is not that literary. Obviously, for common people, culture is the language they speak, the festivals they celebrate, the food they have for meals, or even the sweetness of their desserts. Culture is the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by a group of people. People may even not notice that culture can be seen in their intuition, aesthetics tastes, or upbringing. Culture is like a whisper made by millions of people and goods over millions of years.

#### **2.2.2.1 The Significance of Regional-cultural Design**

##### **2.2.2.1.1 Strong Affinities with People's Life**

Due to the impact of globalization, most products can be found everywhere around the world. Rice cookers and woks are originally from China and Japan, but be easily found in North America or Europe now. In the design area, people share and exchange ideas frequently by publishing fashion trends and leading design elements every year over the world. Designers follow those ‘principles’ to design goods that attract trendy people. Thus, more and more people have similar smart phones, personal computers, or costumes in seasonal colors. The dissemination of products and services proves that there are more and more designs being observed and approved by people around the world. Dissemination of these similar products influences people’s lifestyle and sense of aesthetics.

However, even under this situation, there are still plenty of differences between people’s purchase tastes. Kenya Hara claims that the global age made the differences between designs of all countries less distinguishable. However, precisely because of this situation, it is even more important for each culture to maintain its individuality (Piotti & Menegazzo, 2014). Consumers’ strong affinities toward regional-cultural designs protect cultural diversity. The reasons of this situation can be people’s distinctive and irresistible life habits or acute perceptions towards products. Every person grows up educated in regional cultures. Regional culture infiltrates a person’s life from behavior to thinking. There are always some previous habits people cannot abandon no matter how long after they move to new place. Therefore, regional-cultural designs always own a place in bounds and deserve designers’ effort.

A newly designed rice cooker in China can be a perfect example of this viewpoint (Figure 2.15). As described above, rice cookers are selling everywhere in the world. But even though

people from different regions cook rice for meals now, they desire different textures and taste. For instance, many Chinese people want their rice to test like firewood. Firewood rice is an old taste of rice that has almost disappeared in cities now. In the past, people who lived in rural area of China used firewood and traditional stoves to cook rice. Rice made this way tastes more elastic with higher moisture. With the rapid urbanization, it is hard for people who live in cities to cook the old style rice. To solve this problem, Supor (a Chinese cookware company) designed a new rice cooker with special spherical tank instead of the common cylindrical one. The new steam system can adapt heating duration and degree. Thus, it restores the taste of firewood rice and satisfies Chinese consumers who are missing this taste. As a good design brand, Supor meets the challenge of keeping a traditional taste with new technology and reducing tedious cooking steps.



Figure 2.16 Traditional Firewood Stove & Supor Firewood Rice Cooker

### 2.2.2.1.2 The Quintessence of History

Another influential role of cultural design is transforming outmoded habits and customs to make the past preserve the present. Culture is the accumulation of time and human activities.

It records not only human wisdom, but also local people's aspirations and inclinations. Old culture is like the rich soil for new culture to root: the new one might seem completely changed, but it still originates from the old one. As time goes by, the valuable part of old culture stays with the useless part gone. This is not an automatic process. Today, it is controlled by everyone, especially design researchers and producer.

Although we talk about the fittest surviving, it is still difficult for people to judge the value of culture. Especially for regional cultures, although some lifestyle or life implements disappear over generations, their value will appear sometime in the future. Maybe not as strong as before, but those values will support new design concepts.

As a product designer's job is creating new things that serve people's life better, it is essential for designers to learn from culture and improve it. In 1950s, modern Japanese design began to develop energetically. This process seems awkward at first but was improved into a skillful level later. Because of its special modes of culture, politic, and economic, Japan thinks highly of groups instead of individuals. That is why Japanese design developments always have a stable direction and limited vividness. Today's Japanese culture is based on hundred-years' blending of traditional culture and external culture. From past to present, it is easy to track the Japanese aesthetics attitude in their products: nature, minutia, unadorned materials and modularization.



Figure 2.17 Modern Japanese Design

### 2.2.2.1.3 Cultural Identity and Spiritual Support

In the early part of this thesis, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was used as the carrier of product or service functions. As shown above, one product or service can satisfy several of a user's basic needs and psychological needs. In general, one of those satisfactions might be more outstanding than others. That tends to be the main purchase reason for the consumer.

It goes the same way for regional-cultural designs. Regional-cultural factors are everywhere in daily supply; thus, they satisfy consumers with their basic needs and psychological needs, one of which can be more obvious than others as well. The difference is that regional-cultural designs focus more on local personalities and traditional lifestyles, which produces a greater sense of belonging and loyalty. The target group of such designs is people who have the same cultural identity with the target culture, no matter when acquired. It is worth noting that for the target group, psychological needs are harder to obtain than basic ones. Even though physiological and safety goods are more essential than other supplies, they are easy to



replace. Thus, to make a design non-fungible and attractive, it is important to focus on its function over social relationship and self-esteem.

Cultural identity is a valuable topic in regional-cultural design. An important work of relevant designers is eliciting people's needs of belonging and satisfaction, not only through the design itself, but also its scenes containing typical cultural factors. Here's an old saying: do in Rome as the Romans do. As shown above, regional culture cares more about the lifestyle and pursuit of people from one geographical area. Thus, intimate cultural designs share the same personalities and emotions with users. They help the users build their individual style and relationship with others through the way people use the designs.

#### **2.2.2.2 Regional-culture Stratification for Design**

Regional culture often becomes a difficult tool for designers. Based on the discussion regarding the features of regional culture and the relationship between customers and regional-cultural designs, when doing design research toward one regional culture, designers should give consideration to its current situation, symbolic features, material support and use circumstances, relevant cultures, and local personalities. They can rely on the assistance of the origin and history of culture, the documentaries and relevant movies, or study at the culture center to deepen the research. However, all elements are disheveled and lack an evolution standard. Thus, it is hard to measure regional-cultural factors of a design or use those factors in a systematic design process.

Therefore, to make a strong link between regional culture and product design, all regional-cultural factors related to design can be separated into three parts: Symbol,







Consciousness, and Root (Table 2.1). This is called Regional-culture Stratification. It helps designers shape all cultural elements suitable for design work.

The bottom of the system is Symbol, which includes all easily-perceptible elements that show the essence of a regional culture. It contains the most plain and distinct concrete examples of the target culture, like color, pattern, shape, material, brush stroke, font, etc. Generally, a certain regional culture may have strong symbols that differs from others to a great extent. Such features are usually visible, touchable, or easily felt the first time people connect with the design.

The middle layer is Consciousness. This section represents the perceptual cultural imageries of designs. It includes inspirations that awake the resonance between users and designers. Utilizations of a certain aesthetics technique, expressions of emotions or beliefs, inspirations of nature or humanity are all belong to the Consciousness section.

The top of the system is called Root. The Root section contains rational thinking and analysis related to regional culture. This includes, for example, the special purpose or function of design that serves the target group's life, the traditional skill or technology re-applied or improved, missions that serve folk custom, or any cross-cultural tie with other cultures from the same geographic region. Compared with the other two, the Root section contains more intangible and technical concepts. Things belong to this section might not be noticed at first but will bring a nice result during the using process. During design research, design ideas that have the same correlation background or are used in the same scene with the design target will be studied to fully consider the final design. Those things enrich the Root part and make regional-cultural factors reasonable.

Table 2.1 Three Sections of Regional-culture Stratification

	 SYMBOL	 CONSCIOUSNESS	 ROOT
Explanation	Highly concentrated	Perceptual inspiration	Original tract & reason
Expression	color, pattern, shape, material, brush stroke, font	aesthetics technique, expressions of emotions or beliefs, inspirations of nature or humanity	purpose or function, traditional skill or technology, folk custom support, cross-cultural tie
Perceptual	basic senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste touch)	emotional	rational
Recognizable	● ● ●	● ●	●
Culture Related			
Consumer Needs	Self-actualization Esteem Love/Belonging	Self-actualization Love/Belonging	Safety Physiological

These three sections may enlighten each other. At some point, Symbol elements are the concentrations of emotional inspirations (Consciousness) or rational thinking (Root). Technique factors are the basic carrier of people's life activities. They are complex and every-day. Those factors stimulate people to slow down their steps and make spiritual connections from things around them. Finally, those connections condense into simple but prominent symbols. Although symbols are hard to understand without understanding the culture, they have the most powerful effect.

When using stratification to expand design research, designers are recommended to follow the order of Symbol - Consciousness - Root. The classification method shown above is

used to summarize the regional-cultural factors selected from design research and make the design process go logically. Besides, the process can also be used to build better publicity for design owners or sellers. A very important reminder for designers or companies is that they should approach all cultural factors with care in case of people feeling tired or bored with the designs.

Here are two examples to explain the Regional-culture Stratification system specifically. Sakurakaden (cherry blossom petal) dishes (Figure 2.18) were designed in the town of Arita, Japan, in 2008. This set of dishes uses Arita porcelain technology, which was perceived as one of the most typical Japanese sintering methods. It shows a strong Japanese indigenous feeling through its flower shape, traditional colors, shallow dish depth, thin brush strokes, and delicate porcelain. To clarify all cultural design factors and the meanings behind, the chart below (Figure 2.19) uses the Regional-culture Stratification as a frame.



Figure 2.18 SAKURAKADEN (Cherry Blossom Petal) Dishes

 SYMBOL

Shape



SAKURA  
Cherry Blossom

The Cherry Blossom is one of the most popular symbols of Japan. The Sakura tree and its blossoms entered the imagery of Japan from ancient time. This concept echoes over many aspects of the Japanese history, art and its way of life itself.

Color



Pitch Black  
漆黒



Deep Red  
深緋



Porcelain White  
白瓷



White  
白



Rainbow Red  
虹色

Material



Fine Porcelain

Japan is famous for the high quality and the aesthetic value of its porcelain. In U.S. and European markets, about half of the imported porcelain are from Japan.



## CONSCIOUSNESS

### Beauty of Sakura



Sakura is the national flower of Japan. Japanese believe Sakura is like springtime comes alive. It is the goddess of flower. People love Sakura because of its short but gorgeous life. When its life ends, Sakura shows a kind of peaceful and pure, which were chasing by Japanese people.

### Beauty of traditional colors of Japan



### 日本の伝統色

The traditional colors of Japan are a collection of colors traditionally used in Japanese literature, textiles, and other Japanese arts and crafts. Their historical origins can be traced to the Twelve Level Cap and Rank System. Most names of colors originate from the names of plants, flowers, and animals that bore or resembled them.

### Admire of porcelain



Japanese people believe that delicious cuisine makes the body strong, beautiful ware makes the heart whole. They pay attention to both the beauty and the function of the porcelain. The ware they use at home usually follow the style of the season. Landscape, flower, birds are all their preferred patterns on porcelain.



## ROOT

### Arita Porcelain



As one of the country's oldest art form, Japanese ceramic production has an exceptionally long and successful history. Arita ware (有田焼) is a broad term of porcelain made in the area around the town of Arita. it is one of the most famous sintering method of Japan. Today ceramics still play an important part in everyday Japanese life. Although there have been profound changes in forms and materials, Arita porcelain is still used today with the signature of designers or brands.

### Japanese table manners



Japanese love small dishes because of their dietary habit: they usually use one dish just for one kind of food for one person. Plates or bowls with different color, shape, or material is for different kinds of food. Most dishes are shallow because the food usually has less sauce. People should take the plate up if it is under 15 cm.

Figure 2.19 Regional-culture Stratification of SAKURAKADEN Dishes

## 2.3 Conclusion

In summary, there are strong links between brand language and regional culture, which can be effective support for using regional-cultural factors to improve a Visual Brand Language creation. VBL and regional-cultural design both have spiritual foundations, functional leads, perceptual forms of expression, and signature elements. Both their tangible or visual factors are the most vibrant parts that resonate with people. And these parts are dominated by deeper principles and thoughts. Therefore, there are possibilities for regional-cultural factors to provide VBL support.

However, the study of VBL and regional culture do not share the same route. VBL creation work relies on a four-level pyramid which contains Brand Personality, Product Attributes, Design Principles, and Signature Elements. To build a VBL, designers have to begin with basic brand study. Brand goals and spirit, functional areas of products and services, and target consumer scope should all be defined first. This step is used to establish the Brand Personality and Product Attributes. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs can be helpful with the consumer analysis in this step. After that, more in-depth design research and concept generation follows. The process will take several rounds. All details are set in this step to accomplish the final Design Principles and Signature Elements.

On the other hand, the Regional-culture Stratification is the framework of regional culture research and is applied in two directions. As shown above, the Regional-culture Stratification layers are arranged in order of recognizable difficulty. For culture research, it is better to follow the research order of Symbol-Consciousness-Root, through which designers can

learn the target culture from imagery to essential items. On the other hand, for culture application during brand building, cultural factors should be blended following the order of Root-Consciousness-Symbol. This is due to the structure of VBL: Brand Personality and Products Attributes are concerned more about functions and spirit, which are like Root factors, as well as Design Principle and Signature Elements have more similarities with the Consciousness and Symbol sections. This two-directional study will be used in the procedure of creating an entire VBL. All details will be shown in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 3

### Development of Design Guidelines

The purpose of this thesis is using regional-cultural factors to improve creation of a Visual Brand Language. The key to this process is matching the rhythms of regional-culture research and brand language generation. Regional cultures are raw materials for making a VBL. Analyses toward the Three Regional-Cultural Key Elements will be used several times during VBL creation. This is to make sure the relevant cultural factors are tailored for the target brand.

The guideline is separated into three part: brand identification and expectation, design research, and concept generation. Overall, brand learning goes before regional culture learning to make sure that all the adaptable cultures are based on the target brand identification. Certainly, some interlaced researches regarding target brand and cultures will also be done during the process to test if they work well with each other.

The final VBL will be shown as a handbook which includes a Three Regional-cultural Key Elements summary.

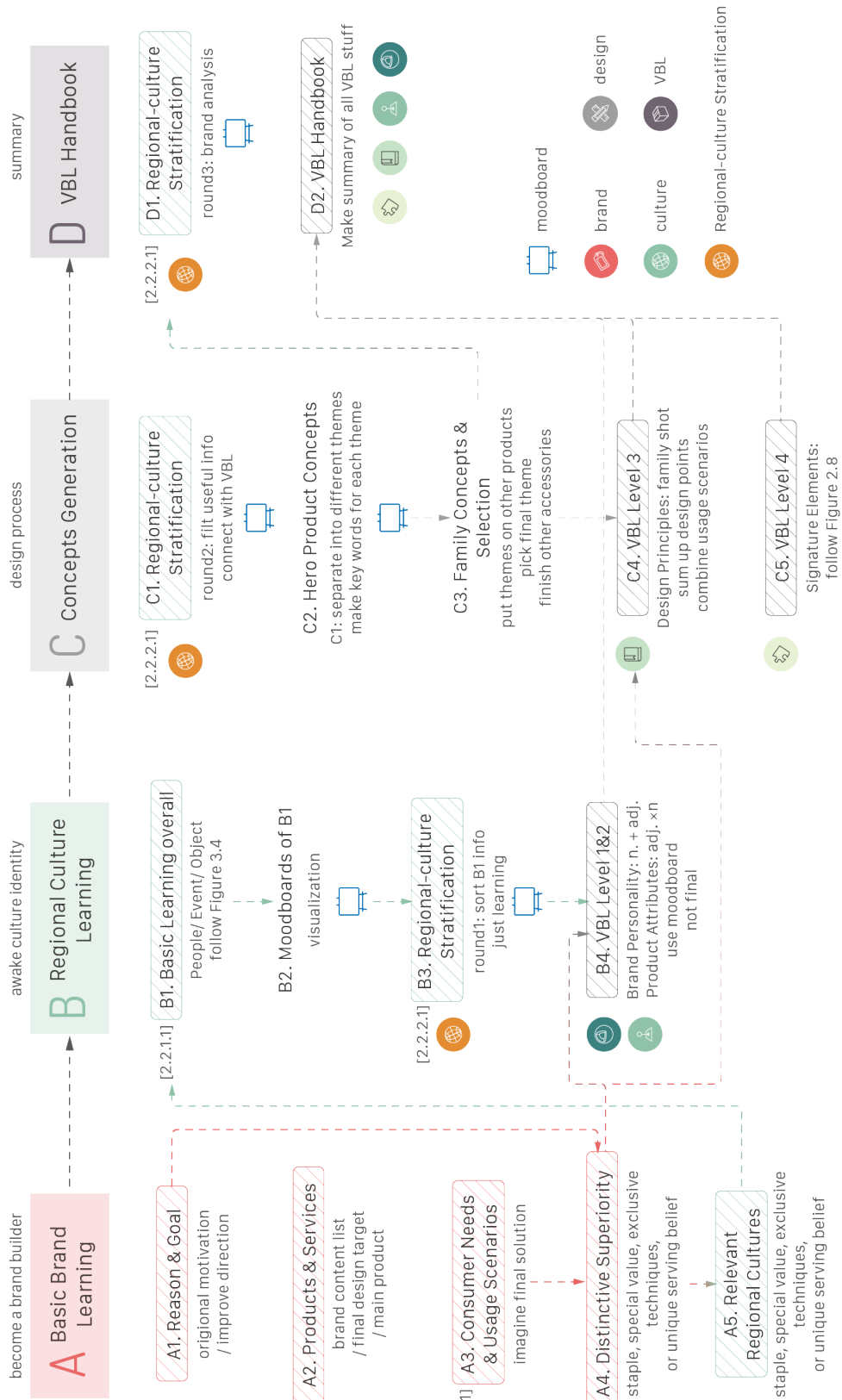


Figure 3.1 Flow Chart of the Design Guidelines

### **3.1 Brand Identification and Expectation**

The very first phase is basic brand study. Designers should learn the target brand from surface to deep, and finally become participators of the brand.

No matter if the target brand is new or mature, designers should get a complete view of its operation principle, service scope, and target consumer. This part of the work will help designers get close to both the brand and its owner, and form or reform the basic level of Visual Brand Language. The brand identification and expectation are the guiding star of research and idea generation. It is worth mentioning that only a fuzzy scope of related regional cultures will be needed for this step.

#### **3.1.1 Reason and Goals**

Learning the brand goal is the very cornerstone of the brand study. The purpose of this step is determining the original motivation of a brand. There are several simple questions for designers to figure out. For example, what does the brand do? What kind of people does it serve? What kind of market status will it obtain? What type of products or services does it offer? Will the brand goal change this time? Most of the answers come from the brand owner's thoughts. Thus, asking the brand owner directly is the easiest way to get answer. But if needed, designers can give advice and suggestions. Designers should make sure they understand the brand's goal and its explanation from the owner, as well as the brand's existing products.

If possible, designers can also learn through the history of the establishment and development process of the brand. Brand history is a nice source to sum up the brand spirit and

how it has changed with time. These notes can be an important basis for looking up the brand personalities and product attributes in Step 4.

### 3.1.2 Products and Services

Step 2 provides designers a clear list of products and services of the brand with their inter-relationship. It also marks the final design target for the Visual Brand Language. According to Chapter 2, the third level of VBL is Design Principles, which is a fusion of Product Attributes (Level 2) and Signature Elements (Level 4). As Design Principles show product family in one or several scenes, in this step, creating a clear relationship analysis will be helpful for the design research phase.

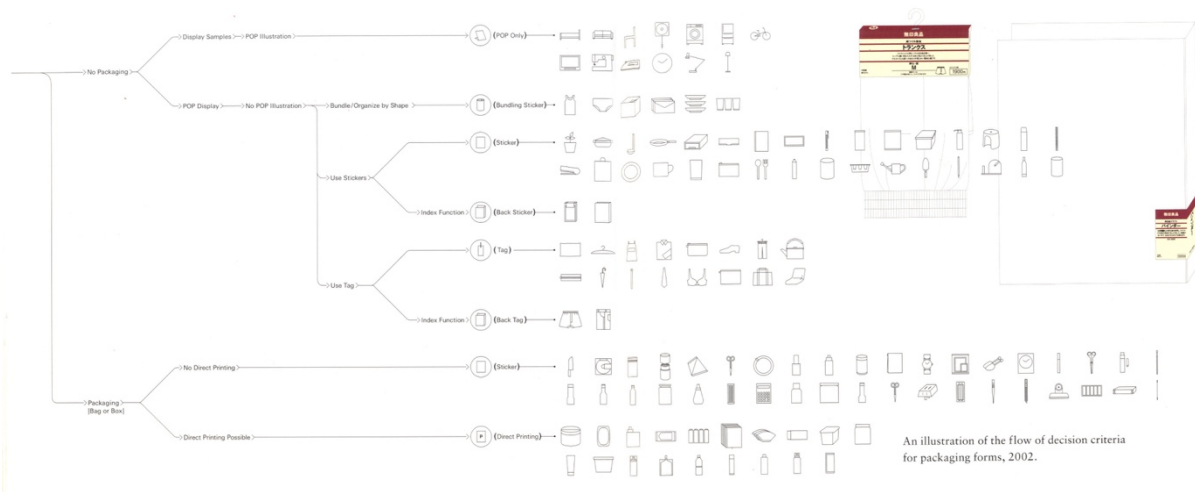


Figure 3.2 Example for Product List: An Muji Illustration

First, designers and the brand owner should agree on the products and services scope. They should create a list all products and services, including industrial products, website, mobile application, and manual services. Then, they should classify all products and service according to their functions or usage context in a form. This is helpful for forming a brand image and

searching related regional cultures. Thus, designers and brand owner can confirm the main product, such as classic ones, to show off the final visual language. This ‘hero’ product will be the start of concept generation in the third step. When the products list is finished, they should list additional designs, like logos, packages, or graphics, and mark them as related products.

### **3.1.3 Consumer Needs and Usage Scenarios**

Based on the product list in the previous step, designers can summarize target consumers’ needs and make the usage context more specific now. This means from this step on, designers must consider the lifestyle of people. An image of daily life or a story of usage scenarios can inspire designers in the final step of this part: brainstorming of related regional cultures. It is worth mentioning that considering the study of regional culture in Chapter 2, the target consumer of a brand is not limited to local residents but also including people who have the same cultural identity.

According to Figure 2.2, the consumer needs analysis follows Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs frame. Designers should use this frame to organizing consumer needs for the brand. An important reminder of this step is using the brand but not specific product as the object of analysis because this step only aims at determining the connections between the brand and target consumers, as well as finding unique methods to satisfy consumer needs (see Table 3.1) in the next step.

Physiological Needs	
Safety Needs	
Love/Belonging Needs	
Esteem Needs	
Self-actualization Needs	

Table 3.1 Consumer Needs Form

### 3.1.4 Distinctive Superiorities

Finding the distinctive characteristics of a brand is the embryo of Brand Personality and Product Attributes. The main function of a brand is using its distinctive features to differentiate itself from other competitors. A brand uses its own personalities or unique characteristics to survive in market of similar products or services. The distinctive advantages of the brand that come forward in this step form a prototype for the final Brand Personalities and Product Attributes (Level 1 and Level 2 of VBL).

To define the distinctive features, designers have to do studies among both the target brand and the competitors. On one hand, designers have to find the right links between products and consumers. The consumer type and consumer needs, which are the results of Step 3, can be the basis of judgment: according to the typical consumer personality and psychological appeals, designers can make the brand unique for the target customers.

### 3.1.5 Summary of Related Regional Cultures

This step aims at roughly listing regional cultures that relate to the design target. The types of cultures should be functionally or emotionally linked with the brand spirits or target products. As shown above, cultural factors are raw materials for creating a VBL in this thesis. To catch those raw materials, designers are suggested to use their own cultural awareness. It is also suggested to reference consumer needs and usage scenarios which are developed in Step 3. The following table (Table 3.2) will be helpful for doing the summary.

	About	Physiological	Safety	Love/ Belonging	Esteem	Self- actualization
<b>Regional Culture 1</b>						
<b>Regional Culture 2</b>						
<b>Regional Culture 3</b>						
...						

Table 3.2 Related Regional Cultures Form

### 3.2 Design Research

After learning the target brand and studying regional cultures, the second phase is about a progressive culture learning process. Designers are going to experience regional cultures through the design research process. The best way to start learning one culture is getting in touch with its people, significant events, and objects. Finding many regional-culture's works can be helpful to develop knowledge of that culture. In addition, designers must pay close attention to the connection between the regional cultures and the target brand. Therefore, Regional-culture Stratification will be a very important tool to learn and analyze cultural elements. It will be used

as a sorting method firstly in this part.

### 3.2.1 Basic Regional Culture Learning

As said before, regional culture is something dissolved into people’s blood. It has strong affinities with people’s life and influences them from behavior to thinking. No matter if designers are going to reference other’s descriptions or sum up personal experience, it is considerable task to manage all knowledge points in a logical form to make the fellow-up work easier. A form of how to classify regional-culture resources is shown below:

	Culture Cataloge	Specific	Example	Onym	Describe
<b>People</b>	Institution Culture	Interpersonal Relationship	communication methods, distance zone, attitude, etc.		
	Institution Culture & Psychology Culture	Charateristics			
		Belief & Spirit			
<b>Events</b>	Psychology Culture	Customs	festivals, folkways, fairytales, legends, etc.		
		Habits	life style, special life tips, ...		
	Art Activities	painting, music, literature, graphic, performance, etc.			
<b>Objects</b>	Material Culture	Costume & Decoration			
		Daily Supply	kitchenware, furniture, stationery, etc.		
		Foods			
		Architecture & Scenery			

Table 3.3 Basic Learning Catalogue of Regional Culture

The generalized definition of culture classifies culture into three sections: material culture, institution culture, and psychology culture. In this form, those three sections correspond



to objects, people, and events. It is suggested to consult multimedia resources like printed works, images, films, documentaries, and audios, to enrich the whole learning process. If designers already have knowledge of the target culture or have been to the cultural region before, it can be much easier for them to find related research sources and make the process efficient.

In Chapter 2, when introducing regional culture, the concept of the center of the regional-culture was brought forward. It carries the strongest and most original features of the local culture. Therefore, if the boundaries of target culture regions are blurred, designers can mainly study its cultural center.

### **3.2.2 Moodboard of Regional Culture**

Moodboard is an advantageous tool for designers to convey design ideas, moods, feelings and fluffy stuff that are hard to communicate (Staff, 2016). Generally, a moodboard includes a number of images and notes or tips that mark inter-connections, explain images or record inspirations (Figure 3.3). Making a moodboard for each reference regional culture could help designers review ideas and make choices.

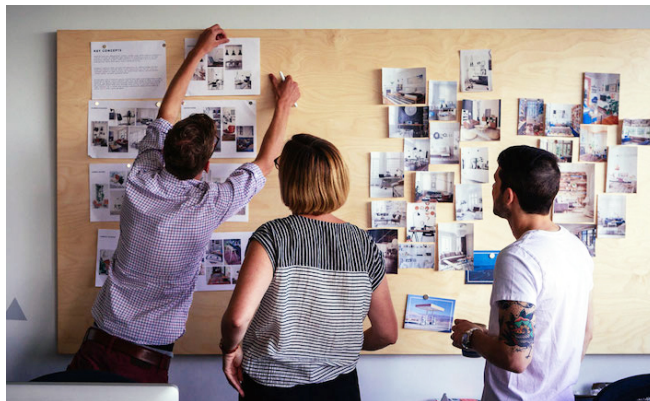


Figure 3.3 Designers Making Moodboard

As the layout of a moodboard needs to put in a place of prominence a key image (Staff, 2016), designers can use a picture that represents the culture best as the key theme image. Then, people, events, objects can be used as satellite key themes. Other smaller supporting images should surround the key images and themes. Designers can start making notes of the connections between regional culture elements and brand appeals, especially brand personality and consumer needs.

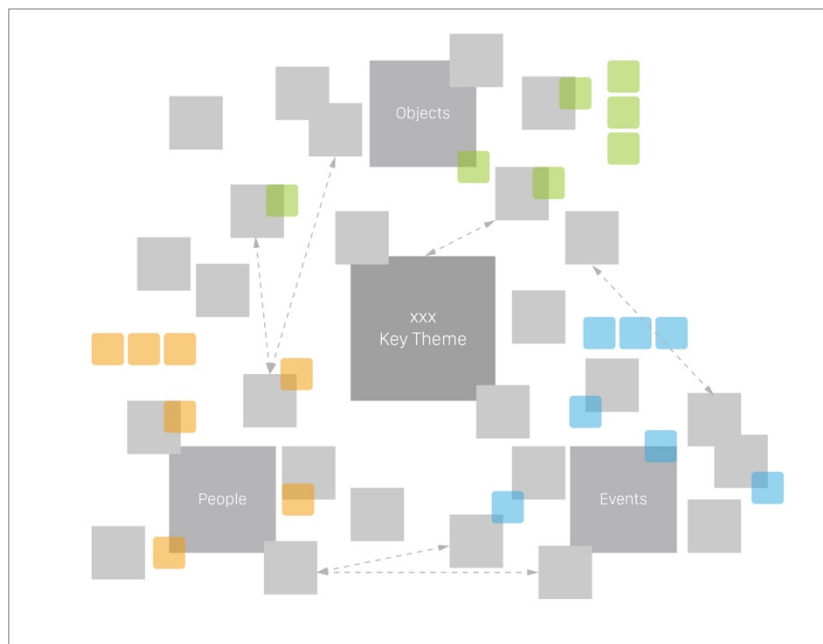


Figure 3.4 Template of Regional-culture Moodboard

### 3.2.3 First Round of Regional-culture Stratification Sorting

At the end of last chapter, the concept of Regional-Culture Stratification was brought forward as a format of both study and evaluation of regional culture. This sorting method is used to shape all cultural elements suitable for design works. When doing the first round of Regional-Culture Stratification sorting, designers have to follow the order of Symbol - Consciousness –

Root. This is because a learning process moves from the surface to the deeper.

The main purpose of this step is reviewing cultural elements and understanding the target culture more deeply. The interrelationships between the three sections can explain the emotional links, fundamental skills, and user experiences behind cultural symbols. Images and notes on the moodboard can be great resources for this step.

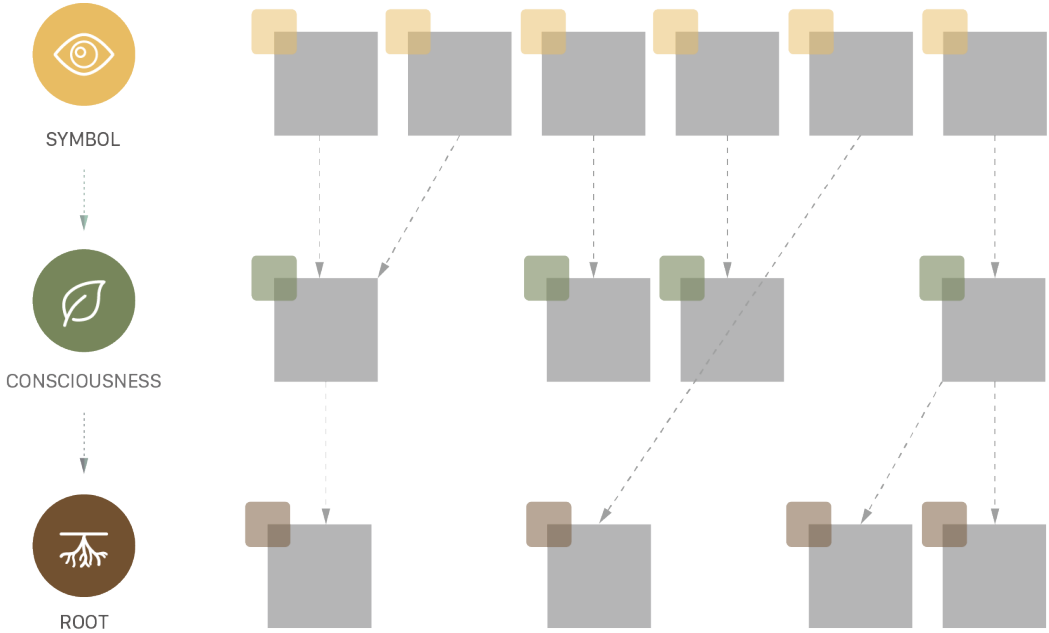


Figure 3.5 Regional-culture Stratification Sorting Board- First Round

### 3.2.4 Establish Brand Personality & Product Attributes

Brand Personality and Product Attributes are the basic levels of Visual Brand Language. Establishing these two levels means the fundamental key of the brand is defined. As the research work over regional cultures may inspire designers with new ideas and improve their thought over the brand positioning, the work for these two aspects has been separated from basic brand study. After regional culture research, designers can mark helpful elements on of the sorting board and

match them with the brand in this step.

A combination of words and images is appropriate to export Brand Personality and Product Attributes. Brand Personality is usually presented by a figure with vivid characteristics, like a fashion-confident sportsman, kitchen enthusiast, or excellent private coffee planter. In this case, personification describes the brand. A Brand Personality can be a server, a producer, or a consumer. A couple of adjectives can be used to describe the most prominent brand figure.

Product Attributes are more specific than Brand Personality. It is presented by more adjectives that directly show off the distinctive priorities of products and services. In the case of KitchenAid from Chapter 2, its Product Attributes are beautiful, approachable, softer, authentic, iconic, and well-crafted. They are just the feelings users will get from the products.

As this is the middle phase of the design process, designers can use character photos or sketches to assist this work. In the final VBL handbook, renderings of usage scenarios with final products will replace those pictures used in this step.

### **3.3 Concept Generation**

At the end of last part, designers have finished two fundamental levels of VBL: Brand Personality and Product Attributes. Therefore, the core value of the brand is established and all the following design steps should follow that value. Most parts of the Concept Generation step are close to general products design process.

Another round of Regional-culture Stratification sorting will come first to narrow down the culture scope. Designers will make selection of matched cultural elements and separate them

into different themes. The whole design process will start from a hero product, which is already decided in the first phase. Then the process moves to other family products and accessories. The final work of this phase is establishing the third and fourth level of the VBL.

### **3.3.1 Second Round of Regional-culture Stratification Sorting**

In this round of sorting, designers are going to filter all information they learned from the last round and just keep feasible elements. Designers will learn those elements more deeply. The results can be shown through moodboards. The most obvious difference between this round and last one is the objects of analysis. In this round, deeper research will only direct at the feasible and highly matched cultural factors.

There are two things that need more attention in this step. Firstly, the connections between target brand and selected cultural factors must be focused. This is to make sure those cultural pieces are matched with the brand and feasible for next step. Designers are recommended to consult VBL content as the foundation for usage of cultural factors. Secondly, the designers should attempt to focus on the usage scenarios related to the target brand and its products as well. If any cultural event or life style image can match the given usage situation, it is worth it to research more deeply.

For more in-depth research, the moodboard (Figure 3.6) for this round needs more details. It doesn't have to follow the order of Symbol – Consciousness – Root. Designers can manage all images and notes according to their personal understandings of the culture. They can use more description and assistive pictures to point out the connections with VBL.

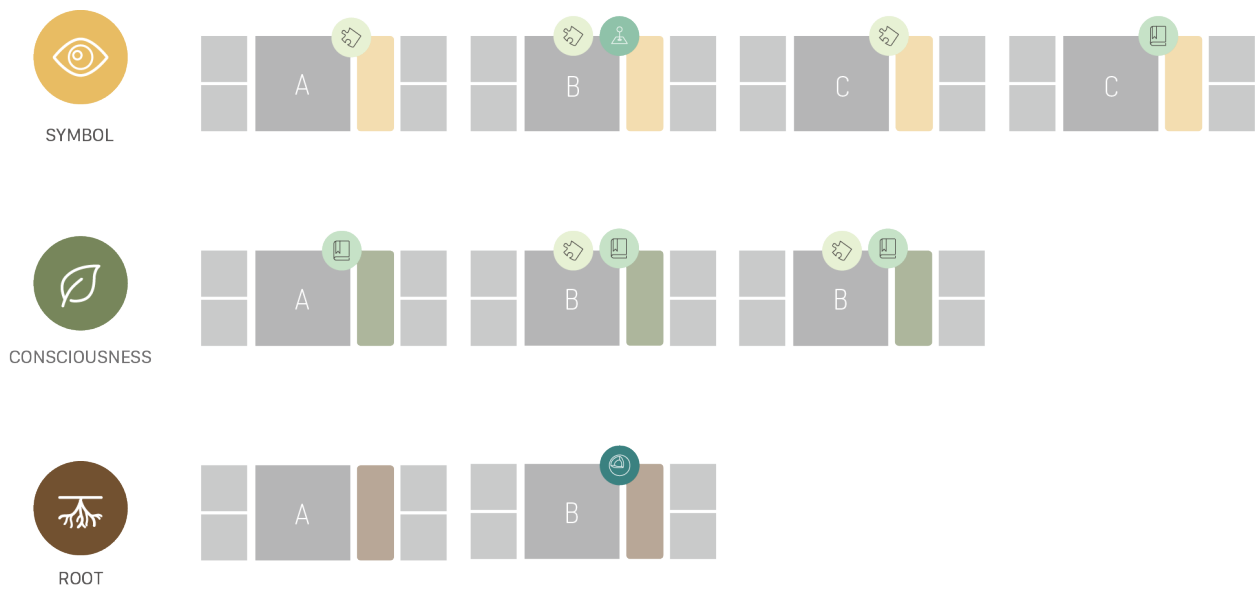


Figure 3.6 Regional-culture Stratification Sorting Board- Second Round

### 3.3.2 Hero Product Concepts

The hero product has been selected during the Products & Services part in the first phase. Before designing the hero product, designers should finalize concept themes. Concept themes can be based on distinctive physical style, regional culture scope, decoration methods, or material features. If the selected cultural factors are not harmonious with each other, they should be separated into different themes.

After this, designers can begin creating hero product concepts. Brand Personality and Product Attributes should still lead this process, even in details. Designers may find that most cultural factors they used in this section belong to Symbol section. Those factors should be used

to a reasonable extent.

### **3.3.3 Other Products Concepts and Selection**

This step is for designing the remaining industrial products and other accessory designs. The final theme selection is also done during this process. Designers can choose the right time to make theme selection. It can be after putting each theme on all products and accessories, or just on part of the products family. After all design families are done, designers can make family renderings to check whether it match the usage scenarios assumed before. This can also help designers choose the final theme.

According to Figure 2.8, accessory designs include all intangibles in the Products & Services list, like logo, packaging, websites, icon sets, and so on. The specific details depend on the practical situation.

### **3.3.4 Design Principles**

As the third level of VBL, Design Principles are specific directions for designers to follow. Design Principles include two parts: literal design specifications, and visual concepts of tangible models or service chain. They are like an instruction book of design main points and overall visual feelings. To sum up Design Principles, designer can use family products renderings in assumed usage scenarios.

### **3.3.5 Signature Elements**

Figure 2.8 is just a universal format for Signature Elements and a reference for this step.

As the top level of VBL, Signature Elements includes all iconic visual features of the whole brand design. It is the essence of the design process, just like the Symbol section of Regional-Culture Stratification. Thus, just the characteristic design points have to be pointed out.

### 3.4 VBL Handbook

#### 3.4.1 Final Round of Regional-culture Stratification Summary

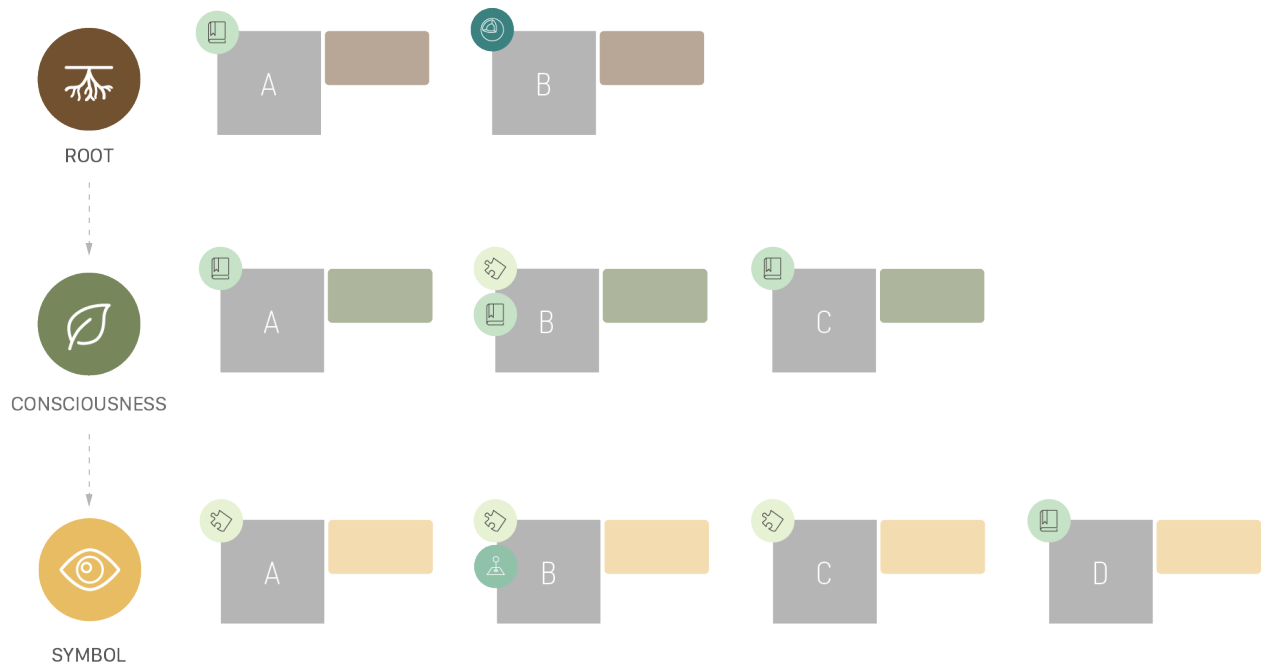


Figure 3.7 Regional-culture Stratification Summary Board

The final round of Regional-Culture Stratification sorting is a summary of the whole Visual Brand Language design. It will be an efficient tool that help designers communicate with brand owner and users. All three sections will focus on regional-culture elements used in final design works, which include industrial products, graphics, and package.

This time, designers should start at the Root section, explaining original cultural motivations and reasons used in the brand design. The connections between culture statements



and brand briefs can help designers think design ideas through completely. Additionally, for Consciousness layer and Symbol layer, detailed renderings of the finished designs are better than the pictures used in Round 2.

### 3.4.2 VBL Pyramid Summary

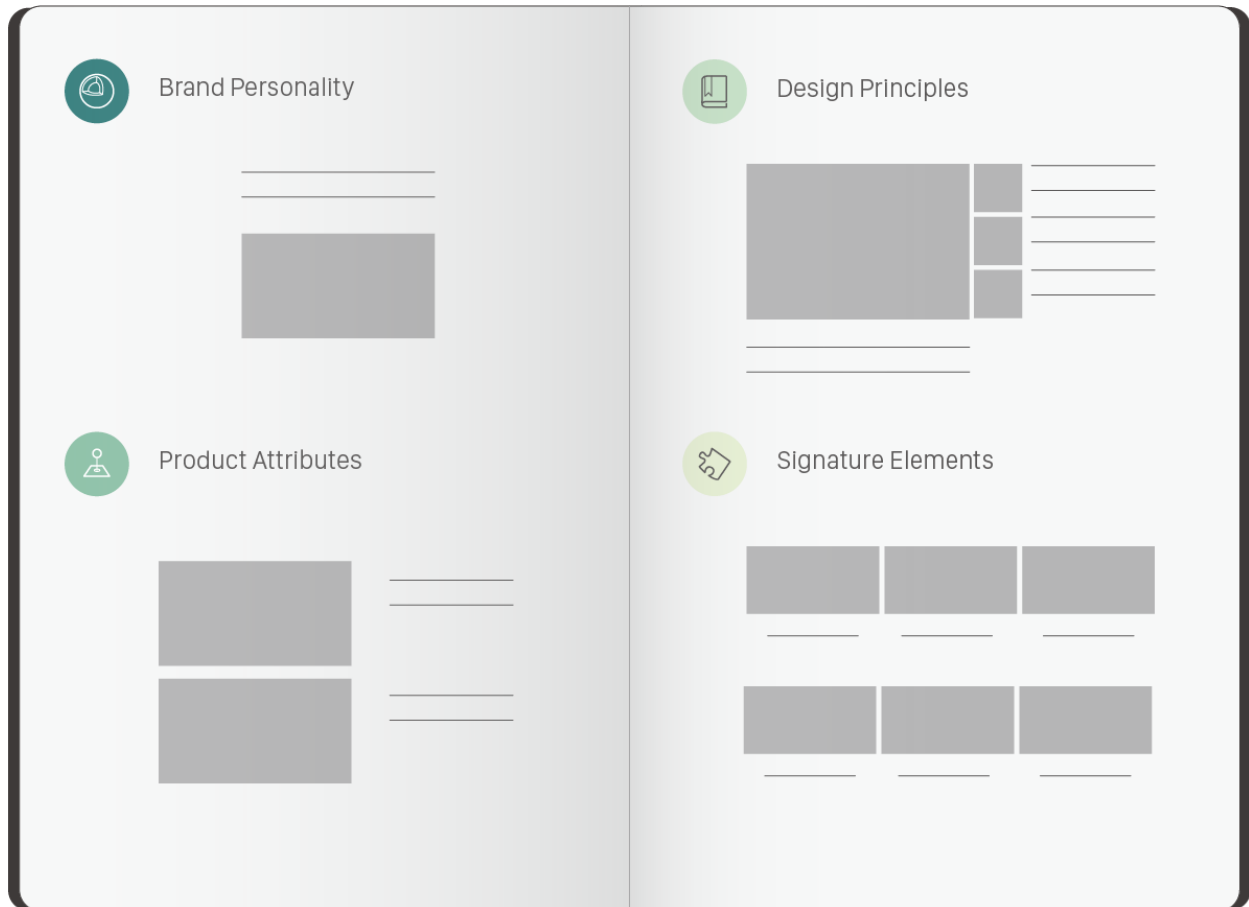


Figure 3.8 VBL Handbook Template

Figure 3.8 is just an example of the final VBL Handbook. As each VBL level has been done during the research and design process, the final arrangement of the handbook will be easy. This handbook is also used to present the whole design to both the brand owner and consumers. Designers can manage the order of the four parts depend on their own understanding. The case

study of KitchenAid VBL in last chapter is an example for this step.

## CHAPTER 4

### Application Results

#### **4.1 Design Opportunity**

In Chapter 2, the example of Supor Firewood Rice Cooker was used to explain how do people's strong cultural affinities protect cultural diversity from disappearing. In this case study, Supor solved the problem of making old-style rice with a new spherical tank and intelligent heating program.

As an excellent Chinese cookware and small appliances manufacturer, Supor cares about the specific life tastes of local people, as well as their regional-culture. Its kitchen appliances series uses a unique way to meet the challenges of design, manufacture, and marketing promotion. However, despite the focus on its products and brand building, there are still several points that need improvement. Its lack of brand personality and product unity make the product menu a mess. Its merchandising model is blurry and the differences between each category are huge. Products are designed in too scattered a way to hold one family image. The company does not have a certain slogan or any long-time brand orientation. Those defects can be great entry points for brand improvement. A well-fitting Visual Brand Language can help Supor build a clear and strong brand image and walk further into consumers' hearts.

A strong competitor in the market, another brand, Gree Electric, made an excellent attempt of branding new appliances. A large establishment, Gree Electric is famous for its giant air-conditioner manufacturing in China. In 2014, when Gree started moving into the small appliances market, it invested in a newborn sub-brand TOSOT to hold its whole small appliances manufacturing lines. Compared to Supor, Gree gave up outdated and low-quality designs but built the brand TOSOT in focus to establish and propagandize its younger, intelligent brand personality. Although it gives up the help from parent-brand's fame and public praise, it got a chance to create its own attraction. Thus, Gree TOSOT can a valuable example for building Supor kitchen appliances series VBL.



Figure 4.1 TOSOT Product Family Image

In this chapter, the design guideline in Chapter 3 will be applied to Supor kitchen appliances. A comprehensive brand study will help Supor find its advantages and weaknesses among the selected catalogue. The application of guidelines will find matching regional-culture elements for Supor and reform Supor as a vivid poignant brand.

## **4.2 Design Process**

### **4.2.1 Brand Identification and Expectation**

Supor is one of the largest Chinese cookware and small appliances manufacturers. It was founded in 1994 and entered the small kitchen appliances market in 2001. With decades of development, Supor holds four main manufacturing lines now: Cookware, Small Kitchen Appliances, Large Kitchen & Bath Appliances, and Household Environment Appliances.

#### **4.2.1.1 Reason and Goals**

For running and improving the brand, innovation is the leading spirit of Supor. The brand name ‘Supor’, which is a homophonic of the word ‘super’, was created for picking the company up and encouraging itself when it was in an extremely difficult position in 1994. After several years’ endeavor and high attention to technology and quality, Supor grew into a super brand in China.

Standing on the point of brand promotion, there is an unobvious transition among the development of Supor. The very first slogan Supor used in 1995 was ‘Supor brings safety home’. After that, Supor took high-quality and high-technology as their main promotions for a long time-period. This promotion direction does conform to the core value of the brand. But as economic growth increased living standards, Supor moved its promotion from basic consumer needs to a higher level. In 2000s, after entering the small kitchen appliances market, Supor moved more attention to consumers’ emotions and feeling. The most familiar slogan it used in advertisements is ‘Perform the wisdom of life.’ At this time, Supor made efforts to build a brand

image of an intelligent kitchen helper that makes cooking easy, efficient, and ingenious. It is a good start for Supor to pay attention to product attributes and deeper consumer needs. Later on, when promoting three new kitchen appliances, Supor put the sentence ‘Ingenuity makes nothing difficult’ as a new motto on most of its posters and commercial videos. Unique technologies were first applied on those new hero products this time. Cooperating with life tastes thinking, those techniques made great efforts to build a brand personality of both wisdom and even temperament.

Although blurry and slack, it is still possible to find Supor’s goal. Quality and technical innovation are what the brand cares most about. For its small kitchen-electronic designs, their work provides easier cooking with more possibilities.

#### **4.2.1.2 Products and Services**

This part can be separated into three parts: Tangible Products, Mobile App, and Sales & After-sales.

Supor small kitchen appliances include several machine types (Figure 4.2). As listed on its website and online shopping center, there are electric pressures, rice cookers, slow cookers, electric steamers, induction hobs, bread makers, actify, soymilk makers, electric kettles, food preparation, high-speed blenders, baking pans, electric hotpots, and noodle makers. They are not separated into catalogs or classes. The electric pressure and the rice cooker are the two primary products of Supor small kitchen appliances.

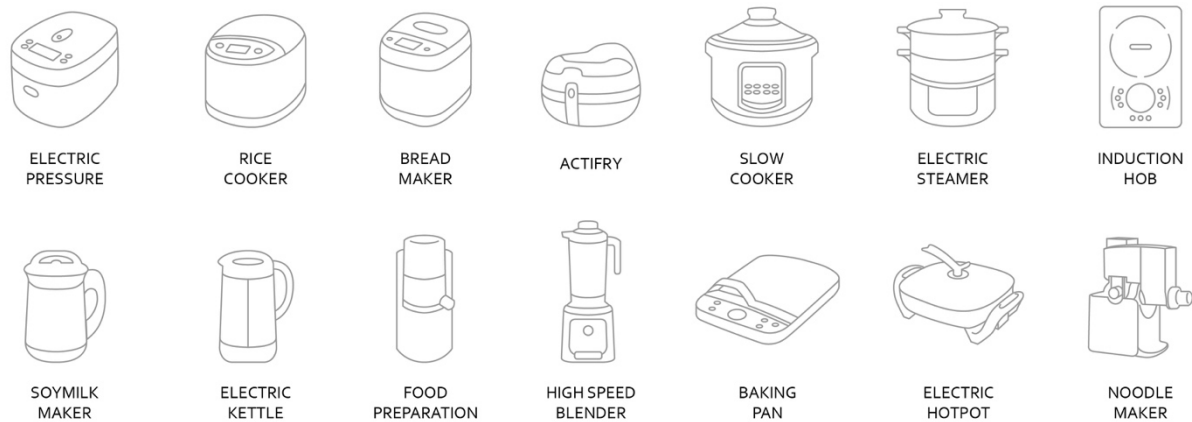


Figure 4.2 Supor Small Kitchen Appliances – Product List

For each machine type, it may include one or multiple models. Unfortunately, based on the information Supor posted on their website, it is not easy to tell the differences of functions or price between models from one machine-type, let along their cost performances. This is caused by a lack of brand image and merchandising approach. To improve this point, the brand has to rely on very clear design principles, which is the third level of VBL.

Another important point worth attention is the product naming method. As claimed before, the small kitchen appliances have not been separated into independent categories or series. But in online research, though most products just get a product number, there are several recent products that use their own Chinese name for promotion, and some even are included under a series name. Although those series look like sub-brand type, the company puts little effort into managing different products. This means the sorting method Supor uses now neither manages products under one catalog clearly, nor manages different products with similar functions or features clearly.

To make the design target clear, all small kitchen appliance types can be separated into five categories according to their main form: Pot, Flat Box, Box, Column, and Other. As shown in the chart below (Figure 4.3), there are several unifying opportunities that can be considered during the design process. Handles, lids, button, knobs, interfaces and other details are strong brand features that can promote unity.

Besides those tangible products, Supor also provides a smart mobile app named Qiaoqiao Su as a supporting tool for its WiFi-controlled equipment (Figure 4.4). After linking their products, users could control working time, read instructions and use tips for their cookers on the app. Besides controlling electric pressures and rice cookers remotely, this app also provides recipes based on those appliances, which help users get the most effective benefits of the products. This app can support three types of kitchen appliances for now: electric pressure, rice cooker, and actifry. Although Supor has not paid much attention to popularizing this app, which causes its valuable additional functions to be ignored, there is large room for making improvement. This app can be a powerful tool assisting new brand language.



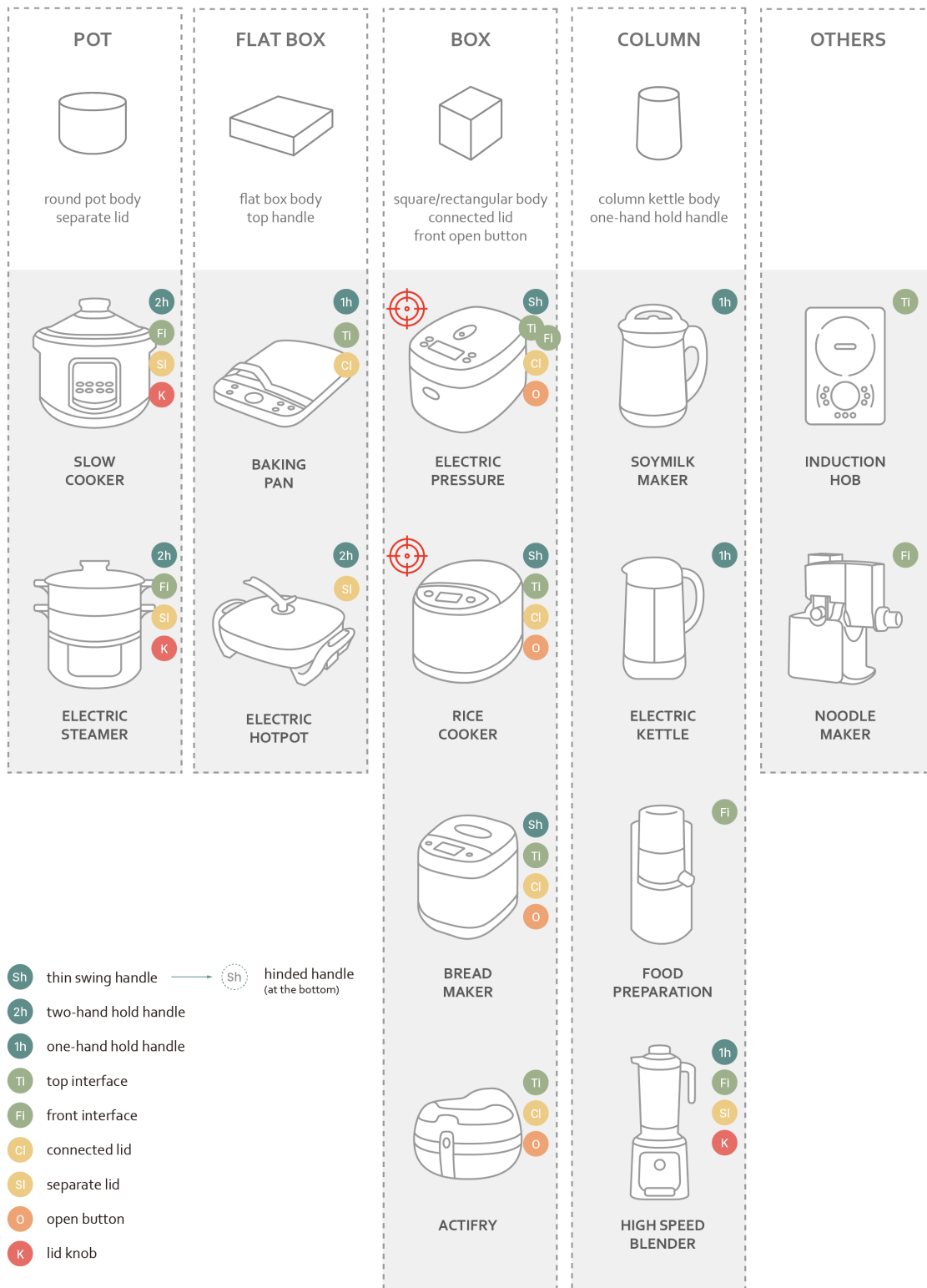


Figure 4.3 Supor Small Kitchen Appliances – Form Catalog

The Sales and After-sales part is much clearer. Speaking of sales modes, E-commerce is the main selling method of Supor small kitchen appliances. Tmall.com and JD.com, which are the top two E-commerce companies in China, are Supor’s official online stores

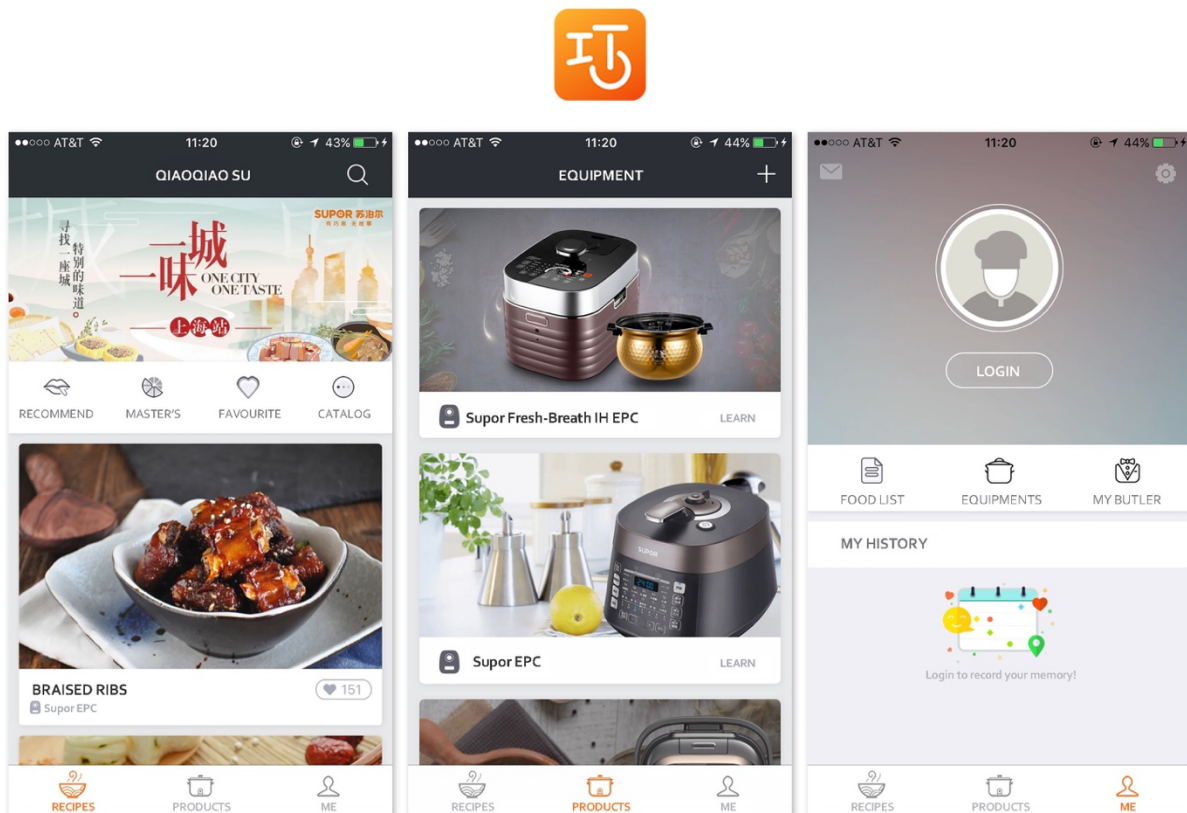


Figure 4.4 Supor Qiaoqiao Su Mobile App

#### 4.2.1.3 Consumer Needs and Usage Scenarios

In Supor’s TV commercial “When you are here, everything I wish is here”, five common but classic family scenarios were set up to express both the functional and emotional meaning of using Supor Ji-Yang High-speed Blender: although daily life is busy, we cook hearty

and nutritional meals from our heart to love our family and ourselves. Family focus is an essence of Chinese culture, as well as health maintenance. As a kitchen appliances brand, Supor expresses strong interest in taking care of these two points.

Based on Supor’s Product & Service list and its promotion materials, here is the conclusion of the consumer needs and their performed features in the products (Table 4.1).

Needs Type	Consumer Needs	Product Features
<b>Physiological Needs</b>	cook well-done food	performance
<b>Safety Needs</b>	secure using process	body connections, breathing light, voice prompt
	easy control	interface, body connections
<b>Love/Belonging Needs</b> <b>Esteem Needs</b>	delicious and nutritional meals	techniques (hardware and software)
	provide various kinds of dishes	performance
	easy and efficient cooking process	appliances performance, interface
<b>Esteem Needs</b>	each cooking step elaborate	performance, operation, interface
	awake the original tastes of food	technique and working principle
	clean and storage	form and details
<b>Self-actualization Needs</b>	personal master-skills of cooking	performance, operation, interface
	efficiency and quality of life	appliances performance, app support
	aesthetics taste of home decoration	appearance, form and details

Table 4.1 Consumer Needs List of Supor Small Kitchen Appliances

#### 4.2.1.4 Distinctive Superiorities

The most unique superiority of Supor small kitchen appliances is the pertinence of its machine technologies. Compared with competitors, Supor small kitchen appliances have great

advantages of food cooking techniques and the sensitive insight of Chinese residents' cooking requirements. Besides the example raised in Chapter 2, which shows how Supor rice cooker solves the problem of making firewood steamed rice, other technologies settled in Supor kitchen appliances also show strong concern about mouth/feel, taste, and nutrition of dishes (Table 4.2). A lot of them provide several cooking modes for different food materials (meat, vegetables, cereals, beans), dish styles (regular dishes, stew dishes, soup, thick liquid), or cuisine methods (fry, stew, boil). Thus, one of the most distinctive superiorities of Supor is its concentrated attention to local people's diet habits.

Table 4.2 Unique Technologies of Supor Small Kitchen Appliances

Machine Type	Unique Technologies	Working Feature
Rice Cooker	high thermal power steam	firewood steamed rice
	smart fire cooking system	
	Spherical Copper Crystal Pot	
Electric Pressure	IH quick firepower	fully aroused food's flavors cooking speed upgrade
	8-G precision control heating system	
	fresh breath cooking curve	
	7-Layer Energy-Gathering Thick Ceramic Crystal Pot	
Soymilk Maker	slow grinding	better traditional craft taste nutrition reserved
	smart temperature control	
	sealed cooking system	
	spherical heating	
High-speed Blender	precisely-controlled heating	blender + cooker design for making soup and congee
	6 bone-crush blade with powerful motor	

#### **4.2.1.5 Summary of Related Regional Cultures**

##### **4.2.1.5.1 Chinese home cooking style**

As the target brand belongs to kitchen appliances area, it is a matter of course to learn about Chinese home cooking style. This research does not only focus on local cooking process and skills, but also on related food culture and emotional expressions. Cooking and meals are one of the largest family topics in China, as it shows in daily communication between family members.

##### **4.2.1.5.2 New Chinese decorative style**

Kitchen appliances are not only cooking tools but also part of the kitchen decorations. They can be the very finishing points of the whole kitchen interior design. Standing on the point of style and flavor, there are a great many trends, factions, and personal flavors. Thus, when learning traditional design features, designers should balance the strength of each style, and make sure they are absorbing functional features for the design target.

To explore the connection between local culture and kitchenware design direction, New Chinese Decorative Style is another possible research area. This style was born when national consciousness came back to local people's life. It inherits part of the traditional home furnishing style, especially Ming and Qing styles, and combines them with modern design trends.

As New Chinese Decorative Style mainly focuses on home furnishing and decorating, the cultural research will start from overall style and move deeper to wares and household utensils.

##### **4.2.1.5.3 Literati Aesthetics & Philosophic Thinking over Life**

As claimed before, Supor’s promotion focus moved from consumer’s basic needs to Love/Belonging needs and esteem needs. To follow this path, the cultural research will also include spiritual pursuits with strong local features. Songs, poems, documentaries and painting can all be valuable materials for learning the life style and regional culture.

## 4.2.2 Design Research

### 4.2.2.1 Basic Regional Culture Learning

To create a multi-perspective cultural research, at this beginning step, different sorts of media support the basic regional culture learning process (Table 4.3).

Culture Catalog	Resource	Type	VBL Opportunity
Chinese home cooking style	Journeys of Daily Meals (Ri Shi ji)	short film	L1/L2
	A Bite of China	documentary	L1/L2/L3
	Cook for One Person (Yi Ren Shi)	short film	L1/L2
	Eat · Drink · Man · Woman	movie clip	L1/L2
Literati Aesthetics & Philosophic Thinking over Life	Poem & Essay	literature	L1/L2/L3
	Zikai Feng’s Artwork	painting	L1/L2/L3/L4
	Songs	melody & lyrics	L1/L2
New Chinese decorative style	Kiln & Porcelain	appliance	L2/L3/L4
	Sweet Olive	picture/literature	L2/L4
	Home Decoration	picture	L3/L4

Table 4.3 Resources of Basic Regional Cultural Learning

The main function of this step is becoming familiar with regional cultures that are related

to the target brand and products. Each kind of resources is reviewed several times, which helps to ensure that they are suitable and adjustable for Supor and its kitchen product. After this step, the gathered information will be shown as images and text on mood-boards.

#### 4.2.2.2 Moodboard of Regional Culture

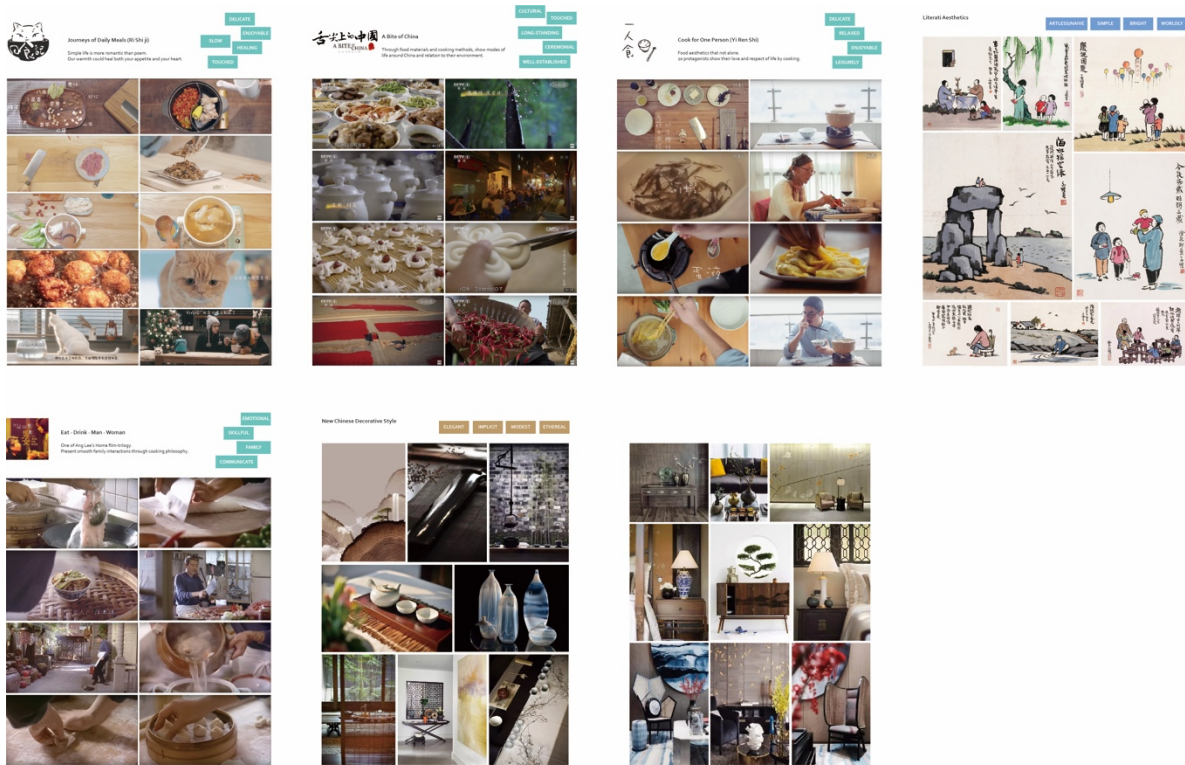


Figure 4.5 Moodboards for Basic Regional Cultural Learning

### 4.2.2.3 First Round of Regional-culture Stratification Sorting

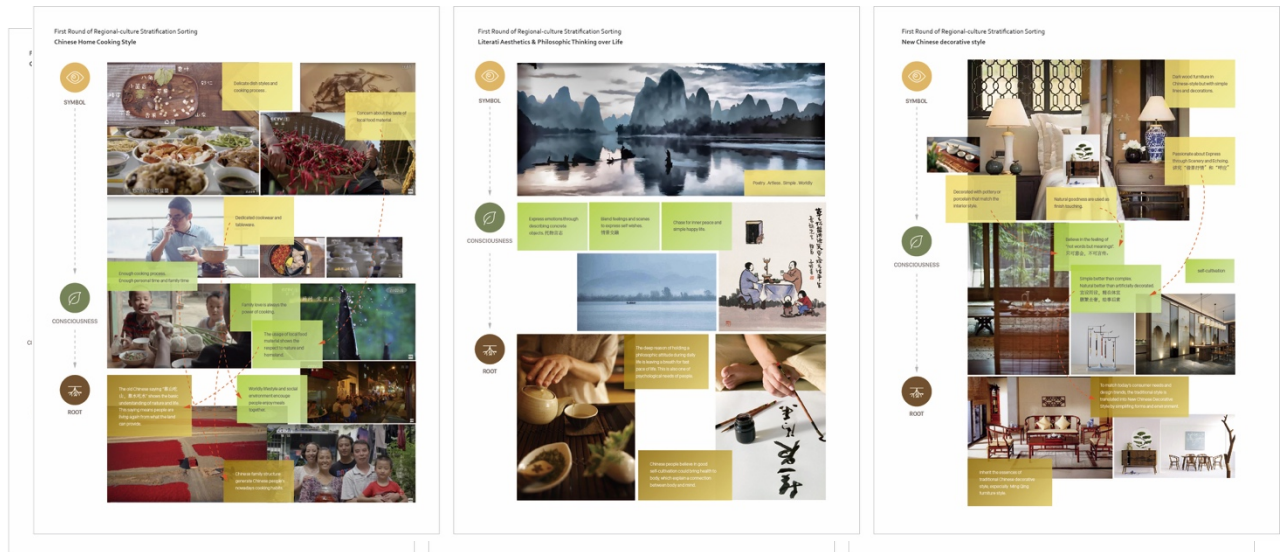


Figure 4.6 Moodboards for First Round of Regional-culture Stratification Sorting

### 4.2.2.4 Establish Brand Personality & Product Attributes

To create a brand characteristic of both smart kitchen work and delicate life style, the final Brand Personality of Supor kitchen appliances is Philosopher in Kitchen. This is to build a typical character of a home cook who enjoys the cooking process, loves communicating and expressing feelings by dishes and meals, cares about esthetics and life details, and chases a poetic life.

The name of this new brand is Taci in English and “灵犀” in Chinese, which means connections between minds. The Supor Taci series aims at striking a responsive chord with consumers.

Product Attributes are the products unique characteristics. The key attributes of Supor Taci series are durable, multifunctional, communicative, simple, and lovely.



As analyzed in 4.2.1, one of the distinctive superiorities of Supor is its concern of Chinese people's cooking culture and diet habit. Supor has done this job perfectly by its advanced technologies. Thus, in its Visual Brand Language, the cooking-habit-friendly technologies will still play an essential role.

However, to develop the whole brand attributes to a higher level, more consumer needs over the mental level require concern. As Supor shows its interest of promoting how their products help express family emotions, family feeling can be another important aspect of Product Attributes.

These product attributes have many opportunities to be shown on products and services. Here lists those possibilities as reminders for the concept generation in the next section.

Durable- large capacity and machine size; safety design details; food grade materials.

Multifunctional- based on the dietary habits of local people; relevant context menu; multiple adjustable index.

Communicative- people to people: new “family recipe” unite in the Qiaoqiao Su App; environment to people: decorative appearance for most local style kitchens.

Simple- simple product appearance and color theme; simplified user interfaces.

Lovely- fluent one-curve machine body; Pebble Knob designed as both functional and decorative.

## **4.2.3 Concept Generation**

### **4.2.3.1 Second Round of Regional-culture Stratification Sorting**



Figure 4.7 Moodboards for Second Round of Regional-culture Stratification Sorting

#### 4.2.3.2 Hero Product Concepts



Figure 4.8 Rendering of the Electric Pressure

#### 4.2.3.3 Other Products Concepts and Selection



Figure 4.9 Rendering of the Taci family

#### 4.2.3.4 Design Principles

- a. Large capacity
- b. Fluent-curve machine body
- c. Lightly-curved and soft surface
- d. Simple and elegant appearance
- e. Easy-cleaning form
- f. Friendly interface with clear guidance
- g. Definite use steps
- e. Pure color theme

#### 4.2.3.5 Signature Elements

- a. Curled-edge form



Figure 4.10 Curled-edge form

b. Shrink feet



Figure 4.11 Shrink feet

c. One-hand handle with upwarping corner and curved chamfer edges



Figure 4.12 Upwarping corner handle

d. Pebble knob

Figure 4.13 Pebble knob

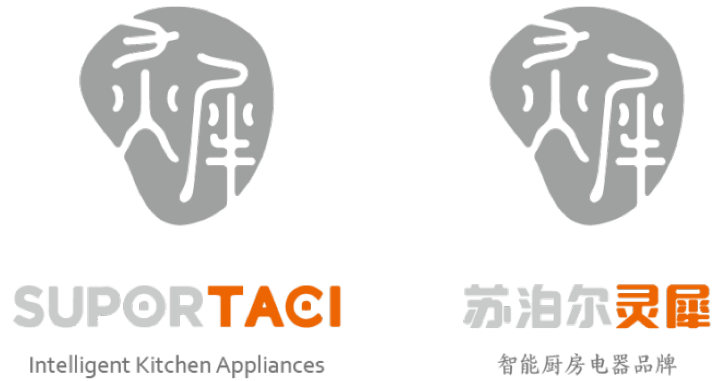


e. Joint-curve screen that shares similar shape with main form

Figure 4.14 Joint-curve screen

f. Logo

Figure 4.15 Logo (English version and Chinese version)



g. Interfaces & Font

h. Color (four white themes)



Figure 4.16 Four White Themes

## 4.2.4 VBL Handbook

### 4.2.4.1 Final Round of Regional-culture Stratification Summary

#### 4.2.4.1.1 Root

Local Cooking Method- Chinese home cooking style is influenced by food material and cooking method. Supor Tacii is aiming at supporting Chinese home cooking style and making it simple and efficient. As Chinese people prefer using traditional ways to process food material

and keep the original taste of food, Supor Taci series use unique techniques to finish nutritious as well as tasty dishes. This feature can also be proved by Figure 4.6.

Family Value- Supor Taci series also aims at promoting family relationships. Chinese people share a stable and strong family value, which means during most times of their life, they have responsibilities to take care of family members. In respect to dining, having meals with family is the best time to communicate with each other. Family members share thoughts, exchange feelings, and even educate children at the dining-table. Thus, the taste of family dishes contains more than just familiar tastes, but also family relationships and emotions. Relevant context will be the main promotion direction of the brand.

#### **4.2.4.1.2 Consciousness**

Kitchen appliances are part of the kitchen decoration. Supor Taci's designs are concerned about home beauty and life aesthetics. They are also concerned about how family members communicate feelings with each other.

Life Aesthetics- Supor Taci wishes to transmit a simple, lovely, and elegant feeling through its products. This feeling comes from local people's universal life attitude. An internal peace could bring delight and happiness to life.

Family Affection- Sometimes daily life is busy and tough; therefore people wish home to be a warm and quiet place that can protect and take care of them. No matter how tired or nervous people get outside, when they remember their families are waiting for them with a meal, they will feel full of power again. That is why cooking tasty and nutritional dishes is important to

Chinese families.

Joy of Cooking- Sometimes, people enjoy being a chef at home. No matter if they are cooking for family or themselves, those people pursue professional and precise cooking processes which help them get recognition from both others and themselves. Smart kitchen appliances can help people experience the joy of cooking and win psychological approvals.

#### **4.2.4.1.3 Symbol**

Pure white machine bodies- Give more possibilities to the kitchen interior design and make sure the kitchen appliances are just modest decorations;

Curled-edge form- A combination of melon-arriss bottle and okra-top bowl;

Upwarping corner handle

Pebble knob and logo- Generated from the Chinese idiom “Even the rocks nod in approval during one’s preaching” , which describes the touchable power of masters in certain areas;

Family recipe- Remember the taste of home.

#### **4.2.4.2 VBL Pyramid Summary**

##### **4.2.4.2.1 Brand Personality**

Philosopher in Kitchen, which describe a home cook who enjoys the cooking process, loves communicating and expressing feelings by dishes and meals, cares about esthetics and life details, and chases the poetic life.



#### **4.2.4.2.2 Product Attributes**

Durable- Large capacity and machine size; safety design details; food grade materials.

Multifunctional- Based on the dietary habits of local people; relevant context menu; multiple adjustable index.

Communicative- People to people: new “family recipe” unite in the Qiaoqiao Su App; environment to people: decorative appearance for most local style kitchens.

Simple- Simple product appearance and color theme; simplified user interfaces.

Lovely- Fluent one-curve machine body; Pebble Knob designed as both functional and decorative.

#### **4.2.4.2.3 Design Principles**

##### **a. Brand Personality**

Philosopher in Kitchen, which describe a home cook who enjoys the cooking process, loves communicating and expressing feelings by dishes and meals, cares about esthetics and life details, and chases the poetic life.

##### **b. Product Attributes**

Durable- Large capacity and machine size; safety design details; food grade materials.

Multifunctional- Based on the dietary habits of local people; relevant context menu; multiple adjustable index.

Communicative- People to people: new “family recipe” unite in the Qiaoqiao Su App; environment to people: decorative appearance for most local style kitchens.

Simple- Simple product appearance and color theme; simplified user interfaces.

Lovely- Fluent one-curve machine body; Pebble Knob designed as both functional and decorative.

#### c. Design Principles

- Large capacity
- Fluent-curve machine body with lightly-curved and soft surface
- Simple and elegant appearance with easy-cleaning form
- Friendly interface with clear guidance and definite use steps
- Pure color theme

#### **4.2.4.2.4 Signature Elements**

- Curled-edge form
- Shrunken feet
- One-hand handle with upwarping corner and curved chamfer edges
- Pebble knob
- Joint-curve screen that shares similar shape with main form
- Logo
- Interfaces & Font
- Color (four white themes)

### **4.3 Summary**

This Visual Brand Language design based on Supor example successfully follow the

design guidelines and show flexible use of design tools in the guidelines. The final design uses five tangible products and one APP page to represent the product and serves of Supor kitchen appliances. The design export of the sub-brand Taci includes all the four VBL levels. Designers could use the guidelines to explore other regional-culture based brand designs.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Study

As claimed in the first chapter, the objective of this research is finding one workable map for applying regional cultural elements in product design. Thus, the guidelines presented in this thesis are only one of the possible ways to apply regional-culture elements in brand design or product design. To follow today's developing commercial trade, this research uses brand as a bridge to connect regional culture and product design.

The research starts with concepts analysis among brand, Visual Brand Language, culture, regional culture, and design process. For deeper feature study, this research focuses on the relationship of both brand-and-design and culture-and-design. After linking regional-culture with product design by brand, a sorting tool Regional-culture Statistic is created. This statistic is based on several academic definitions of culture and the characteristics of regional-culture. It becomes a powerful tool in the guidelines as it can help with researching culture, applying cultural elements in designs, and expressing brand content.

A good learned result of this research is the importance of a physical model towards a product or brand design process. During the guideline application, a full-size model of the Supor Taci high-speed blender was made. This model helped designer estimating the design in an actual way, especially measuring how to match the curved form and the actual size of the blender, and the comfort of the handle and the knobs. Thus, for most designs among industrial product brands,

it is recommended to make physical models or mockups to perfect the design.

There are still more aspects that can be further investigated in the next phase. Suggestions for the further research as follows:

1. The Regional-culture Stratification raised in this research is a concept based on the culture definitions mentioned in this research. This is an attempt to analyze culture from a comprehensive view. Designers can change culture-research method if they have specific concision or understanding over a certain culture.

2. Although designers' familiarity of a certain culture is a recessive factor of how they start a regional-culture base design, it is highly suggested to use these guidelines to explore cultural design in unfamiliar areas. That will be a valuable attempt of culture identification and application.

3. The Visual Brand Language concept used in this research is limited in its visual aspect. But as mentioned before, there are some companies and organizations that have expanded VBL concept into other perspectives and areas. A new concept of Brand Language may communicate with consumer through more methods. If so, the design target of this research can be expanded into wider areas.

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