

The Evolution of Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design and Market Effects

Liu Fang^{1*}, Azhar Bin Abd Jamil², Norfadilah Kamaruddin³

¹Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia;
College of Design and Humanities, Chongqing University of Science and Technology, No. 20, Donglu
Road, Shapingba District, 401331, Chongqing, China.

Email: 82603713@qq.com

²Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

Email: azhar388@uitm.edu.my

³Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

Email: dilagiant@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

CORRESPONDING

AUTHOR (*):

Azhar Bin Abd Jami

(azhar388@uitm.edu.my)

KEYWORDS:

Monkey Zodiac Stamp

Design

Evolution

Market Effects

CITATION:

Liu, F., Azhar Bin Abd Jamil, & Norfadilah
Kamaruddin. (2025). The Evolution of
Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design and Market
Effects. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences
and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 10(8), e003462.
<https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v10i8.3462>

This study takes the Monkey Zodiac stamp design as the research object. It analyses the design methodology used in its stamp design to achieve an in-depth understanding of the relationship between cultural symbols and economic activities. Applying qualitative research and deriving a research design model based on Saussure's (1916) semiotic theory, the study adopts the method of visual analysis to collate the cultural elements of the Monkey Zodiac stamp design during the period of 1980-2024, and analyses in detail the textual symbols, stylistic symbols, colourful symbols, graphic symbols, and material symbols in the design of the Chinese Monkey Zodiac stamps through the detailed observation and visual analysis of the six Monkey Zodiac stamps, so as to reveal their The design symbols are analysed in detail, revealing their evolution in different cultural and historical contexts and the symbolic meanings they carry, exploring the connection between the design symbols and the artistic aesthetics, cultural contexts and social environments of the times in which they were created, and exploring the evolutionary trajectory of the monkey zodiac stamp design and its impact on economic sustainability, as well as how this evolution echoes with the economic trends. Analyzing the design methods and symbolic meanings of Monkey zodiac stamps provides insight into their relationship with the socio-cultural context. Ideas are made available on how the design of the Monkey Zodiac stamps can retain cultural connotations while incorporating the characteristics of the times and maintaining innovativeness, as well as how economic activities can feed the cultural heritage and form a virtuous cycle.

Contribution/Originality: This study is one of very few studies which have investigated the interplay between design evolution and market performance in philately, integrating semiotic analysis of visual symbols with stepwise multiple regression to quantify how cultural symbolism influences transaction prices, thereby

advancing qualitative semiotics and quantitative economic analysis in philatelic scholarship.

1. Introduction

Traditional culture encompasses the customs, beliefs, rituals, practices, and knowledge passed down through generations, shaping social identity and historical continuity (Kroeber, 1963). A distinctive feature of Chinese culture is the Chinese Zodiac, which links twelve animals to the twelve months of the year: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig. Each animal holds unique cultural significance in mythology (Wu, 2020).

The stamp patterns are a microcosm of historical records, reflecting China's progress. The first Chinese Zodiac stamp featuring a Monkey was issued in 1980, marking the beginning of Chinese Zodiac stamps' artistic, cultural, and technological evolution. Today, these stamps offer a visual narrative of cultural and societal change (Guo, 2003). The Monkey Zodiac stamps' artistic evolution integrates traditional and modern elements. Initially, these stamps featured vibrant colors and intricate designs, gradually incorporating innovative techniques. This evolution reflects the fusion of tradition and modernity. The monkey imagery on these stamps carries cultural symbolism, enhancing the stamps' cultural resonance. Printing techniques have also evolved from traditional methods to modern technology, resulting in more vivid colors, finer details, and novel textures, elevating the stamps' aesthetic and cultural value (Qi, 2017). The diverse shapes of these stamps add to their visual appeal, showcasing the dynamism of their design (Hu, 2009).

Zodiac stamps embody auspicious symbols, folklore, historical narratives, and contemporary life, fostering cultural understanding both domestically and internationally (Wang, 2013). The Monkey Zodiac stamps are no exception. These stamps represent vibrant cultural heritage, blending traditional culture with various art forms. They reflect all aspects of society and life within a limited space, revealing boundless connotations. This study examines the symbolic evolution of the Monkey Zodiac stamps in China from 1980 to 2024, examining their textual, visual, color, graphic, and material symbolism. It reveals the evolution of these symbols within different cultural and historical contexts, exploring the relationship between design symbols and factors such as the artistic aesthetics, cultural context, and social environment of their time. Additionally, it examines the evolutionary trajectory of the Monkey Zodiac stamp design, its impact on economic sustainability, and how this evolution aligns with economic trends.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Origin and Development of Monkey Zodiac Stamps

The Gengshen Year Monkey Stamp had a limited release of only 5 million copies. Due to its historical significance and artistic value, its price has surged since its issuance, making it a prized collectible in philately (Wang, 2010).

Subsequently, China Post has issued four monkey zodiac stamps, each incorporating modern artistic elements while maintaining traditional themes. The 2016 "Year of the

Monkey" stamp, also designed by Huang Yongyu, represents a perfect blend of tradition and modernity. This series of stamps showcases the innovation and progress in Chinese stamp design through its vibrant colors and intricate engraving. The international influence of the monkey zodiac stamps has also grown, with countries like the United States and Singapore issuing related stamps (Lee, 2014).

Monkey zodiac stamps are popular in the Chinese market and have become sought-after collectibles internationally. The 2004 U.S. "Year of the Monkey" stamp, inspired by Chinese paper-cutting art, merges Eastern and Western cultural elements, enhancing the stamp's artistic value and promoting cultural exchange between China and the world (Brown, 2015).

2.2. The Evolution of Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design

Chinese stamp design. From the first to the fourth series, there has been a progressive enhancement in artistic and technical aspects. The first series of Monkey Zodiac stamps was characterized by a simple and distinct national style, employing traditional woodblock printing techniques that emphasized the layering of patterns and the smoothness of lines (Zeng, 2019). The designs of the second and third series incorporated elements of modern art, such as paper-cutting and contemporary painting, making the patterns more vivid and expressive (Chen, 2012).

The fourth series of Monkey Zodiac stamps reached new heights in artistry and technical execution. The 2016 Year of the Monkey stamps they combined traditional design elements with advanced printing techniques, resulting in more refined color expression and detailed handling. Huang Yongyu successfully conveyed deep cultural connotations by meticulously depicting the monkey's image and integrating auspicious elements (Zhao, 2016). Moreover, the design also emphasized an international expression, with countries like the United States and Japan incorporating Chinese traditional design elements, such as calligraphy and traditional painting, in their Year of the Monkey stamps, thereby enhancing the artistic value and collectability of the stamps (Oosterwijk, 2017).

Regarding technical evolution, the printing process for Monkey Zodiac stamps transitioned from traditional printing to modern photogravure. This shift improved the quality of the stamps, making the color and pattern rendering more realistic and delicate. The photogravure technique used in the third and fourth series of Monkey Zodiac stamps allowed for more intricate detail, particularly in depicting the monkey's fur and background elements, reaching new artistic heights (Chen & Zhang, 2016). These technological advancements have made the Monkey Zodiac stamps highly popular in domestic and international markets, earning significant recognition in the global philatelic community (Müller, 2018).

2.3. The Market Impact of Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design

The design of Monkey Zodiac stamps has significantly influenced the philatelic market, with their evolving aesthetic and cultural symbolism driving both collector demand and market valuation. For example, the market price of the third series of monkey zodiac stamps increased several dozen times within a few years, making it a popular collectible among investors. As the monkey zodiac stamp market heated up, other zodiac-related stamps also gained popularity, contributing to the growth of a large

collectibles market. This market boom has advanced stamp collecting culture and stimulated the rise of related industries, such as stamp auctions and exhibitions (Qian, 2016).

However, the high returns of the monkey zodiac stamp market are accompanied by significant risks. Market prices are highly volatile, especially during periods of economic instability, when prices may plummet (Huang, 2015). Additionally, the prevalence of counterfeits in the market poses substantial risks for investors. Therefore, despite the strong performance of monkey zodiac stamps in the market, investors should exercise caution. This is particularly true for novice investors, who should thoroughly understand the market and acquire relevant knowledge before investing to avoid unnecessary losses (Wang & Huang, 2015).

The market effects of the monkey zodiac stamps vividly illustrate the unique position of cultural products and the immense commercial value derived from the fusion of art and investment. As global cultural exchanges deepen, monkey zodiac stamps have gained popularity in the Chinese market and have also achieved widespread recognition in international markets, becoming an important vehicle for cultural exchange between China and the world (Brown, 2015). This phenomenon indicates that the market effects of cultural products extend beyond their economic value to encompass their cultural significance and social value.

Stamps, as artworks that combine collectible and practical functions, have a design closely linked to their market value. Literature shows a significant correlation between the quality of stamp design and market performance. For example, O'Neil (2008) analyzed pricing strategies for visual art from the artist's perspective and found that the aesthetic value of design combined with market demand leads to complex pricing decisions, a process also reflected in the stamp design market. Fillis et al. (2023) explored the market orientation of visual art as a product, emphasizing the role of design innovation and market interaction in enhancing economic value. Fischer and Firer (1985) examined the potential of the stamp market as a source of portfolio diversification, stressing the relationship between stamp pricing mechanisms and design quality. Dimson and Spaenjers (2010) further studied the investment returns of British collectible stamps, finding that stamp returns, while highly volatile, sometimes approach those of the stock market.

In the Chinese market, Huang (2001) pointed out that newly issued stamps generally appreciate faster than older ones due to asymmetry between design and market demand, reflecting the critical role of design innovation in enhancing market value. Peiris (2023) emphasized in a discussion of commemorative stamp design that stamp design is not only a reflection of national symbols but also a creator of market value. Grimes et al. (2023) confirmed through their study of factors determining U.S. commemorative stamp prices that design, production quantity, and stamp characteristics influence market prices.

Thiel and Petry (1995) studied bidding behavior in rare stamp auctions from 1923 to 1937, revealing consensus on stamp market value and the impact of design on market demand. Nilaiish (2012) highlighted the significant boost to stamp market value from innovative and customized designs in his evaluation of the market impact of bespoke stamp design.

[Chen and Chen \(2012\)](#) studied the long-term market performance of stamps issued in New China, finding that design and printing characteristics impact stamp returns, especially for stamps involving significant historical events, where design elements are particularly crucial.

Research indicates that brand image and consumer values play a crucial role in purchasing decisions. For instance, [Isa et al. \(2023\)](#) noted that Malaysian and Chinese consumers exhibit different purchasing preferences when influenced by online reviews, especially when choosing products with symbolic and cultural significance, such as zodiac stamps. In these cases, reviews and word-of-mouth are particularly influential.

In studies on the impact of brand and country-of-origin image on consumer behavior, [Kasuma et al. \(2022\)](#) found that consumers tend to pay more attention to the symbolic meaning of brand and origin when purchasing high-involvement products, such as stamps with collectible and investment value. In the zodiac stamp market, the cultural image of the issuing country is crucial to the appeal of the stamps, a trend that is especially evident in Southeast Asia, where issuers often incorporate unique ethnic characteristics into stamp designs to attract specific audiences ([Kasuma et al., 2022](#)).

Furthermore, how global marketing efforts influence the consumption of cultural products is an area of significant interest. [Akhoundi et al. \(2017\)](#) found that global marketing activities impact consumer behavior by enhancing brand values, a mechanism that is equally applicable to cultural products like stamps. Discussions and promotions of zodiac stamps on social media not only boost their market demand but also deepen the global audience's understanding of traditional Chinese culture and its symbolic value ([Akhoundi et al., 2017](#)).

In terms of cultural preservation, [Zaky and Azmi \(2022\)](#) proposed that cultural heritage, including intangible cultural elements, requires effective protection to promote tourism and cultural dissemination. In the case of zodiac stamps, the inclusion of traditional cultural elements, such as the twelve zodiac animals, in their design not only aids cultural preservation but also contributes positively to the cultural economy through the collectible market and tourism. Effective cultural legislation and policies are essential for enhancing the cultural dissemination and market influence of stamps.

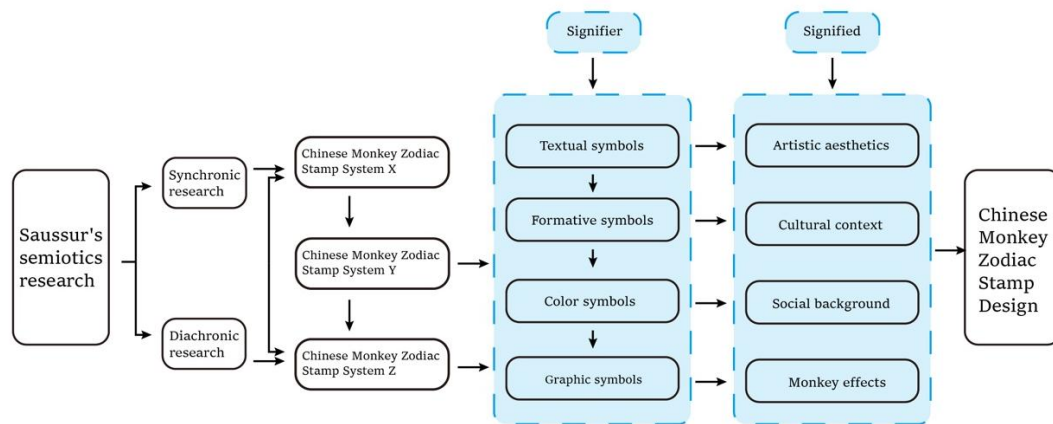
In conclusion, stamp design determines its cultural and artistic value and plays a crucial role in influencing its market value. The market performance of stamp design reflects not only its material value but also its intrinsic value as a cultural symbol and national emblem.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, deriving a research design model based on [Saussure's \(1916\)](#) semiotic theory, as displayed in [Figure 1](#). The aim is to systematically explore the cultural elements in the design of monkey zodiac stamps and their market effects between 1980 and 2024. The study uses visual analysis to conduct a detailed observation and analysis of six critical years' monkey zodiac stamps, focusing on the design elements of verbal, iconic, color, graphic, and material signs. The research examines how these design elements have evolved under different cultural and historical contexts and the symbolic meanings they convey. Additionally, the study

will analyze how these design signs influence and reflect market effects, exploring the interaction between design evolution and economic trends.

Figure 1: Diagram of the Synchronic and Diachronic Study of the Monkey Zodiac Stamp



Source: Created by the authors.

3.1. Research Design

This study constructs a research design model based on Saussure's semiotic theory (Saussure, 1916) and the model proposed by Wang et al. (2022) to explore the dynamic relationship between the evolution of monkey zodiac stamp designs and their market effects. Applying qualitative research methods allows an in-depth examination of how design symbols function within artistic aesthetics, cultural environments, social settings, and economic effects across different periods. As Bresler (2006) noted, the importance of aesthetic experience in the artistic process can enrich data collection, analysis, and writing in qualitative research, thereby revealing the deeper meanings of design symbols within artistic aesthetics. This approach not only aids in understanding the role of symbols within various cultural contexts but also explores their function in social environments (Benzies & Allen, 2001).

Moreover, by analyzing how design symbols interact with market responses, the research aims to uncover the complex interaction mechanisms between stamp design and market effects. Gummesson (2005) emphasized that qualitative methods are particularly effective in capturing the complexities and ambiguities of market economies, especially when analyzing market data and consumer behavior. By integrating these qualitative analyses, the study will further explore how design symbols influence market responses under different economic conditions, thereby profoundly impacting economic sustainability.

Under this framework, the specific objective of this study is to explore and analyze the core visual design symbols—such as text, form, color, and graphics—present in monkey zodiac stamps, using semiotic theory as the analytical foundation. These symbols will be systematically identified and categorized according to their corresponding cultural backgrounds and social contexts. By conducting an in-depth semiotic analysis, the study aims to uncover how these visual elements construct and convey meaning within various socio-cultural environments. In addition, the research will investigate how these culturally embedded meanings influence market responses, including fluctuations in stamp prices, shifts in perceived value, and patterns in transaction behavior. This approach not only deepens the understanding of visual

communication in philatelic design but also highlights the dynamic interplay between cultural symbolism and market economics. According to [Thomas \(1998\)](#), semiotic analysis plays a crucial role in understanding the social significance of material culture.

This study will employ multiple linear regression analysis to examine the dynamic relationship between zodiac stamp design symbols and various market responses, such as price fluctuations, transaction volumes, and the influence of specific designers. By incorporating data across different historical periods and socio-cultural contexts, the analysis aims to reveal how particular visual and symbolic elements embedded in monkey zodiac stamps correspond to changes in market behavior. This quantitative approach will allow for the identification of statistically significant correlations and trends, offering deeper insights into how cultural symbolism interacts with consumer perception and market valuation over time. The research will collect the highest transaction amounts from major trading platform websites with recorded sales and analyze how these design symbols, within specific social contexts, impact market performance using design descriptions provided by official sources like the China Post Group ([Magidson, 1988](#)).

3.2. Research Setting, Sample, and Data Collection

3.2.1. Research Setting and Sample

This study aims to explore the evolution of monkey zodiac stamp designs and their market effects between 1980 and 2024, focusing on monkey zodiac stamps issued in China. The research setting includes mainland China and related stamp markets. Data collection encompasses stamp images and price data from the National Postal Administration and major philatelic websites. Design background information is also gathered from literature and expert interviews reported on mainstream media websites.

To better analyze the cultural symbols in stamp designs and their market effects, the primary samples in this study include high-resolution images of six monkey zodiac stamps, which serve as the core physical data for the research. Through analyzing these stamps, changes in design elements and their market responses can be directly observed. These stamps were issued in 1980, 1992, 2004, and 2016. The research data also includes market price changes after the stamps' issuance, primarily collected and analyzed from major stamp trading markets, literature, and price records from relevant auction websites.

3.2.2. Data Collection

To support the visual and quantitative analysis, this study collected a comprehensive dataset comprising high-quality images, market transaction records, and contextual design information. First, high-resolution images of monkey zodiac stamps were obtained from the official China Post website, as well as from reputable online philatelic databases. These images provide the visual basis for symbol identification, enabling the systematic analysis of design elements such as form, color, text, and composition. Only officially issued stamps and commemorative releases were included to ensure data authenticity and consistency.

In parallel, market price data were collected to assess how specific design symbols correlate with fluctuations in stamp value. This dataset was compiled from public auction platforms, verified collector market databases, and major philatelic transaction websites with traceable sales records. Price data included highest recorded sale values, average transaction prices, and trading frequency, spanning multiple time periods to facilitate comparative historical analysis. These quantitative records serve as a key component in the regression analysis, enabling the exploration of the relationship between design and market performance.

In addition to image and price data, detailed background information on the stamp design process was compiled to enhance interpretive depth. This included a thorough literature review of relevant academic research on zodiac stamps, as well as interviews with prominent stamp designers published on mainstream public media and philatelic forums. Official narratives and design statements provided by institutions such as the China Post Group were also consulted to ensure that cultural context and artistic intent were accurately captured. By integrating these diverse data sources, the study ensures a well-rounded and culturally informed understanding of how design symbolism interacts with both public perception and market dynamics.

3.3. Data Analysis

This study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in [Saussure's \(1916\)](#) semiotic theory, utilizing a synchronic study approach to examine the impact of various design elements on stamp design. By categorizing and analyzing design elements such as color, patterns, and typography, the study aims to assess the performance of these elements in the contemporary market.

To investigate the cultural and communicative functions of monkey zodiac stamps, this study conducts a comprehensive semiotic analysis of four key symbolic components: textual symbols, color, form, and graphic imagery. Each element is examined in relation to its cultural context and temporal evolution, allowing for a holistic understanding of how visual design contributes to meaning construction and market perception.

The analysis of textual symbols focuses on the typography used in stamp design, including the stylistic attributes of Chinese characters and numbering conventions across different issuance periods. By comparing variations in font type, size, orientation, and layout, the study explores how textual elements participate in meaning-making and interact with visual components to reinforce cultural narratives. These typographic choices are not merely functional; rather, they play a critical role in expressing authority, tradition, or modernity, depending on their stylistic execution.

In terms of color symbolism, the study employs visual analysis techniques to decode the chromatic choices embedded in monkey zodiac stamps. Particular attention is paid to the culturally embedded meanings of colors—such as red for prosperity, gold for authority, or black for solemnity—and how these meanings evolve or persist across time. By tracing changes in color usage, the study demonstrates how designers utilize chromatic symbolism to align with prevailing cultural values or to appeal to evolving aesthetic preferences among collectors and the general public.

Form symbol analysis investigates both the external contours of the stamps and the compositional arrangement of internal elements. This includes the use of framing,

geometric balance, symmetry, and spatial hierarchy in the stamp layout. The formal attributes are interpreted through a symbolic lens, where certain structural conventions—such as circular frames or central alignment—convey implicit meanings tied to Chinese cosmology, harmony, or hierarchical order.

Finally, the analysis of graphic symbols centers on the monkey imagery itself, which serves as the primary visual representation of the zodiac identity. Within the semiotic model, the monkey image is understood as the signifier, while the cultural attributes it evokes—such as cleverness, agility, and fortune—constitute the signified. The study dissects the morphological features of the animal renderings, decorative patterns, and stylistic choices to examine how they reflect shifting ideological values and aesthetic norms across different political and historical contexts. By conducting a diachronic (longitudinal) analysis of these graphic symbols, the research reveals how symbolic visual language evolves over time and how such shifts potentially affect collector behavior and market performance.

To gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between stamp design and market effects, this study examines the evolution of stamp designs over different periods and their impact on market prices through a diachronic study and employs multiple regression analysis to quantify the extent of these impacts. By collecting data on all monkey-themed zodiac stamps from 1980 to 2024, the study conducts a time series analysis of the trends in the evolution of different design elements and, using a multiple regression model analyzes the independent and combined effects of each design element on market prices. This approach can reveal which design elements have significantly impacted market performance during specific periods and how these effects have changed over time.

The multiple regression analysis will help identify which design variables (such as color, composition, typography, designers, etc.) significantly correlate with market prices while controlling for other factors that may influence market prices, such as issue quantity. By combining this with a synchronic study, the research will also compare the interaction between design symbols and market effects across different historical periods and cultural contexts, thereby providing more comprehensive insights.

Ultimately, this integrated analytical approach will offer valuable references for designers, philatelists, and researchers in related fields, helping them understand and predict the potential impact of stamp design on market prices and providing guidance for future stamp design.

4. Findings

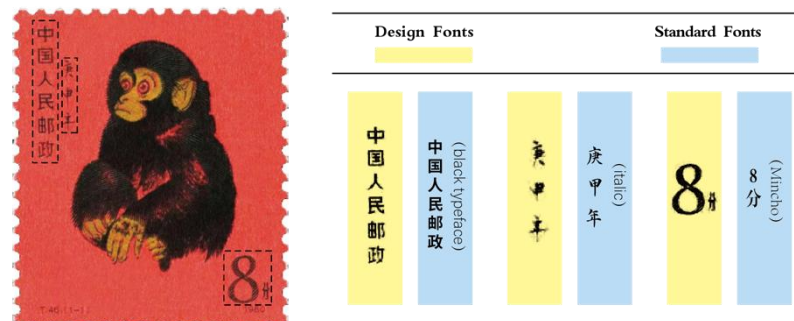
This chapter presents a systematic analysis of the design symbols and market effects of monkey zodiac stamps issued between 1980 and 2024. By examining visual and textual elements within their respective historical and cultural contexts, the study traces the evolution of stamp design over more than four decades. The analysis not only highlights key transformations in visual language and symbolic representation but also investigates how these changes have influenced the stamps' performance in the philatelic market.

The findings demonstrate a strong and dynamic interaction between design symbols—such as typography, color, form, and imagery—and market responses, including price fluctuations, transaction volumes, and collector engagement. This relationship is shown to vary significantly across different economic cycles and socio-political environments, indicating that both aesthetic trends and cultural narratives play a role in shaping market valuation. Ultimately, the results suggest that stamp design is not merely an artistic or cultural output, but also a responsive medium that reflects and participates in broader market and societal dynamics.

4.1. Analysis of Design Symbols in the 1980 Monkey Zodiac Stamp

As shown in Figure 2, text symbols are important elements in stamp design. For the 1980 Year of the Monkey zodiac stamp, the design of text symbols conveys a distinct character through its typography choices. The term "庚申年"(Gengshen Year) is rendered in a solid calligraphy style, imparting a sense of weight and solemnity. In contrast, the six characters for "中国人民邮政" (China People's Post) are displayed in a carved, hollow font that resembles bamboo joints. This style introduces a strong three-dimensional effect, enriching the design's depth and visual impact. The meticulous design of the strokes further enhances this effect; the carved characters appear exceptionally dimensional under light and shadow, while the solid calligraphy emphasizes a stable, weighty visual quality.

Figure 2: Extraction and Analysis of Typography in the 1980 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design



Source: Created by the authors.

As depicted in Figure 3, the contour design of the 1980 Monkey Zodiac Stamp adopts a standard rectangular shape, with evenly arranged perforations on all four sides at a gauge of 11.5. This design adheres to the traditional specifications of postage stamps, avoiding any unconventional shapes, thus imparting a classic and rigorous style. Guo (2022) emphasizes the importance of standardized methods in stamp production, noting that such practices ensure uniformity and consistency in production and meet the practical needs of stamps in circulation and collection. Consequently, the 1980 Monkey Zodiac Stamp's design follows the classic elements of traditional stamps and reflects a strict adherence to the demands of standardized production.

The analysis of Figure 4, color symbolism in the 1980 Chinese zodiac stamp featuring the monkey can be approached from multiple angles. Firstly, this stamp predominantly uses three colors: red, black, and gold, which are all highly saturated and distinctly different in hue. The red background, a warm tone, symbolizes festivity, enthusiasm,

and good fortune, echoing the celebratory customs in traditional Chinese culture—a theme explored in the paper "Research on Traditional Colors and Their Application in Zodiac Stamps" by Xie (2018).

Figure 3: Analysis of Shape Symbols in the 1980 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design



Source: Created by the authors.

Figure 4: Analysis of Color Symbols in the Design of the 1980 Monkey Zodiac Stamp

Color Signifier	Color Signified
	In traditional Chinese culture, red is the most iconic color representing good fortune, celebration, happiness, and prosperity. It is indispensable in Chinese New Year and other significant festivals, used to express blessings and good wishes. The red background in this stamp conveys the joy of the New Year and the significance of the stamp's issuance.
	In Chinese culture, black often symbolizes solemnity, strength, and mystery, and it also carries connotations of stability. In this stamp, black emphasizes the monkey's outline and form, highlighting its intelligence and agility, symbolizing wisdom and restraint.
	Gold symbolizes wealth, honor, and sanctity in Chinese culture, often associated with royalty. In this stamp, the use of gold adds vitality and a sense of nobility to the monkey, suggesting wealth and good fortune, aligning with New Year aspirations for happiness and success.

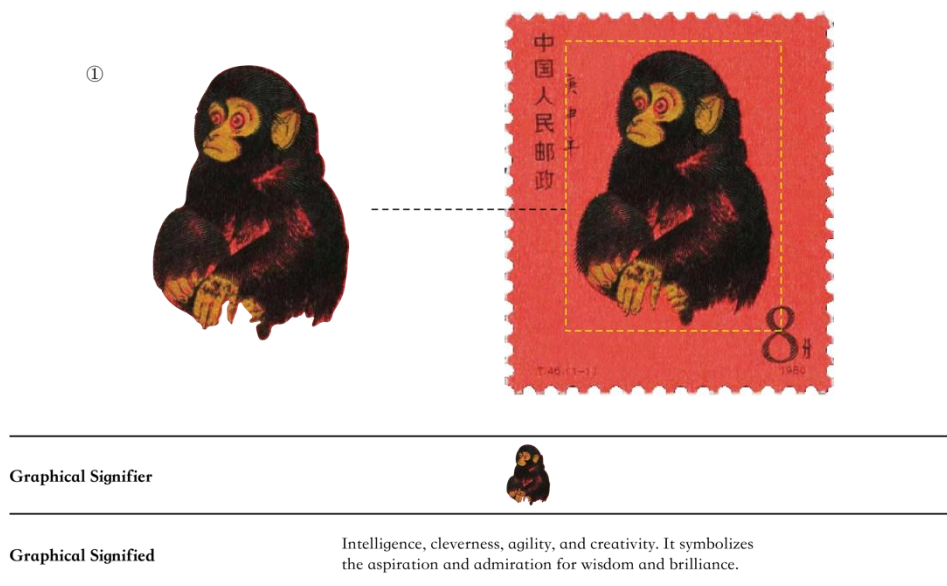


Source: Created by the authors.

In terms of color composition, the designer employed a contrasting and complementary mix of red, black, and gold, creating a strong visual impact. Red, occupying most of the background, establishes a festive atmosphere; black, concentrated in the monkey's image, stands out sharply against the red; and gold, used as an accent, enhances the visual appeal, imparting a sense of nobility and joy. This use of color not only amplifies the visual effect but also conveys the symbolic meanings of Chinese culture through its color choices.

The graphic symbol design of the 1980 Monkey Zodiac Stamp can be explored in detail from various perspectives, including imagery, form, composition, symbolic semantics, and cultural symbolism. As indicated in Figure 5, the monkey's image on the stamp is rendered in an ink-wash painting style, where just a few strokes capture the monkey's liveliness and spirit. The fur is treated with a gradual shading technique, giving it a three-dimensional effect that brings the monkey to life. The lines are delicate and natural, particularly in depicting the monkey's face and limbs, showcasing the traditional Chinese painting technique of "balanced light and shade." The use of black as the primary color contrasts sharply with the red background, highlighting the monkey's figure and enhancing the stamp's visual depth. The overall composition is harmonious and unified.

Figure 5: Analysis of Graphic Symbols in the 1980 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design



Source: Created by the authors.

Culturally, the monkey is considered a symbol of intelligence and cleverness in Chinese culture. The combination of gold and red further reinforces the festive atmosphere of the Year of the Monkey, representing good wishes for the New Year. Overall, through simple yet effective strokes, the graphic symbols in the 1980 Monkey Zodiac Stamp skillfully integrate the symbolic meanings of traditional Chinese culture. The collaboration of imagery with color and text conveys deep cultural significance, making this stamp a classic design example.

4.2. Analysis of Design Symbols in the 1992 Monkey Zodiac Stamp

The textual design symbols in the 1992 Monkey Zodiac Stamp underwent significant changes. As shown in Figure 6, in the "Ren Shen Year" 2-2 stamp titled "Magpies on Plum Blossoms," the primary visual element is the seal script character for "monkey" (猴), which occupies the visual center, highlighting traditional Chinese culture. The phrase "China People's Post" was simplified to "China Post," reflecting the modernization and simplification trends in Chinese society during that period, aligning with the accelerated modernization process in China in the 1990s.

Figure 6: Analysis of Textual Symbols in the 1992 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design



Source: Created by the authors.

In terms of stroke design, the seal script's strokes feature strong contrasts in thickness, emphasizing the structure of the "monkey" character and enhancing its visual impact. The designer skillfully made the "monkey" character the composition's focal point, contrasting it with the red paper-cut background, further accentuating its symbolic significance. The overall visual order is balanced, with the black "Ren Shen Year" text and the red "monkey" character creating a harmonious visual relationship.

As shown in Figure 7, The shape symbols in the design of the 1992 Monkey Zodiac Stamp feature perforations at a gauge of 11.5 and a standard square contour. The internal design incorporates traditional Chinese elements such as a "longevity peach" and paper-cut motifs, which are simple yet rich in cultural significance. This design not only showcases traditional Chinese art but also reflects a clean and modern aesthetic that is accessible and appealing to the broader public. Combining these traditional and modern elements highlights the stamp's cultural depth while ensuring its resonance with contemporary society.

Figure 7: Analysis of Shape Symbols in the 1992 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design



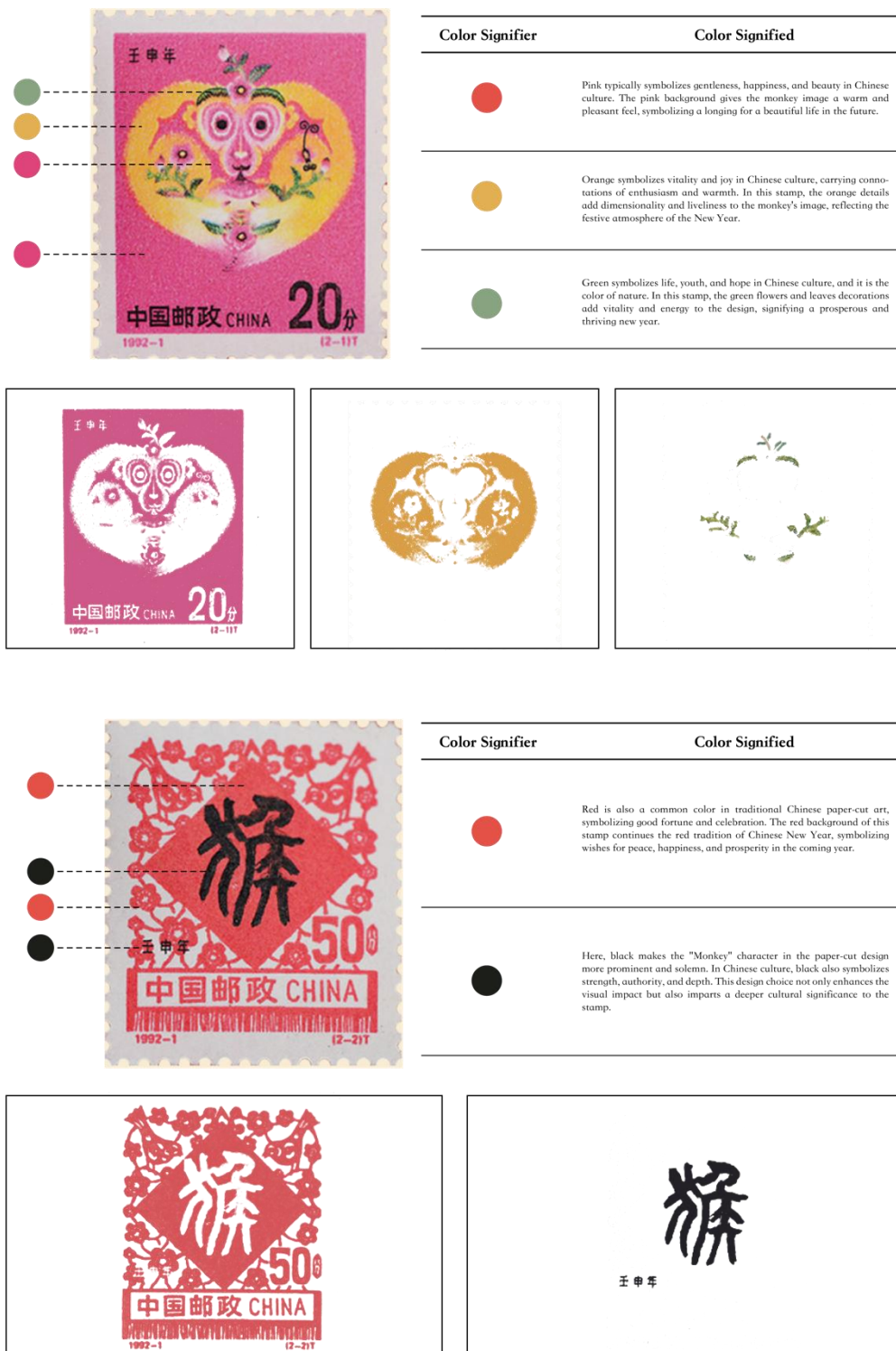
Source: Created by the authors.

As illustrated in Figure 8, the color symbolism design of the 1992 Monkey Zodiac stamp employs a clever combination of red, pink, and yellow, enhancing its visual impact while sincerely conveying the symbolic meanings in Chinese culture. Red symbolizes good fortune, happiness, and celebration, holding particular significance in Chinese culture, especially during the Lunar New Year. Red contrasts firmly with the other colors as a warm color, making the stamp's design more striking. Pink is associated with warmth and happiness, adding a gentle and cozy atmosphere to the design. Yellow symbolizes wealth and prosperity, further reinforcing the stamp's symbolic significance, evoking aspirations for prosperity and good luck.

The 1992 Monkey Zodiac stamp's color design features high purity and showcases the use of highly saturated colors. The clever combination of red, yellow, and pink creates a vibrant and layered color scheme. The contrast between red and yellow, along with the accent of pink, enhances the stamp's symbolic significance and cultural depth and establishes a visual focal point, increasing the stamp's market appeal. The arrangement and combination of colors highlight the design's primary subject and convey a robust festive atmosphere of the New Year, further enhancing the stamp's overall aesthetic and cultural symbolism.

In summary, the 1992 Monkey Zodiac Stamp's careful use of color achieves visual harmony and successfully conveys Chinese tradition's rich cultural connotations. This use of color symbolism increases the stamp's market value and establishes it as a significant vehicle for cultural heritage.

Figure 8: Analysis of Color Symbols in the 1992 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design



Source: Created by the authors.

According to Mr. Cao Hongnian, the designer of the "Monkey and Peach" motif, the design of this Monkey Zodiac stamp adopts the art of paper-cutting, as shown in Figure 9. Paper-cutting is not only a visual art but also an integral part of Chinese folk tradition, showcasing auspicious patterns and cultural symbols through cutting and folding techniques. Wang (2011) highlights how the design, featuring a monkey within

a peach, a monkey dragging a peach, and another monkey eating a peach, emphasizes the combination of the monkey and peach, symbolizing longevity and prosperity. The bat-shaped lines on either side of the monkey's ears create an image symbolizing "blessing and longevity."

Figure 9: Analysis of Graphic Symbols in the 1992 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design



Source: Created by the authors.

The use of symmetrical folding and cutting techniques in paper-cutting vividly portrays the symmetrical facial features of the monkey. At the same time, the serrated patterns effectively represent the texture of the monkey's fur and the peach's fuzz, fully demonstrating the unique artistic language of paper-cutting.

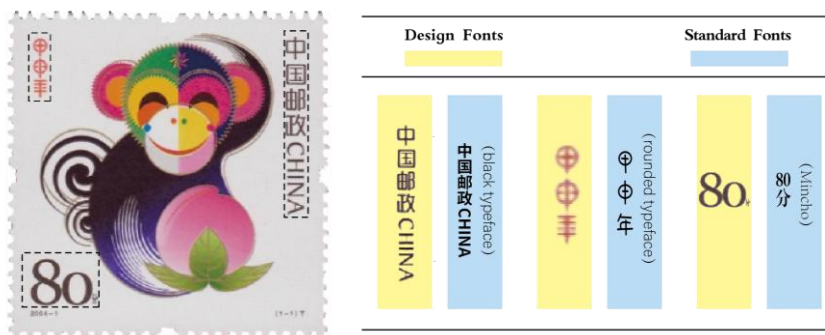
Additionally, bees and peach blossoms are included in the main design, where the bee (homophonic with "seal" and "abundance") and the monkey (homophonic with "marquis") carry the meanings of "granting a marquisate" and "longevity and prosperity." The stamp's design uses a rose-red background, with red monkey faces and red peach blossoms, presenting a festive scene reminiscent of "a rosy face reflecting peach blossoms." This design not only reflects the traditional aesthetics of paper-cutting art but also integrates Chinese auspicious culture. Zhou (2016) noted that the composition of "Monkey and Peach" adopts a radial design centered around the peach, with strong symmetry in all directions. The "Magpies on Plum Blossoms" design, on the other hand, uses symmetrical paper-cut patterns and a prominent seal script character for "monkey," forming a balanced and dignified composition.

Through the ingenious combination of these graphic symbols, the 1992 Monkey Zodiac stamp conveys rich cultural symbolism and exemplifies the innovation and heritage of contemporary Chinese stamp design, enhancing its recognition and acceptance in the market.

4.3. Analysis of Design Symbols in the 2004 Monkey Zodiac Stamp

The textual design of the 2004 Monkey Zodiac stamp skillfully combines the essence of traditional Chinese culture with the simplicity and efficiency of modern design. As shown in Figure 10, the rounded font used for "甲申年" is paired with the "中国邮政 CHINA" and "80分" labels, creating a strong visual impact while remaining easy to read. The rounded font gives "甲申年" a soft and approachable feel, aligning with the harmonious symbolism of the Year of the Monkey. The contrast between straight and curved lines enhances visual clarity, effectively distinguishing primary elements. The typography is well-organized, with a compact and balanced layout, and the large font for "80分" emphasizes the stamp's practical function, meeting modern market demands.

Figure 10: Analysis of Textual Symbols in the 2004 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design



Source: Created by the authors.

Overall, the textual design successfully integrates traditional culture with modern design language, resulting in a visual expression that is both culturally rich and aesthetically contemporary.

The design of the 2004 Monkey Zodiac stamp introduced significant innovations in its symbolic form (Figure 11). Firstly, the stamp's perforation gauge is set at 13. The contour shape was changed from the previous rectangular form to a 36mm by 36mm square, breaking away from the traditional shape conventions of stamps. The size of the stamp was also increased compared to previous Zodiac stamps, making it stand out more in stamp albums or exhibitions and giving it a more modern appearance.

Figure 11: Analysis of Shape Symbols in the 2004 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design



Source: Created by the authors.

The design of the 2004 Monkey Zodiac stamp demonstrates a profound cultural connotation through the use of color symbolism. As shown in the [Figure 12](#), the stamp features vibrant red, yellow, green, and black, which hold significant symbolic meaning in traditional Chinese culture. Red and yellow, as warm tones, symbolize happiness, prosperity, nobility, and dignity ([Sun, 2016](#)). Green and black, on the other hand, represent vitality, hope, solemnity, and stability, aligning with the color perceptions in auspicious culture, reflecting simplicity, sincerity, and fervent emotions.

In terms of color composition, the designer created strong visual contrasts through the staggered arrangement of color blocks, particularly on the monkey's face and the peach. The monkey's face is divided into two halves, composed of different color blocks, enhancing the visual layers of the image and achieving a sense of balance through the contrast and harmony of colors. This approach to color aligns with the emphasis on traditional culture in modern design ([Li, 2014](#)).

From a symbolic perspective, these colors are more than mere visual decoration; they convey cultural significance. The combination of red and yellow often symbolizes the New Year and celebrations in Chinese culture, expressing wishes for a fashionable, harmonious, peaceful, and healthy new year. Green injects vitality and hope into the image, symbolizing the vigorous energy of the new year. At the same time, black imparts a sense of solemnity, balancing the lively and festive atmosphere with a dignified and profound quality. This design concept is highly consistent with the folk culture and folk art characteristics emphasized in Zodiac stamp studies ([Teng, 2020](#)).

Figure 12: Analysis of Color Symbols in the 2004 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design



Source: Created by the authors.

In essence, the color design of the 2004 Monkey Zodiac stamp not only achieves visual harmony and beauty but also conveys profound cultural symbolism through color. This rich use of color has attracted broader market attention.

As illustrated in [Figure 13](#), the 2004 Chinese Zodiac stamp design featuring the monkey emphasizes a blend of tradition and modernity. By employing vibrant colors and geometric patterns, the stamp maintains a traditional aesthetic while also embodying elements of contemporary design ([Wang, 2015](#)).

The monkey's image is divided into distinct regions with bold blocks of red, green, yellow, and black, creating a dynamic and modern visual impression. The contrasting color blocks on the monkey's face form a symmetrical structure, giving it a playful and balanced appearance. The body of the monkey is depicted with smooth lines, particularly evident in the curved design of the tail, which adds a sense of motion and flexibility to the overall composition.

Symbolically, the monkey represents intelligence, cleverness, and agility in traditional Chinese culture. For example, in *The Auspicious Monkey and Blessings for the Year of the Monkey: A Brief Discussion on the Year of the Monkey Zodiac Stamps (Part 1)*, [Zhou \(2016\)](#) notes that monkeys are fond of peaches, giving rise to imagery such as “monkeys offering longevity” and “golden monkeys bringing blessings,” which underscores the monkey’s symbolic meaning. The stamp design itself reinforces these themes: the monkey is depicted with one hand grasping a peach on a tree branch and the other holding a peach, symbolizing the act of offering peaches as blessings and conveying messages of goodwill and auspicious wishes.

Figure 13: Analysis of Graphic Symbols in the 2004 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design



Source: Created by the authors.

In terms of composition, the monkey's figure occupies the center of the image, while the swirling background patterns further enhance the visual impact. This layout breaks away from traditional stamp compositions, giving it a more modern and visually striking appeal.

In conclusion, the graphic symbolism in the 2004 Year of the Monkey Zodiac stamp design effectively integrates modern and traditional elements, enhancing the stamp's

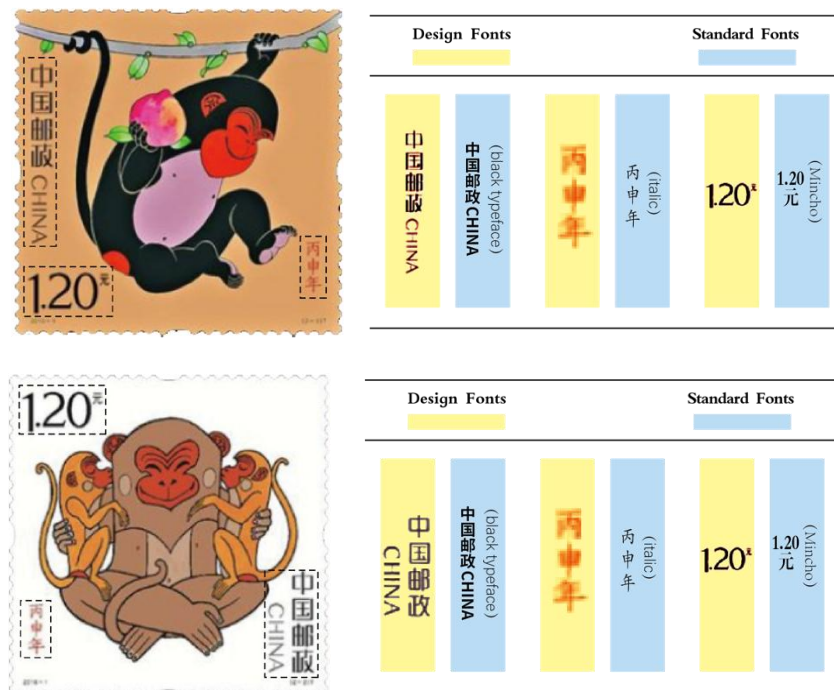
visual appeal and conveying deep cultural meanings, thereby making it highly competitive in the market.

4.4. Analysis of Design Symbols in the 2016 Monkey Zodiac Stamp

As shown in Figure 14, the text design of the 2016 Year of the Monkey stamp skillfully blends modern and traditional elements. The use of Kaishu script for "Bingshen Year" adds both dynamism and a contemporary feel. The bold black font for "China Post" is prominent and easily recognizable, while the denomination "1.20 yuan" employs an elegant and readable serif typeface, adding a touch of refinement. In the overall design, "China Post" is centered and eye-catching, "Bingshen Year" is balanced with a smaller font size, and the denomination is placed in the upper left corner, clear yet unobtrusive. The text design perfectly balances modern and traditional typography, ensuring clarity and visual order.

As shown in Figure 15, the 2016 Year of the Monkey stamp features a square design with a perforation gauge 13, continuing the 36mm*36mm square format used in 2004. The stamp's edges are smooth, giving it a well-rounded and balanced appearance.

Figure 14: Analysis of Textual Symbols in the 2016 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design



Source: Created by the authors.


Figure 15: Analysis of Shape Symbols in the 2016 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design



Source: Created by the authors.

As shown in Figure 16, the design of the 2016 Year of the Monkey stamps includes two versions: one with a colored background and one with a white background.

Figure 16: Analysis of Color Symbols in the 2016 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design

Color Signifier	Color Signified
	Gold symbolizes wealth and auspiciousness. The use of gold in the monkey's tail and the peach imparts a sense of nobility, conveying the auspicious meaning of "offering a peach," which foretells prosperity and a bountiful harvest.
	Black symbolizes stability and strength, and in Chinese culture, it also conveys a sense of mystery. The image of the black monkey portrays a sense of calm and restraint, while enhancing the depth and texture of the stamp, highlighting the monkey's agility and liveliness.
	Red symbolizes celebration, enthusiasm, and good fortune. The red face emphasizes the vividness and vitality of the monkey's image, conveying the festive atmosphere of the New Year.
	Pink symbolizes gentleness and beauty. The pink peach represents longevity, happiness, and peace, conveying good wishes for a prosperous future.



Source: Created by the authors.

The primary color palette of the stamps consists of red, orange, brown, and black. Red symbolizes celebration and good fortune, orange conveys warmth and vitality, brown symbolizes stability, and black provides depth and seriousness. The designer skillfully contrasts warm and cool colors, with the warm red and orange hues contrasting sharply with the excellent black, enhancing the stamps' sense of layering and dimensionality. The monkey's body is primarily brown and orange, representing vitality, while its red face expresses joy and happiness. The black background and lines highlight the central image, creating a visually balanced and symmetrical design. The color symbolism, combined with social policy themes, conveys wishes for a good life, and the design received a positive market response.

The 2016 Year of the Monkey stamp set consists of two stamps. As seen in Figure 17, the first stamp features a male monkey climbing a branch to pick a peach with a smile. He holds a fresh, pink longevity peach in his left hand while his other hand grips the branch, symbolizing agility and wisdom. This imagery also conveys the well-wishing sentiment of "offering peaches as an auspicious gift." The male monkey is depicted as lively and spirited, with his tail coiled like a vine around the branch. His eyes are half-closed, giving him a mischievous yet cheerful expression, further enhancing the playful imagery.

The second stamp depicts a mother monkey holding two baby monkeys, creating a warm family scene. The poses of the two baby monkeys mirror that of the mother, symbolizing 'family happiness.' The mother's steady posture contrasts visually with the liveliness of the two baby monkeys, highlighting both the playful nature of the monkey zodiac and the warmth of family love. The stamp set portrays a happy monkey family, emphasizing the zodiac theme of "the auspicious monkey offering longevity" while showcasing a harmonious family life.

Figure 17: Analysis of Graphic Symbols in the 2016 Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design







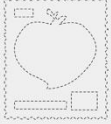


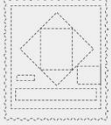










Source: Created by the authors.

In terms of design, the monkey images on the stamps are created with simple yet expressive lines, making them effortlessly appealing to viewers. The stamps convey social policies and family values through detailed graphic symbol design, which hold deep cultural significance while also effectively driving the stamps' market performance. This highlights the close connection between the designer's work and the market response. Moreover, the research by [Shandrivska and Kira \(2022\)](#) suggests that applying graphic design in marketing helps enhance product market performance, mainly when design is used to convey brand values and cultural meanings through symbols. These findings further validate that stamp designs hold profound cultural significance and are crucial in boosting market performance.

4.5. Diachronic and Synchronic Comparative Analysis of Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design

[Saussure \(1916\)](#) posited that "there are no isolated changes in words; only systemic changes." As illustrated in [Figure 18](#), a diachronic analysis of the Year of the Monkey stamps reveals changes and innovations in Chinese culture and social development. From the release of the first Monkey Stamp in 1980 to the issuance of the 2016 Year of the Monkey Stamps, this series documents the evolution of design styles and reflects shifts in societal values and technological advancements. By examining the design changes of these stamps, one can observe how the symbolic meanings of cultural icons have evolved in response to changing social contexts. As [Zhang and Chen \(2014\)](#) noted, diachronic elements in design effectively reflect the historical and social development processes within specific cultural contexts. Additionally, [Zhang et al. \(2015\)](#) further demonstrated that the visual analysis of diachronic changes can reveal the transformation of cultural and social values over specific historical periods. Therefore, the Year of the Monkey stamps are not merely design artifacts but also witnesses to the continuous evolution of Chinese culture, reflecting the cultural and technological innovations across different historical stages in Chinese society.

Figure 18: Diachronic and Synchronic Comparative Analysis of Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design

1980		中国人民邮政 庚申年			The first issuance of zodiac stamps, featuring unique engraving and printing techniques, with rich color layers and a strong sense of depth. Combined with Huang Yongyu's emotional and artistic expression, it marked a new chapter in the design of Chinese stamps.
1992		中国邮政 CHINA 壬申年			Increased to two stamps. The name was simplified to "China Post." The graphic style shifted from realistic to paper-cut and folk styles. With exquisite design combining images and text.
		中国邮政 CHINA 壬申年			
2004		中国邮政 CHINA 申年			Returned to a single stamp, shifting from paper-cut art to a modern style. With richer colors. The design focuses on visual impact and features a strong sense of modernity.
2016		中国邮政 CHINA 丙申年			Returned to two stamps, echoing the number of the 1980 Monkey Stamp. Huang Yongyu was invited to design again. "Family Happiness" added a mother monkey and two little monkeys, reflecting changes in social policy.
		中国邮政 CHINA 丙申年			
		WRITING SYMBOL	MODELLING SYMBOL	COLOUR SYMBOL	SYNCHRONIC RESEARCH

Source: Created by the authors.

In 1980, the first Year of the Monkey stamp, designed by the renowned artist Huang Yongyu, employed a traditional realistic style, portraying a dignified and solemn golden monkey. This design captured the essence of traditional Chinese painting, symbolizing wisdom, courage, and auspiciousness. As time progressed, the design styles of the 1992, 2004, and 2016 Monkey stamps gradually diversified and modernized. The 1992 stamp featured bright colors and simple compositions, highlighting the monkey's agility and liveliness. The 2004 stamp adopted a more cartoonish style, incorporating modern design elements and bolder colors, reflecting a pursuit of cultural confidence and innovation in the new century. By 2016, the Year of the Monkey stamps further integrated mainstream social values, depicting a male monkey offering a longevity peach and a female monkey with her family, symbolizing harmonious family life. This reflects the societal emphasis on family values and aligns with the country's two-child policy. These stamps, with their intricate color and pattern designs, merge traditional and modern elements, showcasing the inheritance and innovation of Chinese culture.

Holistically, the diachronic analysis of the Year of the Monkey stamps reveals the evolution of these stamps as cultural symbols. Through continuous innovation and transformation, the stamps have not only preserved the traditional connotations of the zodiac culture but also integrated modern design concepts and social values, advancing the modernization of Chinese stamp design. This evolution has not only met market

demands but has also enhanced the symbolic significance of the stamps on a cultural level.

4.6. Evolution of Monkey Zodiac Stamp Design and Market Effects

This study finds a significant interactive relationship between the evolution of design symbols and market effects through a systematic analysis of the visual symbols in stamp design and their market performance. Between 1980 and 2024, the design symbols of Monkey Zodiac Stamps have continually evolved, shifting from traditional realistic styles to more modern and diverse designs. These changes in symbolic representation have directly influenced the stamps' market performance.

As shown in Table 1, a stepwise multiple linear regression analysis was conducted in R (version 4.4.0) using the `lm()` function to explore the effects of Duration of issuance, Graphic elements, Color quantity, Designer, Paper types, and their two-way interactions on transaction prices. Duration of issuance ($\beta = 4\ 627.2$, $p < .001$) and Paper types ($\beta = 98\ 437.2$, $p < .001$) emerged as the strongest positive predictors, whereas Graphic elements had a significant negative effect ($\beta = -316\ 060.0$, $p < .001$). The interaction between Duration of issuance and Graphic elements was also significant ($\beta = 5\ 028.9$, $p < .001$), indicating that the influence of issuance length on price varies with graphic complexity.

Table 1: Results of Multiple Linear Stepwise Regression Analysis of Factors Influencing Transaction Prices

Variable	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	p value
Duration of issuance	4627.2	686.87	6.74	0.000005
Graphic elements	-316060	46480.43	-6.8	0.000004
Color quantity	27019	5495.55	4.92	0.000155
Designer	58307.4	10123.99	5.76	0.000029
Paper types	98437.22	14347.71	6.86	0.000004
Duration of issuance: Graphic elements	5028.89	738.8	6.81	0.000004
Duration of issuance: Color quantity	-1124.38	168.45	-6.67	0.000005
Duration of issuance: Designer	-1235.28	182.99	-6.75	0.000005

Note: "Variable" lists main effects and two-way interactions; estimates are unstandardized coefficients and p-values are two-tailed.

Source. Created by the authors.

"Estimate" indicates the regression coefficient for each factor in the linear regression results, showing the magnitude of each variable's effect on transaction prices. "Std. Error" represents the standard error of the regression analysis, indicating the precision of the estimate. "t value" refers to the t-value from the regression analysis, used to assess the significance of the relationship between the factor and transaction prices. "p value" indicates the significance test result from the regression analysis, with a p value less than 0.05 considered statistically significant, meaning the regression result is valid.

In this study, "Graphic. elements" is a categorical variable, including traditional elements (coded as 0) and modern elements (coded as 1). This result suggests that when "Graphic. elements" shift from traditional to modern elements (a change from 0

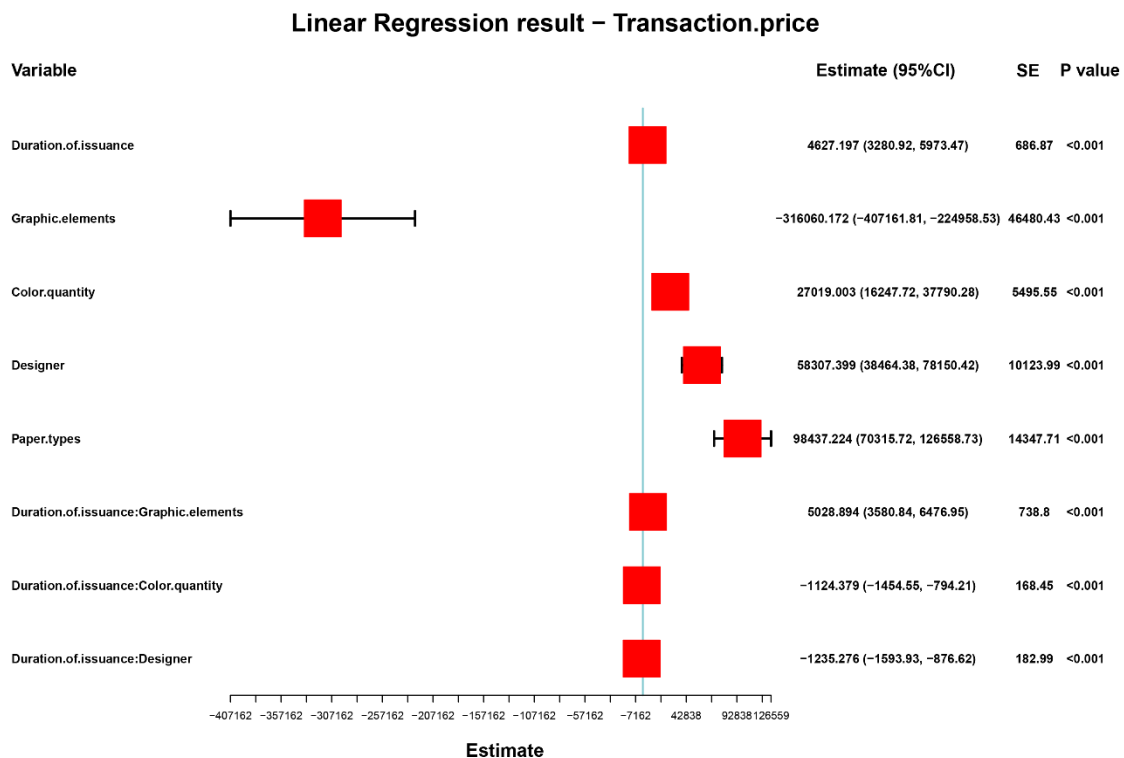
to 1), transaction prices decrease, potentially indicating that stamps featuring traditional elements may have higher transaction values.

Additionally, "Paper. Types," "Designer," and "Color. quantity" also have substantial regression coefficients, at 98437.22, 58307.4, and 27019, respectively. This suggests that differences in these factors can significantly influence stamp transaction prices, all positively, though their influence is somewhat weaker compared to "Graphic elements."

As shown in Figure 19, the significant interactions identified in this analysis are between duration of issuance and graphic elements, duration of issuance and color quantity, and duration of issuance and designer identity. However, these interactions exert much smaller effects on stamp transaction prices compared to the primary factors previously discussed. Interestingly, all three interactions involve duration of issuance, indicating that when this factor interacts with others, it can influence transaction prices.

In this study, the unstandardized regression coefficient for duration of issuance is 4 627.2, which is slightly higher than those for duration of issuance × color quantity (−1 124.38) and duration of issuance × designer identity (−1 235.28), but lower than the coefficient for duration of issuance × graphic elements (5 028.89). This further highlights the prominent role of graphic elements in determining stamp transaction prices. Therefore, graphic elements are the most critical factor influencing transaction prices, followed by paper types, designer identity, and color quantity. While duration of issuance exerts only a minor individual effect, it substantially moderates the impact of other factors on transaction prices.

Figure 19: Forest Plot of Multiple Linear Stepwise Regression of Factors and Transaction Prices



Source: Created by the authors.

4.7. General Discussion

In conclusion, the study reveals the complex interactive relationship between the evolution of design symbols in Monkey Zodiac Stamps and their market effects. Design symbols are vehicles for cultural expression in stamps and key factors influencing market performance. Through an in-depth analysis of design symbols across different periods, this research offers new perspectives for understanding stamp design's cultural value and market effects, providing necessary theoretical support and empirical evidence for future stamp design practices.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study systematically explored the evolution of design elements in Monkey Zodiac Stamps from 1980 to 2024, examining how these visual symbols interact with market performance. Using a qualitative approach grounded in [Saussure's \(1916\)](#) semiotic theory, we analyzed textual, shape, color, and graphic features of each issue. Our findings reveal that these design symbols not only serve as vehicles for cultural expression but also exert a measurable influence on stamp market outcomes. Through our detailed semiotic analysis, we traced the design evolution of Monkey Zodiac stamps across successive periods. Early issues employed relatively simple, emblematic motifs, whereas later releases incorporated increasingly complex and culturally rich elements. This progression reflects both the ongoing development of Chinese cultural identity in the age of globalization and the ways in which designers leverage visual symbolism to communicate deeper cultural meanings.

The study found that Monkey Zodiac stamp designs, in addition to their rich cultural significance, exert a direct influence on market value and economic performance. Specifically, issues that incorporate deeper cultural symbolism and are produced by designers with strong social reputations attract greater collector interest, which in turn drives up their transaction prices.

This analysis demonstrates that the evolution of Monkey Zodiac stamp designs has both reinforced cultural heritage and bolstered economic sustainability. From 1980 to 2024, successive innovations—especially the integration of deeper cultural symbolism—have endowed these stamps with enduring market vitality. Issues that combine novel design elements with rich heritage motifs consistently command higher transaction prices and sustain collector demand over time. These findings suggest that culturally grounded design not only preserves intangible heritage but also generates long-term economic benefits, illustrating how cultural products can drive sustainable economic growth through the synergistic interplay of culture and market dynamics.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are suggested for future stamp design and market strategies:

Future Monkey Zodiac stamp issues should balance deep cultural significance with creative innovation. By embedding traditional cultural motifs—such as classical calligraphic characters or emblematic iconography—within contemporary design frameworks, stamps will preserve their heritage value while broadening their market appeal. This dual focus not only maintains the stamps' symbolic resonance but also attracts younger collectors, ensuring sustained economic vitality in an evolving philatelic market.

Stamp designs should be closely aligned with contemporary social and economic policies to ensure thematic relevance and public resonance. For instance, the 2016 Monkey Zodiac Stamp successfully incorporated the Year of the Monkey's cultural symbolism alongside China's "Made in China 2025" innovation agenda, generating widespread media attention and enhanced collector interest. By integrating timely social themes—such as technological advancement, environmental protection, or public health initiatives—within the visual narrative, future issues can both reinforce policy messages and achieve stronger market performance.

Future Monkey Zodiac stamp designs should honor time-tested artisanal techniques—such as hand engraving and intaglio printing—to safeguard their cultural and artistic heritage. Simultaneously, embedding cutting-edge digital features, for example augmented reality (AR) overlays or interactive QR-code experiences, can expand the stamps' appeal to a tech-savvy audience. By marrying historic craftsmanship with digital innovation, designers can create collectible issues that both celebrate traditional skills and engage younger generations through immersive, multimedia storytelling.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA (RECUiTM). All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

Acknowledgement

Part of this article was extracted from a doctoral thesis submitted to Universiti Teknologi MARA. Thanks to other authors for their guidance and data collection.

Funding

This study received no funding.

Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

References

- Akhoundi, M., Osman, S., Paim, L., & Nezakati, H. (2017). Mediating roles of consumer individual values on the relationship between exposure to global marketing activities and consumption behavior. *Malaysian Journal of Consumer and Family Economics*, 25, 102-107. <https://doi.org/10.60016/majcafe.v29.07>
- Benzies, K. M., & Allen, M. N. (2001). Symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective for multiple method research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 33(4), 541-547.

- Bresler, L. (2006). Toward connectedness: Aesthetically based research. *Studies in Art Education, 48*, 52-69.
- Brown, M. (2015). The global influence of Chinese zodiac stamps. *International Journal of Cultural Studies, 18*(3), 45-60.
- Chen, L. & Zhang, Y. (2016). Technological advancements in Chinese stamp printing. *Journal of Print Technology, 9*(2), 78-95.
- Chen, S. (2012). The evolution of Chinese stamp design. *Art and Design Journal, 7*(1), 34-48.
- Chen, X., & Chen, X. (2012). Stamp characteristics and long-term return after issuance: evidence from new China stamps. *China Finance Review International, 2*(4), 351-376.
- Dimson, E., & Spaenjers, C. (2011). Ex post: The investment performance of collectible stamps. *Journal of Financial Economics, 100*(2), 443-458.
- Fillis, I. R., Lehman, K., & Wickham, M. (2023). Assessing the notion of art as a product: Entrepreneurial marketing insights from the visual arts. *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship, 25*(3), 410-430. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRME-09-2020-0132>
- Fischer, B. H., & Firer, C. (1985). Risk/return characteristics of the stamp market. *Journal of Investment Analysis, 14*(2), 31-43.
- Grimes, P. W., Woodward, L. R., & Clark, M. (2023). Price Determinants of Collectable US Commemorative Stamps: An Examination of Philatelic Demand. *The American Economist, 68*(2), 246-260.
- Gummesson, E. (2005). Qualitative research in marketing. *European Journal of Marketing, 39*, 309-327.
- Guo, L. (2022). Research On Production Effectiveness Evaluation Of Postage Stamps Information System Based on Fuzzy Analytic Hierarchy Process. *2022 5th International Conference on Data Science and Information Technology (DSIT)*, 1-5.
- Guo, Y. (2003). The artistic charm of Chinese zodiac stamps. *People's Education, (17)*, 43-44.
- Hu, S. (2009). *The art within square inches* [Master's thesis, Chongqing University]. China National Knowledge Infrastructure.
- Huang, S. (2001). Asymmetric participation in China's stamp market: hobbyists and investors. *Applied Economics, 33*(8), 1039-1044.
- Huang, T. (2015). Market risks in stamp collecting: A case study of Chinese zodiac stamps. *Journal of Economic History, 12*(4), 123-137.
- Isa, M. A., Azman, N. A., & Ismail, M. D. (2023). Online Reviews and Purchase Decision: Perspectives of Malaysian versus Chinese Consumers. *Malaysian Journal of Consumer and Family Economics, 31*(1), 33-60. <https://doi.org/10.60016/majcafe.v31.02>
- Kasuma, J., Adenan, A., Lajuni, N., Yacob, Y., Indriastuti, H., & Herjanto, H. (2022). The country of origin or the brand image, which one comes first? The study of consumer purchase intention in East Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Consumer and Family Economics, 29*, 352-356. <https://doi.org/10.60016/majcafe.v29.14>
- Kroeber, A. L. (1963). *Style and civilizations* (Vol. 76). University of California Pres.
- Lee, J. (2014). Zodiac symbols in global stamp design. *Graphic Design Review, 11*(2), 67-80.
- Li, C. (2014). *The cultural charm of zodiac images in modern design* (Master's thesis, Shenyang Normal University, Liaoning).
- Magidson, J. (1988). Improved statistical techniques for response modeling. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 2*(4), 6-18.

- Müller, K. (2018). Chinese influence on European stamp design. *Journal of European Cultural Studies*, 13(4), 109-122.
- Nilaiash, N. (2012). *The evaluation of mass customization's key benefits for stamps*. [Master's thesis, Coventry University]. SSRN Electronic Journal.
- O'Neil, K. M. (2008). Bringing art to market: The diversity of pricing styles in a local art market. *Poetics*, 36(1), 94-113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2007.12.002>
- Oosterwijk, S. (2017). Cross-cultural influences in philately: The case of zodiac stamps. *Global Philately Review*, 10(2), 49-65.
- Peiris, N. (2023). Commemorative stamp: Background and the design perspective. *Collections*, 3(2), 68-71. [https://doi.org/10.31705/BPRM.v3\(2\).2023.16](https://doi.org/10.31705/BPRM.v3(2).2023.16)
- Qi, H. (2017). *Research on the development of Chinese stamp design art* (Doctoral dissertation, Shanxi Normal University). China National Knowledge Infrastructure Database.
- Qian, W. (2016). The economic impact of Chinese zodiac stamps. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 14(3), 91-105.
- Saussure, F. (1916). *Course in general linguistics*. McGraw-Hill.
- Shandrivska, O., & Kira, A. (2022). Applied aspects of design market research on marketing basis. *Management and Entrepreneurship in Ukraine: The Stages of Formation and Problems of Development*, 4(1), 177 - 188. <https://doi.org/10.23939/smeu2022.01.177>
- Sun, Y. (2016). A study on the symbolic meanings of traditional Chinese colors. *Yangtze River Series*, (32), 124-126.
- Teng, T. (2020). *A study on the design of zodiac cultural stamps* (Master's thesis, Nanjing Normal University, Jiangsu). China National Knowledge Infrastructure.
- Thiel, S. E., & Petry, G. H. (1995). Bidding behaviour in second-price auctions: rare stamp sales, 1923-1937. *Applied Economics*, 27(1), 11-16.
- Thomas, J. (1998). Review Articles : The Socio-Semiotics of Material Culture: Gottdiener, M. Postmodern Semiotics: Material Culture and the Forms of Postmodern Life, 1995, Oxford: Blackwell. 262 pp. 0-631-19216-6 Riggins, S.H. (ed.), *The Socialness of Things: Essays in the Socio-Semiotics of Objects*, 1994, New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 482 pp. 3-11-014133-7. *Journal of Material Culture*, 3(1), 97-108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/135918359800300105>
- Wang, J. Z. (2015). Integration of emotions in a small space: The application of traditional Chinese patterns in contemporary stamp design. *Beauty and Times*, 2015(6), 61-62.
- Wang, L., Chen, F., & Ma, K. (2022). Research on the packaging design of White Rabbit creamy candy from the perspective of Saussurean semiotics. *Art Edition of Packaging Engineering (Art Edition)*, 43(14), 238-245.
- Wang, M. (2010). The impact of cultural heritage on stamp design: A Chinese perspective. *Heritage Studies Review*, 8(1), 28-42.
- Wang, T. (2013). *New exploration of cultural connotations and aesthetic values in stamp design* (Doctoral thesis, Tianjin University of Technology). China National Knowledge Infrastructure.
- Wang, X. (2011). The Chinese cultural connotation of Shaanbei auspicious pattern paper-cutting. *Chinese Cultural Studies*, 2011(4), 173-179.
- Wang, X., & Huang, T. (2015). Risk management in stamp collecting: Lessons from the Chinese market. *Journal of Financial Risk Management*, 10(2), 211-227.
- Wu, Y. (2020). *The twelve Chinese zodiac signs*. Chemical Industry Press.
- Xie, H. (2018). Study of traditional colors and their application in zodiac stamps. In *Proceedings of the 10th Asia Color Forum (Outstanding Papers)* (pp. 186-192). China National Postage Stamp Museum.

- Zhao, Y. (2016). *Semiotics: Principles and Deductions*. Nanjing University Press.
- Zaky, S. Z. N., & Azmi, I. M. A. G. (2022). Protection for intangible cultural heritage as a viable tourist product: Malaysia as a case study. *Malaysian Journal of Consumer and Family Economics*, 29, 59-62. <https://doi.org/10.60016/majcafe.v29.04>
- Zeng, X. (2019). The unique charm and market performance of the Monkey Stamp. *Collecting*, (15).
- Zhang, L., & Chen, F. (2014). Landscape Diachrony in the Design Expression for Meishan Culture Park: A Survey. *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering*, 13(1), 157-162.
- Zhang, W., Geeraerts, D., & Speelman, D. (2015). Visualizing onomasiological change: Diachronic variation in metonymic patterns for woman in Chinese. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 26(2), 289-330.
- Zhou, Z. (2016). Auspicious monkey presents good fortune: A brief discussion on the Year of the Monkey zodiac stamps. *China Post*, (3), 62-63.