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Challenges of Authenticity for “Chinese Cool” Design

There is an emerging desire among young Chinese designers to develop a concept of “Chinese-Cool” to compete with American and Japanese lifestyle trends, according to a recent survey of Chinese youth culture published in September 2009 by Hunt Haggarty, a London/Hong Kong-based branding company. This paper will investigate the definition of Chinese-Cool and review the use of the word cool (or ku 酷 in Chinese) in the Chinese context as a term of admiration or approval of a person’s attitude, appearance, or style. After examining graphic design works created over the past decade by trendsetting young Chinese designers, this paper argues that it will be challenging to establish a unique identity to represent contemporary China, since establishing the authenticity of Chinese-Cool is problematic to begin with. The research methods used in this paper will be based on discussions of postcolonial and transnational theories as they are applied to the construction of a contemporary national design identity for China.