Available Online: 24 November 2026 DOI: 10.54254/2753-7102/2026.39243

A tea worth waiting for: reconstructing the value of Yongsheng Huangjing through narrative branding

Yuheng Xian[1,*], *Siqi Xu*[2], *Yixi Zhang*[3], *Yifei Liu*[4], *Hairong Huang*[5]

[1]Basis International School Shenzhen, Shenzhen, China
[2]Immersion Academy, Irvine, USA
[3]Kang Chiao Xian International School, Xi'an, China
[4]Miller School of Albemarle, Charlottesville, USA
[5]Changsha WES Academy, Changsha, China

*Corresponding Author. Email: helenaxyh@gmail.com

Abstract. This paper examines the narrative branding and value reconstruction of Huangjing Tea from Yongsheng. The paper does not only view Huangjing as a raw herbal ingredient, but also view it as a subject that connects agricultural time, rural labor, traditional herbal culture with younger generations' consumption habits and self-caring ideals. Through the establishment of product strategy, brand design, platform communication, and emotional storytelling, the paper claims that Huangjing should be positioned as a new life-orientated product that transcends its function, price and original in the current market. This case indicates that when the traditional agricultural products' material qualities and human stories is transformed into reliable emotionally resonance and responsible brand narrative, the rustic products could enter the contemporary consumer culture that could also bring attentions to traditional culture of China.

Keywords: Huangjing, narrative branding, time-based value, rural branding, slow living

1. Introduction

Traditional Chinese herbal medicines are culturally familiar to the public, yet they rarely fit into young city-dwellers' everyday routines. In today's fast-moving society, many young people are looking for easy-to-access self-care and slow-living experiences. This shift is visible in the consumer data. In McKinsey's 2024 Future of Wellness survey, covering more than 5,000 consumers across China, the United Kingdom and the United States, found that 87% of Chinese respondents prioritized wellness in everyday life. Gen Z and millennial consumers were also found to purchase more wellness products and services than older generations across health, sleep, nutrition, appearance and mindfulness[1].

Earlier consumer research also suggests a gap between the recognition of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and its integration into everyday wellness. In a survey of 3,410 Beijing community residents, 70.8%

[1] McKinsey & Company. (2024). The trends defining the $1.8 trillion global wellness market in 2024.

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

expresses willingness to receive TCM-related health information such as medicinal diets and teas, while 82.8% reported that they had never received such practices [1]. Although the survey is not limited to younger generation, it suggests that the cultural recognition does not automatically translate into lifestyle usage.

As one well known medicinal and edible plant, Huangjing (Polygonatum sibiricum) has a legitimate basis for the development of everyday consumes, as it was officially included by China's Ministry of Health in the 2022 list of substances that are traditionally used as both food and medicine[2]. Even so, Huangjing produced in Yongsheng is mostly sold as unprocessed farm produce. Its value is judged only by price, basic health benefits and place of origin. Deeper values related to culture, human stories and feelings are hardly communicated to buyers.

Most existing herbal product marketing stresses practical effects alone and cannot meet young consumers' wish for emotional connection and lifestyle belonging. This paper therefore raises its central research question: How might the idea of "waiting" be used as a narrative branding tool to rebuild the multiple values of Yongsheng Huangjing tea, and connect rural herbal resources with young urban consumers?

2. Background: Yongsheng, Amma's Garden, and Huangjing

Yongsheng County in Yunnan has favorable natural surroundings for growing medicinal herbs. According to Yunnan provincial reporting, by 2024, Yongsheng was cultivating 21 medicinal-herb varieties across approximately 70,400 mu, with total output of 1,569.6 tonnes and an estimated production value of 320 million CNY [2]. However, years ago, many left-behind women lack farming skills, steady earnings and reliable sales routes, which hold back household economic progress. This challenged was further coped by the cultivating development of Yongsheng medicines. The initiative "Amma's Garden for public-welfare was conceived to redress this. Provides local growers with technical support, large-scale standardized planting and reliable sale channels. The project merges ecological conservation and rural development, increasing family income by promoting the growing of natural medicinal crops. The Yongsheng Country Rural Community Development Association began implementing the project from 2016. Its first large-scale program supported 40 left-behind women, with the highest income reaching 70,000 CNY per year for a single household. By 2022, the projected has raised more than 5 million CNY, benefited more than 500 households across the six townships in Yongsheng[3].

These stories bring the human element of Yongsheng Huangjing production to life through real farming families. According to a field interview conducted by the project team, there is an elderly couple of whom the husband is a military veteran. With the support of Amma's Garden, they cultivate four acres of Huangjing and receive a steady income every year. This allows them to earn a living in their hometown instead of travelling far for work. This case exemplifies what the project seeks to accomplish: The sustainability and empowerment of rural households through special herbal agriculture. Each Huangjing harvest is testament to farmers — long term work and patience.

Huangjing is a perennial crop with a relatively long cultivation cycle. Harvesting age varies by species and propagation methods, but 3-5 years of harvesting periods are common. A study of Polygonatum crytonema cultivated in Yunnan, for instance, identified three years as the optimal harvest period for Huangjing [3]. Unlike fast growing commercial crops this long gestation period gives it a time value which is precious. In

[2] National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China. (2002). List of items that are both food and medicine.

[3] China Foundation for Rural Development. (2022). ME Innovation Program: "Amma's Garden" supporting rural revitalization.

conventional usage of Huangjing, it is described as replenishing qi and nourishing yin, strengthening the spleen, moistening the lung and tonifying the kidney. Modern plythochemical research has also identified Polygonatum polysaccharides as major bioactive constituents [4]. Rich in polygonatum polysaccharide for light constitution human body is not bad, but has heavy internal dampness diarrhea and other adverse reactions are not suitable for eating. It is taken in numerous manners including herbal tea, porridge, soups and medicinal wine.

On today's market, processed goods including nine steam nine sun Huangjing, Huangjing tea and Huangjing ointment have become popular, proving good commercial prospects. Nevertheless, Huangjing from Yongsheng is still largely circulated as cheap raw material. Brand builders have not drawn attention to its multi-year growing process, farmers' life stories or public-welfare meaning. In fact, Yongsheng Huangjing already carries ecological, time related and human centered values, forming a solid base for narrative-driven brand building.

3. Problem analysis: the distance between traditional herbs and young consumers

Although Chinese herbal medicine remains a high cultural recognition, the recognition does not promote the daily consumption of the Chinese herbs as people will not integrate it into their daily life merely because they are familiar with it, especially the younger customers. Meanwhile, younger generations increasingly emphasize wellness, emotional balance and self-care, making them a promising customer segment. Digital consumer data suggests that younger generations are not purely motivated by functional utility when selecting products. QuestMobile estimated that China had about 442 million active post-1900 and post-2000s mobile-internet users by Feb 2025[4]. Therefore, in order to reach this group of customers, brand should utilize a more comprehensive strategy that infuse Chinese herbal medicine into people's daily life. Therefore, the core becomes convenience, accessibility and effectiveness. Nevertheless, in the current Chinese medicine market, the herbal derivative products such as herbal tea, foot bath agents, sachets only account for 8.4%-10%[5], which is limited. Therefore, the product format of Yongsheng tea bags responds to the market demand: Transforming conventional form of medical consumption into life-orientated consumption.

4. Narrative concept: turning waiting into brand value

The central narrative of the Yongsheng tea bag is organized around the concept of "waiting". This concept is not an arbitrary branding innovation or storytelling, but the material reality and origin of Huangjing from Yunnan, which becomes a cultural and emotional proposition in a society advocates for efficiency and immediate gratification. Previous research demonstrated that brand storytelling can boost consumer experiences and brand associations. Lundqvist et al. found that firm-oriented stories can influence the way consumer perceive and evaluate the brand [5]. This provides a theoretical foundation for using the cultivation cycle and farmers' lived experiences as central branding element.

---

[4] QuestMobile Research Institute. (2025). 2025 pan-young consumer marketing insights report.

[5] China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing, Pharmaceutical Logistics and Supply Chain Branch. (2025). Report on the development of China's traditional Chinese medicine supply chain (2025).

To begin, the concept of "waiting" is embedded in the growth period of Huangjing. The planted Huangjing requires about 3-5 years for harvesting. Therefore, the fact provides a strong symbolic foundation: the value of Huangjing is not instantaneous, but rooted from patience and care from planters.

Moreover, the concept of waiting is deepened through planters' storytelling of their ordinary life. At Yongsheng, Mr. Huang, a planter of Huangjing, and his wife attach to the land for their whole life; and their descendants are all working in other regions. Therefore, growing Huangjing does not only satisfy their basic living demand, but also their physical and emotional attachment. Therefore, the product is the source of lived time of planters.

Finally, the concept of "waiting" is being transformed into the embodied experience of customers. When customers put the tea bag in boiling water, it requires time for them to "wait" for the boiled water and brewing. In turn, it relates back to the "waiting" period for planters and the cultivation cycle of Huangjing, appraoching an intact product narrative.

5. Product strategy: from raw herb to daily tea ritual

The concept of 'waiting' should not be limited to being just part of the brand's storytelling; it should also affect the way consumers use the product. To this end, the current exertion should be transformed from raw herbal ingredient to individually packaged tea product, the specific amount would be about 5 grams per tea bag and 10 bags per box. This design is mainly organized as a packaging specification rather than a therapeutic dosage. This new product format is primarily aimed to minimize the gap between traditional Huangjing and the daily routines of younger consumers, because the tea bag is convenient for daily usage.

Many Chinese consumers are familiar with Huangjing as a Chinese medicine; however, it is not always accessible and convenient to use, because consumers might not know the mount of Huangjing that should be used each time and for how long it should take for the brewing process. Such minor uncertainties can lead to the lack of willingness to consume it repeatedly. Therefore, the individual packaging fill in this gap by replacing the traditional process incorporating cooking into a short process of brewing.

The tea-bag form also means that Huangjing is easier to take with you and to store. Single packages can be put into an office drawer, handbag, backpack or suitcase, so the product can be used in all sorts of everyday situations. Rather than being restricted to the kitchen or the conventional method of preparing herbal remedies, Huangjing can be incorporated into an afternoon break at work, a period when studying, or a peaceful moment after coming home. Moreover, the individual sealing helps to protect the remaining tea bags after the box has been opened and gives the product a cleaner and more organized appearance.

Most importantly, the tea bag means that Huangjing can more easily be carried into daily routine. Since the product does not require users to master a complicated method of preparation before using it, both the practical and psychological obstacles linked with traditional herbs are reduced.

The product should not be presented as one that gives a quick health effect, since doing so would make Huangjing seem too much like a medicine and at the same time go against the main concept of the brand. Huangjing takes many years to grow and its value is closely tied to time, so the several minutes needed for brewing should not be seen as a nuisance. On the contrary, these minutes can be turned into a brief self-care routine.

A straightforward instruction might be: "Put a tea bag into your cup, add some hot water, wait for three to five minutes and use those minutes to yourself." It is by this means that the length of time the consumer is waiting is linked to the much longer agricultural process involved in the product.

The tea bag therefore has no effect on Huangjing itself; instead, it alters the way in which consumers come across Huangjing. Although the traditional ingredient remains visible, its form is made more appropriate for modern life. As a result of this change, Huangjing can move from being primarily a raw herbal ingredient to becoming a daily lifestyle product.

6. Brand design: packaging, visual symbols, and slogan

The brand design should make the idea of 'waiting' visible if the product strategy enables consumers to experience it; the packaging of Yongsheng Huangjing tea should therefore go beyond its role of protecting the product and should instead convey the connection between time, land, agricultural labour, and the final cup of tea.

The visual style as a whole should appear natural, modest, warm, and reliable. The packaging must not look too much like that of traditional medicine, since an excessively medical look could widen the gap between Huangjing and younger consumers. Nevertheless, it should not depend on very bright colors or temporary internet fads just to appear modern. The design needs to be up to date yet at the same time retain the natural and agricultural character of Huangjing.

Visual symbols can be used to illustrate this point. Take gold, for example: although gold could be taken as a metaphor for Huangjing ("gold from the land"), gold actually stands for accumulated value and not for luxury. A modest golden-brown shade can associate the product with the soil, its roots, and time.

The second symbol is the root since the valuable rhizome takes several years to develop underground and therefore the root stands for value which is gradually accumulated and not immediately visible. A botanical illustration that displays both the plant and its underground rhizome can assist consumers in understanding where the product comes from.

The third symbol is that of hands. These hands stand for the human labour and care which are involved at every stage of the product's journey, including planting, harvesting, processing, packaging, brewing and finally holding the cup. This establishes a visual link between the producer and the consumer.

A further significant aspect of the design is time-based traceability. The package may contain the year in which the crop was planted, the growing period, the time of harvesting, the processing batch, and the date of production. The system might be referred to as the "Waiting Record". The "Waiting Recod" is the normal production date, but a record of what happened before the product arrived at the factory. For instance, the package may say that the Huangjing was planted in 2022, grew for four years, was harvested in November 2026, and then processed and packaged. The idea of having to wait thus becomes more believable since consumers are able to see proof of the product's history. This design is not without a motivation of boosting consumer confidence, which it could not be considered merely as an approach for storytelling. Research on consumer trust in food systems shows that information about product origin, production methods and supply chain can reduce information asymmetry and strengthen consumer confidence in product authenticity, safety and quality [6]. A 2024 meta-analysis covering 72 peer reviewed studies revealed that consumers reported willingness to pay for food traceability as shown in an increase average reported premium approaching 32%, although the magnitude might vary due to subdivided industry [7]. The key slogan, "A Tea Worth Waiting For", gives a simple expression of the brand's concept. By adding "From years in the soil to minutes in your cup", it links the time spent in growing the tea and the time spent by the consumer. When it comes to communicating about the grower, the phrase "He plants Huangjing; he waits for life" can provide a more human element, though this message has to be used with care in order not to turn rural life into emotional decoration.

A brand concept that is successful should not be limited to just a slogan; it has to be consistently reflected in the product itself, in the packaging, in the visual symbols, in the written language, and in the consumer's experience. With respect to Yongsheng Huangjing tea, the tea bag makes the act of waiting easier to experience, while the packaging shows the years that lie behind that waiting. Thus, through both product strategy and brand design, Huangjing is transformed from a simple herbal ingredient into a significant daily product associated with time, place, labour, and personal care.

7. Communication strategy: translating rural time into urban slow living

The Speed sales is what the market believes. Yet our goal is to turn the rural calendar—slow, ruled by seasons—into a brand idea that actually means something to urban consumers. For Yongsheng Huangjing tea, the way we talk about this tea across platforms takes "waiting" as its core. We consciously avoid overstating the herb's medical effects. City people live inside a loop of instant gratification; the brand whispers a correction: some things cannot be rushed.

Rednote, a social media platform originate from China, does most of the heavy lifting for brand building and getting young buyers to care. This choice of platform is supported by recent platform research: in iiMedia Research's 2025 survey of Rednote users, 55.10% reported using the platform to obtain information, 42.35& for learning new knowledges, and 41.78% for shopping and consumption-related purposes[6]. The content is almost entirely visual, leaning into a certain lifestyle look. Scroll through: you'll find minimalist packaging shot in soft, uneven natural light, hand-drawn plant sketches that feel personal rather than corporate, close-ups of tea bags steeping in clear water, and real, unscripted clips of Yongsheng's mist-heavy highlands. The posts all orbit one line: "give yourself five minutes." They show a ritual that doesn't ask much—a short break between study sessions or meetings. Drinking Huangjing tea becomes a tiny escape, sliding a bit of slowness into the daily grind. Instead of listing what it does for your body, the visuals ask, quietly, why this cup deserves patience. It's not really about the tea. It's about the five minutes it buys you.

On TikTok and WeChat Channels, the camera work turns quieter. We follow actual people. This approach is consistent with Garner's study of a small dairy farm, which illustrates how authentic communication of farming practices in daily life through social media can help establish the credibility of local agricultural producers [8]. An old grower stands in the field, his hands cracked from the soil. No narration for the first thirty seconds. Just him, the dirt, and the quiet. We see Yongsheng's textured farmland, and the full cycle of Huangjing from seed to harvest. There's a video series in the works, The Wait of One Huangjing. We ask why these farmers stay when their kids leave for office jobs. We ask how many years the roots must sit underground before they matter. We ask when it's right to pull them without rushing. The farmer stays put. His children leave for cities with smartphones and subway cards. The whole journey, from dirt to cup, is documented with no filter, no script. Every episode ends up at the same line: "He plants Huangjing; he waits for life." Across platforms, the question stops being "What does Huangjing cure?" and becomes "Why is this tea worth waiting for?" The viewer is invited to live with the question rather than expect a clean answer.

Emotional branding, though. Let's be straight: turning old farmers into mascots just to stir sentiment and move product is exploitation, plain and simple. Their stories need real quality backing them up, or it's all just wallpaper. Throwing trendy colours and viral posts at young people isn't branding. They see right through it. What actually hits them is the real substance behind the image, not the polished surface.

[6] iiMedia Research. (2025). 2025 China Xiaohongshu user media habits and consumption intention survey.

Health claims. Handle with care. We simply won't exaggerate. Reliable production, standardised processing, safety checks, and full traceability—planting year, growth cycle, batch records—are the bare minimum. If a batch can't be traced, the farmer's years mean nothing. A brand story you can actually trust needs more than pretty words and poetic shots. It needs hard proof, real people, and honest talk that respects both the grower and the buyer.

There's a lesson buried in here, whether we planned it or not. Maybe people in cities will realise that waiting isn't lost time—it's a way of paying attention. The tea becomes a token of that attention. If the brand can walk the line between a good story and the truth, it might offer a way for slow, rural time to make sense in a fast, urban world. Yes, it could get sappy. But it could also make patience matter again.

8. Authenticity and limits: avoiding a story bigger than the product

Nevertheless, emotional branding carries potential risks that a pragmatic researcher cannot ignore. Brands should not romanticize rural elders merely to stir public sentiment and drive sales; that would be exploitative. Stories of local growers must be backed by tangible product quality, or the narrative collapses into decoration. Youth-oriented branding is far more than trendy colour palettes, fashionable fonts or viral social-media posts that fade by noon. Genuine resonance with young audiences comes from consistent value behind visual presentation, not from the surface alone.

All health-related statements require caution and responsibility; exaggerated functional claims are strictly off-limits in any material. This restriction is not only an ethical principle that brand needs to follow but also a regulatory requirement. Under China's Food Safety Law, food labels, instructions and advertisements must not contain disease-prevention or disease-treatment claims; health-food claims are required to have scientific supports and cannot present the product as a substitute for medicine[7]. Reliable production workflows, standardized processing, safety testing and full traceability—including planting year, growth cycle and batch records—lay the essential foundation for the brand narrative. A farmer's patience means little if the batch cannot be verified. Ultimately, a credible brand story cannot rely purely on elegant wording or poetic imagery. It must be grounded in solid product evidence, real-life individuals and ethically sound communication that respects both the grower and the consumer. This design logic corresponds with established brand authenticity strategy. Beverland identifies heritage, relationship to place, methods of production, stylistic consistency and commitment to quality as recurring cues through which consumers perceive authenticity [9].

Looking deeper, the communication design reveals an implicit pedagogy. Urban audiences may begin to sense that waiting is not lost time but a form of respect. The tea becomes a token of that respect. If the brand can hold this line—between storytelling and truth—it may offer a template for how rural temporal value enters urban perception without distortion. The risk of sentimentality remains, but so does the opportunity to make patience visible.

9. Conclusion: Huangjing as a case of time-based rural branding

The Yongsheng Huangjing tea bag is a good example of how traditional rural products can adapt to modern markets. Rather than just selling a local herbal material, this brand gives Huangjing new meanings for modern city consumers.

[7] Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. (2018). Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China.

The idea of "waiting" is very important in this project. It links the slow growth of Huangjing plants, local farmers' hard work, and city people's need for self-care in their busy lives. The project does not only care about product functions or market prices. It creates extra value for the tea bag through time and human labour.

This case also provides a possible path for other traditional herbal products. They do not need to remain simple raw materials. With good branding, they can become daily lifestyle items with special feelings and stories.

In short, the value of Yongsheng Huangjing tea bags goes beyond their health benefits. They carry natural time, gifts from local land, farmers' hard-work and human patience.

References

[1] Liu, Z., Huang, Y., Cui, Z., Tan, Y., Yang, J., Lü, A., Wang, Y., & Jiang, M. (2017). Application of traditional Chinese medicine in medical practice: A survey of community residents in Beijing, China. *Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 37*(2), 261–268.

[2] He, Q., Wen, S., & Wang, Y. (2024). Yongsheng County: Industry development, optimized structure and strong momentum. *Yunnan.cn*. https://m.yunnan.cn/system/2024/03/20/032981423.shtml

[3] Xiao, L., Xu, H., Wu, T., Xie, Q., Wen, R., Wang, L., Su, B., & Zhang, H. (2024). Metabolomic diversity in Polygonatum kingianum across varieties and growth years. *Molecules, 29*(21), Article 5180. https://doi.org/10.3390/molecules29215180

[4] Ren, Y., Sun, Y., Liao, Y. Y., Wang, S., Liu, Q., Duan, C. Y., Sun, L., Li, X. Y., & Yuan, J. L. (2024). Mechanisms of action and applications of Polygonatum sibiricum polysaccharide at the intestinal mucosa barrier: A review. *Frontiers in Pharmacology, 15*, Article 1421607. https://doi.org/10.3389/fphar.2024.1421607

[5] Lundqvist, A., Liljander, V., Gummerus, J., & van Riel, A. (2013). The impact of storytelling on the consumer brand experience: The case of a firm-originated story. *Journal of Brand Management, 20*(4), 283–297.

[6] Wu, W., Zhang, A., van Klinken, R. D., Schrobback, P., & Muller, J. M. (2021). Consumer trust in food and the food system: A critical review. *Foods, 10*(10), Article 2490. https://doi.org/10.3390/foods10102490

[7] Tran, D., Schouteten, J. J., Gellynck, X., & De Steur, H. (2024). How do consumers value food traceability? A meta-analysis. *Food Control, 162*, Article 110453.

[8] Garner, B. (2022). Using social media to establish authenticity: An analysis of a small dairy farm's use of Facebook. *Journal of Promotion Management, 28*(6), 826–842.

[9] Beverland, M. B. (2005). Crafting brand authenticity: The case of luxury wines. *Journal of Management Studies, 42*(5), 1003–1029.