

ISSN 2957-2169

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14028348>



مجله مطالعات حقوق بین الملل ایران

Reverse Psychology of Confiscated Ancient Intellectual Properties in the West: A Case Study on the Appropriation of the Swastika by Nazi Germany and the Mazda by Japanese Automotive Industry

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Accepted and published October, 2024

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Abstract

This paper explores the concept of reverse psychology as it applies to the transformation of cultural and intellectual symbols, focusing on the swastika as a case study. Once a universal symbol of good fortune and harmony originating in Asia, the swastika was repurposed by the Nazi regime in Germany, becoming associated with violence and supremacy. This ideological shift demonstrates how the symbolic identity of cultural artifacts can be dramatically altered when appropriated by external entities for political agendas, which often results in the cultural and psychological alienation of the symbol's original communities. The paper further investigates the implications of such cultural appropriations for contemporary society and the efforts to restore the swastika's original significance. The concept of reverse psychology of ancient cultural heritage also applies to the concept of Mazda (ancient Persian God of righteousness) currently being used as a brand in automotive industry which needs careful consideration.

Keywords: Intellectual property rights, Mazda, Swastika, Nazi Germany, Hakenkreuz

Introduction

Cultural symbols have long been central to human expression, embodying complex layers of historical and social meanings. One striking example is the swastika, a symbol dating back millennia, used across Asia as a representation of good fortune and spiritual well-being. In the 20th century, however, this symbol was repurposed by Nazi Germany, becoming a universally recognized emblem of oppression and violence. This study will analyze the psychological and sociocultural impacts of this transformation on both Asian societies and the Western world, highlighting the concept of reverse psychology in cultural appropriation. Additionally, the article will review current efforts in India and other Asian countries to reclaim the swastika's original meaning. The Mazda brand name carries a legacy that connects modern automotive engineering with ancient spiritual symbolism. Founded in Hiroshima, Japan, in 1920, Mazda began as a small manufacturer known as the Toyo Cork Kogyo Company, initially producing machine tools and later vehicles (Mazda Motor Corporation, 2023). In 1931, the company shifted focus toward the automotive industry, producing a three-wheeled truck. However, it was in the early 1960s that the company rebranded as Mazda, drawing on the symbolism of the ancient Zoroastrian god, Ahura Mazda (Haigh, 2006).

Ahura Mazda, revered in Zoroastrianism, is the god of wisdom, light, and goodness, a symbol of knowledge that transcends darkness. The choice of the Mazda name was intended to reflect these values and honor the founder's vision of promoting innovation, intelligence, and harmony in their vehicles (Dastur, 2012). Ahura Mazda was central to Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions originating in ancient Persia around the first millennium BCE (Boyce, 1984). The deity's name, which translates to "Wise Lord," embodies the pursuit of enlightenment, progress, and ethical integrity—principles that the Mazda brand has aspired to align with in its designs and philosophy.

The name Mazda was selected as a tribute not only to Ahura Mazda but also to Jujiro Matsuda, the company's founder, whose surname "Matsuda" is phonetically similar to "Mazda" in Japanese (Mazda Motor Corporation, 2023). This dual reference underlines a commitment to combining tradition with progress, tying together Eastern and Western values. Today, Mazda's vehicles are marketed globally with a focus on innovative design, advanced engineering, and a reputation for quality, all of which resonate with the enlightened values that Ahura Mazda represents.

Historical Background of the Swastika

The term "swastika" derives from the Sanskrit word *svastika*, meaning "well-being" or "good fortune" (Chatterjee, 2020). Used for thousands of years in cultures such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, the swastika has represented positive aspects of life and spiritual harmony (Wong, 2019). This symbol is prevalent across Asia, where it decorates temples, artwork, and is used in various cultural ceremonies.

In the early 20th century, however, German Nazi ideology reinterpreted the swastika as a symbol of Aryan superiority. Adolf Hitler and his regime utilized the swastika in their propaganda, transforming its meaning from spiritual well-being to that of racial and nationalistic dominance (Strobl, 2018). This appropriation fundamentally altered the symbol's perception, especially in Western societies, leading to widespread aversion and legal prohibitions on its display in many countries.

Psychological Impact of the Symbolic Transformation

The appropriation of the swastika by the Nazi regime represents a clear case of reverse psychological impact on symbol perception. When the swastika, originally a revered symbol of harmony, was rebranded as a Nazi icon, it resulted in widespread psychological distress for Asian communities. This shift exemplifies what psychologist Carl Jung refers to as "cultural trauma," where a symbol or cultural object associated with positive values becomes linked with negative associations (Perry, 2017).

The redefinition of the swastika had long-lasting effects on both Eastern and Western societies. Western audiences now associate the

swastika almost exclusively with Nazism and hate, rather than its original meanings of fortune and peace (Nakamura, 2016). This shift in perception demonstrates reverse psychology on a cultural scale, where the value of an artifact is redefined by external forces, alienating its cultural origins and disrupting its psychological impact on the public.

The Role of Reverse Psychology in Cultural Appropriation

Reverse psychology in cultural appropriation occurs when the imposed meanings contrast with or even negate the artifact's original significance. For the swastika, Nazi Germany's appropriation represents a significant psychological reversal, turning a symbol of peace into a representation of terror. This transformation resulted in a "symbolic displacement," where the swastika's original meaning became overshadowed by its newfound political associations (Schwartz, 2019).

By seizing the swastika, the Nazis not only repurposed it for propaganda but also instigated a form of cultural erasure, stripping it from its Asian roots. Psychological studies have shown that such acts of appropriation, when politically or ideologically motivated, can leave deep emotional scars on affected cultures (Liu, 2020). In the case of the swastika, Asian communities were forced to confront the psychological dissonance of seeing a symbol of peace weaponized in the West.

Cultural Reclamation Efforts in the Modern Context

Despite the negative connotations attached to the swastika in the West, various Asian cultures continue to use it in its original context. In Hindu and Buddhist ceremonies, the swastika remains a powerful spiritual symbol, representing prosperity and well-being (Rao, 2015). Cultural reclamation movements are now actively working to restore the swastika's original meaning by distinguishing between the Nazi swastika and the ancient symbol used across Asia.

For example, the "Swastika Reclamation Movement" in India has launched initiatives to educate global audiences on the symbol's original significance. Through conferences, media campaigns, and educational outreach, these movements aim to foster an understanding of the swastika's dual identities and to challenge Western-centric views that see it solely as a Nazi emblem (Chatterjee, 2020).

Conclusion

The appropriation of the swastika by Nazi Germany provides a compelling example of reverse psychology in the context of cultural appropriation. By transforming a symbol of peace into one of oppression, the Nazis effectively erased its positive origins from public consciousness, replacing it with negative associations. This process has left Asian communities grappling with a cultural loss, as a cherished symbol was rebranded as a symbol of fear. Reclamation efforts continue to face challenges, yet they highlight the ongoing struggle to reclaim cultural heritage in the face of historical distortion. By exploring these cases, we gain a deeper understanding of how reverse psychology can shape public perception of cultural artifacts, reinforcing the need for cultural sensitivity and global awareness in interpreting symbols with diverse cultural origins. In the case of Ahura-Mazda the holistic approach of Persians towards the Name and symbol of Ahura-Mazda makes further concerns about appropriation of the name with business motifs. Although, the automotive industry never waged a war against humanity, the confiscation is considered illegal and has to be considered a legal agenda.

Acknowledgement: Dr. Amirali R. Davoudpour is an associate professor at the Iranian Canon of Medicine and Law, a non-governmental organization dedicated to protecting the civil rights of Iranian and Afghan migrants. Nasim Amiri Ghadi is an M.A. graduate from the Faculty of Anthropology and Cultural Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan-Poland with research background in Mythology and Human rights.

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