

# Typographic Compositions in Ceylon Tea Brand Packaging

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**Abstract** – Ceylon Tea is a globally recognized symbol of Sri Lanka’s cultural heritage and export economy, valued for its quality, taste, aroma, and historical significance. As the industry shifts from bulk exports to value-added consumer products, packaging design has become a vital medium for brand differentiation. In retail environments, packaging serves as a “silent salesperson,” conveying product value through carefully composed visual elements. While tea packaging includes a variety of graphic components—such as logos, imagery, and typography—the brand name rendered as a typographic wordmark stands out as the most visually dominant and consistent element, playing a central role in shaping visual identity. This study investigates the visual attributes of wordmark compositions in export-oriented Ceylon Tea packaging. Addressing a gap in scholarly literature, it adopts a visual analysis methodology supported by systematic observation, categorization, and design-led interpretation. The research is structured around two interlinked strands: a Visual Compositional Analysis of logo structures and a Typographic Style Analysis of letterform features. A stratified sample of 30 brands—selected based on sales performance and sourced from the Sri Lanka Tea Board’s flagship outlet in Colombo—was digitally redrawn to enable detailed comparison. The findings reveal that Ceylon Tea brand logos are typically composed through an interplay of wordmarks and symbolic elements. Three dominant compositional categories were identified: crest-based compositions, typographic-only logos, and motif-integrated formats. Typographically, serif typefaces are the most common, often featuring decorative characteristics such as sweeping terminals and bracketed serifs, while sans-serif and script styles also appear across the sample. This research contributes to the fields of branding, design studies, and visual communication by illuminating how typography functions as a core identifier in export-oriented Ceylon Tea branding—reflecting both postcolonial visual heritage and global branding imperatives.

**Keywords:** Ceylon Tea; Brand Identity; Visual Analysis; Packaging Design; Typography

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## I. Introduction

Tea is one of the most widely consumed beverages globally, valued not only for its taste and health benefits but also for its deep cultural and historical significance (Tea Exporters Association of Sri Lanka, n.d.). In Sri Lanka, tea holds a prominent place in the nation's economy, culture, and global image. Introduced during the 19th century following the collapse of the coffee industry, Ceylon Tea—named after the island's colonial designation—gained international prominence with James Taylor's establishment of the first commercial plantation in 1867 at Loolecondera. By the late 1800s, most former coffee estates had been converted to tea, and the first export shipment of Ceylon Tea to London in 1872 marked the beginning of Sri Lanka's global reputation as a premium tea exporter (Resplendent Ceylon, n.d.). Today, Sri Lanka ranks as the world's fourth-largest tea exporter, with Ceylon Tea renowned for its quality, aroma, and heritage value (Sri Lanka Export Development Board, n.d.).

The tea industry continues to play a critical role in Sri Lanka's economy, contributing significantly to employment, foreign exchange earnings, and national identity (Wijayasiri et al., 2018). Over time, the sector has evolved from bulk exports to value-added consumer products, highlighting the importance of sales packaging—referring to consumer-ready, shelf-displayed formats—as a key tool for market differentiation (Underwood & Klein, 2002). As the transition from wooden chests to branded packaging accelerated, visual branding became central to how tea products are positioned and perceived in both local and international markets (De Alwis, 2000).

In competitive consumer environments, sales packaging functions as the first point of brand interaction. Often described as a "silent salesperson," it communicates product value through visual elements such as logos, imagery, and typography (Klimchuk & Krasovec, 2013). Among these varied components, the logo—particularly the brand name presented as a wordmark—emerges as the most consistent and visually dominant typographic element across packaging formats. This study focuses on these wordmarks to understand how they function as core identifiers in shaping brand identity for Ceylon Tea products designed for export.

This research aims to investigate how brand names, rendered as wordmarks, are visually composed and typographically styled within export-oriented Ceylon Tea packaging. It is guided by two key objectives: (1) to conduct a Visual Compositional Analysis of logo structures, identifying dominant spatial and iconographic arrangements, and (2) to carry out a Typographic Style Analysis of letterform features, classifying traits such as typeface category, stroke modulation, and expressive reference. Adopting a visual analysis methodology—supported by systematic observation, categorization, and design-led techniques—the study reveals how visual identity is constructed within Sri Lanka's tea industry. Its significance lies in offering a culturally rooted understanding of typographic branding in a postcolonial context while providing practical guidance for designers and marketers striving to balance heritage aesthetics with contemporary global branding demands.

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## II. Literature Review

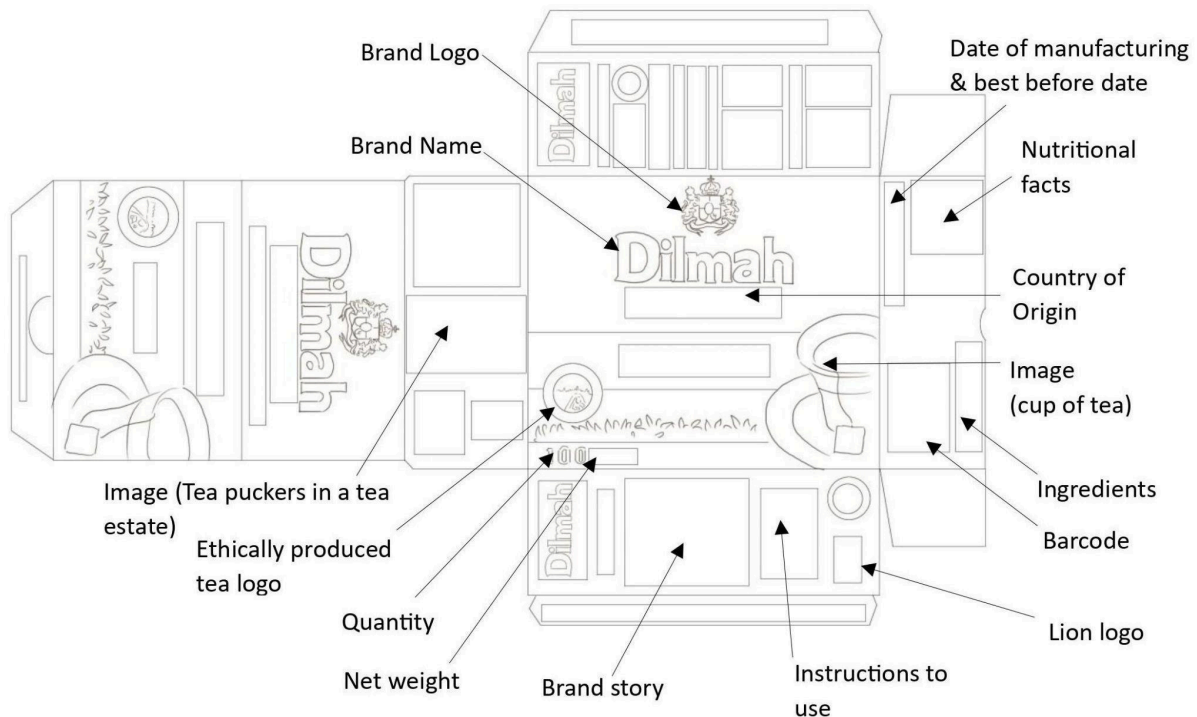
Building on the study's focus on logo-wordmarks and how they function as identifiers in shaping brand identity in export-oriented Ceylon Tea packaging, the following literature review situates the research within three interconnected domains.

### A. Packaging Design and Brand Communication

In Sri Lanka, the tea industry includes a diverse range of brands and product types—including black tea, green tea, and value-added blends—each requiring targeted visual strategies to communicate product attributes, brand narratives, and market positioning. Packaging design typically features a layered set of graphic elements such as the brand name, blend type, tagline, origin, net weight, ingredients, nutritional details, certifications, manufacturer information, usage instructions, and safety declarations. These elements are expressed through a combination of typographic and pictorial components, including illustrations, photographs, the Ceylon Lion logo, barcodes, and QR codes (figure 01). As noted by Bagnpouch.com (2024), packaging extends beyond aesthetic appeal to meet regulatory standards and ensure product transparency.

**Figure 01**

*Packaging Design Features Highlighted via a Dilmah's Tea Bag Packaging*



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More than a protective container, packaging functions as a strategic brand communication tool, especially in competitive retail environments where consumer decisions are made rapidly and often visually (Keller, 2008; Underwood & Klein, 2002). In such contexts, packaging serves as a “silent salesperson,” facilitating brand recognition, product recall, and emotional engagement through its visual design (Klimchuk & Krasovec, 2013). Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) emphasize that in saturated markets, effective brand differentiation is key to creating a lasting impression and building customer loyalty.

Among the various elements on tea packaging, the brand name—rendered as a wordmark—emerges as the most visually dominant and consistent graphic feature across formats. As the primary identifier, the wordmark plays a central role in communicating the brand’s identity, tone, and values at a glance. Its typographic expression becomes a critical asset in achieving differentiation on crowded shelves and in export contexts where visual immediacy is essential (Wheeler, 2009; Henderson et al., 2004). Within this framework, packaging design operates as the vehicle through which the brand’s visual language—anchored by the wordmark—is conveyed to the consumer, making it an essential component of integrated brand communication (Louw & Kimber, 2006; Hynes, 2009).

### ***B. Wordmarks and Visual Identity in Branding***

A brand’s visual identity is most immediately communicated through its logo, which serves as the primary graphic representation of the brand in packaging, advertising, and consumer touchpoints (Wheeler, 2009). In the context of packaged goods, the logo acts as the focal point of brand recognition, carried prominently on packaging surfaces where it shapes consumer perception and brand recall. Logos can be broadly understood as compositions of typographic and symbolic elements—including icons, crests, initials, or abstract forms—each chosen to convey specific brand attributes (Landa, 2011). Within the spectrum of logo forms, logotypes refer to text-based marks built from the brand name, while wordmarks are a subset of logotypes that rely exclusively on typography without any accompanying symbols or icons (Hembree, 2017).

This study focuses specifically on wordmarks, which are logo forms composed entirely of typographic styling of a brand name. Unlike symbolic or pictorial logos, wordmarks convey brand personality and positioning through font selection, layout, and visual detailing (Wheeler, 2009). Globally recognized wordmarks—such as those of Google, Coca-Cola, and Canon—demonstrate the potential of typography to operate as a self-contained visual identity. Key design considerations in wordmark construction include typeface category (serif, sans-serif, script, decorative), capitalization, letter spacing, x-height, ascender and descender proportions, ligatures, and stroke modulation (Lupton, 2014). Related forms such as monograms and lettermarks also serve as scalable tools for building cohesive brand identity systems across various media (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020).

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These typographic decisions are not merely stylistic—they help communicate brand attributes such as tradition, elegance, modernity, or authenticity. Previous research has shown that typography influences emotional engagement, brand perception, and consumer trust (Henderson et al., 2004; Hynes, 2009). However, such studies have largely concentrated on Western consumer markets and generalized product categories, with limited attention to how these mechanisms operate in Sri Lanka, particularly within the context of the tea industry. This study addresses that gap through a structured visual analysis of wordmarks used in Ceylon Tea packaging, investigating the compositional and expressive strategies that inform their design and communicative impact.

### ***C. Colonial Inheritance and Hybrid Branding in Ceylon Tea Logos***

Tea was introduced to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) as a plantation crop during British colonial rule in the 19th century. Following the collapse of the coffee industry, the British established commercial tea plantations—most notably beginning with James Taylor’s efforts at Loolecondra in 1867—transforming the island’s central highlands into a vast network of estates managed and owned by colonial planters (Roberts, 2007). These estates not only dominated agricultural production but also developed their own brands, many of which bore the estate’s name or the owner’s surname as part of the brand identity (e.g., Mackwoods, Lipton). Alongside the verbal identifiers, the symbolic elements used in packaging—such as crowns, shields, lions, and crests—borrowed heavily from the iconography of the British monarchy and aristocracy. These visual devices functioned as signifiers of authority, authenticity, and export-grade quality.

From a semiotic perspective, these early branding choices can be understood through Roland Barthes’ theory of mythologies, where signs (e.g., a crown or serif typeface) operate not only on a denotative level (as images or letterforms) but also on a connotative level, reinforcing ideological messages about tradition, legitimacy, and colonial prestige (Barthes, 1972). In Stuart Hall’s (1997) framework of representation, such visual codes participate in systems of meaning that link the product to broader narratives of imperial quality and cultural superiority, especially in export contexts targeting European markets.

Though Sri Lanka has long since gained independence and the tea industry is now locally owned and operated, many of these colonial visual motifs persist—either explicitly, through retained symbols, or implicitly, through inherited typographic styles and layout conventions. This visual continuity illustrates what Homi Bhabha (1994) refers to as a “third space,” where hybrid cultural identities emerge through the negotiation between colonial influence and local adaptation. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2000) similarly describe this hybridity as a central feature of postcolonial aesthetics, wherein inherited colonial forms are reappropriated and localized, producing layered and often contradictory visual languages.

In the domain of tea packaging, this hybridity is visible in the frequent use of serif typefaces that echo British typographic traditions, crests that reference royal emblems, and brand names that retain colonial surnames or estate titles. These are often juxtaposed with localized visual

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elements—such as stylized tea leaves, lotus flowers, or Kandyan figures—that anchor the product in Sri Lankan identity. Such pairings are not merely decorative; they work as semiotic devices that signal both global credibility and national provenance.

While some scholarship has acknowledged the presence of hybrid symbolism in Sri Lankan packaging and branding (Bandara, 2019), few studies have examined its typographic dimension in depth. This study extends the inquiry by focusing on how wordmarks—through their letterforms, compositional structures, and symbolic associations—participate in the negotiation of national identity in a postcolonial branding landscape. By examining these visual strategies within the everyday object of a tea package, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how postcolonial narratives are materialized through contemporary design practice.

### **III. Methodology**

This study adopts a visual analysis methodology supported by systematic observation, categorization, and design-led analysis. It focuses on how brand names, rendered as wordmarks, are visually composed and typographically styled within export-oriented Ceylon Tea packaging. The analysis is structured around two parallel but interlinked strands: a Visual Compositional Analysis of logo structures and a Typographic Style Analysis of letterform features. Together, these approaches enable a layered understanding of how visual and typographic strategies function within the broader context of Sri Lankan tea branding.

#### **A. Sampling Strategy**

The sample for this study was drawn from the Sri Lanka Tea Board Sale Center in Colombo, chosen for its credibility, comprehensive product representation, and availability of reliable sales records. As of May 2023, the outlet displayed over thirty branded tea products (Figure 02). To maintain consistency, the study focused exclusively on carton-based black tea packages in cuboid form, which represented the most prevalent and visually uniform packaging format across all available brands. A purposeful stratified sampling strategy was employed based on product sales performance recorded between May and October 2023. Thirty brands were selected and categorized into three strata of sales performance: ten high-selling brands, ten mid-range brands, and ten low-selling brands. The analysis was limited to black tea packaging, intentionally excluding green tea, flavored teas, and value-added variants to control for visual variability associated with different product types.

#### **B. Data Collection and Analytical Framework**

Each selected tea package was photographed under controlled lighting conditions against a neutral white background to capture the front-facing panel, which typically features the primary brand logo. The wordmark logos were then digitally cropped and isolated to facilitate detailed visual examination. The analytical process was conducted in two distinct but complementary phases: Visual Compositional Analysis and Typographic Style Analysis.

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**Figure 02**

Thirty Tea Brand Logos Included in the Research

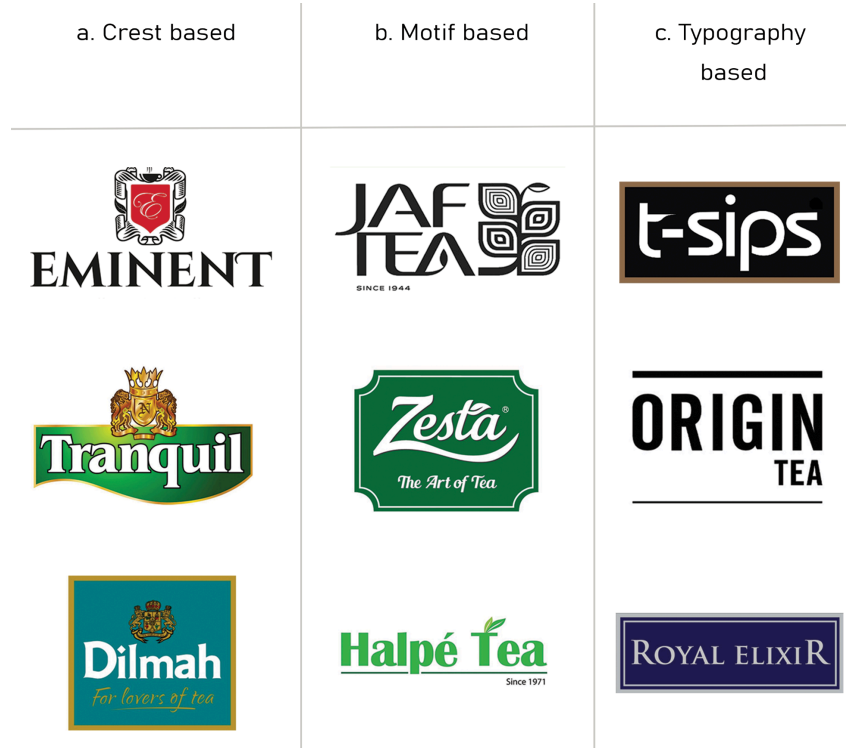
				
Akbar	Alwazah Tea	Ayubovan	Basitur	Battler
				
Ceyleaf	Ceylon Kisses	Dilmah	Greenlands	Eminent
				
Halpe Tea	Hyleys	Hyson	Impra	Jaf Tea
				
Lakma	Lions	Mackwoods	Mlesna	Origin Tea
				
Ranfer	Royal Elixir	Samley	tarlton	Tea4u
				
TeaLia	Tea Tang	Tranquil	t- sips	Zesta

The Visual Compositional Analysis focused on the structural layout of each logo design. All 30 wordmarks were digitally redrawn using vector graphic software to enhance clarity and isolate compositional details. This redrawing process allowed for precise visual comparison by removing background noise and non-essential design elements. The analysis examined the overall structure of each logo, paying particular attention to icon placement above the wordmark, the presence of framing devices such as circular or rectangular enclosures, and the spatial relationship between graphic motifs and typographic elements. The logos were then grouped into visual themes according to recurring structural patterns. These included crest-based compositions,

motif-integrated wordmarks, and purely typographic layouts (Figure 03) revealing visual conventions commonly used in Sri Lankan tea branding.

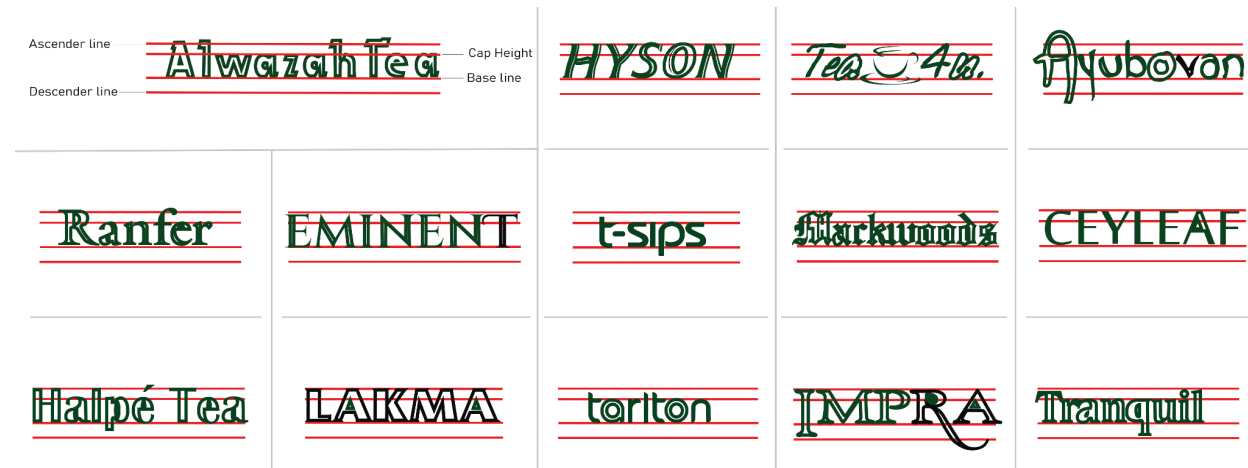
**Figure 03**

Sample of a. Crest-Based Compositions, b. Motif-Integrated Wordmarks, and Purely c. Typographic Layouts



**Figure 04**

Sample of Redrawn Wordmarks on a Uniform Reference Lines: X-Height for Typographic Comparison



The Typographic Style Analysis examined the construction and expressive features of the letterforms used in each brand's wordmark. Each logo was redrawn along a uniform x-height and

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baseline grid to enable systematic comparison of typographic characteristics without interference from surrounding imagery or framing devices. Logos were classified according to their typeface style—whether serif, sans-serif, script, or decorative—as well as stroke modulation, including distinctions between high contrast and monoline styles. Further distinctions were made based on type weight (light, medium, or bold) and cultural or expressive references, such as the use of colonial-era serif conventions, calligraphic influences, or modernist geometric styling. This classification process enabled the identification of dominant typographic tendencies and their alignment with branding strategies and market positioning across the sampled products.

## IV. Analysis

### A. Visual Composition Analysis of Tea Brand Logos

The visual identity of Ceylon Tea brands is constructed primarily through the interplay of wordmarks and symbolic motifs. These compositions are carefully designed to evoke heritage, trust, and product distinctiveness, especially in the context of international retail environments. This section categorizes and analyzes the visual composition of 30 Ceylon Tea brand logos based on their structural layout and the integration of emblematic or illustrative elements. Three major compositional categories were identified: crest-based, motif-integrated and typographic-only compositions.

A significant number of brands adopt crest-based compositions, drawing from European heraldic traditions to convey prestige, colonial legacy, and institutional reliability. These logos typically feature shields, crowns, or floral embellishments placed directly above the wordmark. Some designs incorporate the entire visual arrangement within framed shapes such as squares, roundels, or organic borders. For instance, brands such as Eminent, Lakma, Tranquil, Ranfer, Hyleys, and Samley exhibit a consistent format comprising a stylized initial rendered in script form, enclosed within a crest or shield and positioned above a clean wordmark. These references to European estate branding serve to reinforce the visual language of legacy and authenticity. Dilmah presents a more elaborate crest composition, incorporating figures such as a tea plucker and a Kandyan dancer within a square frame to embed cultural symbolism into the logo. Mlesna, Basilur, and Lions embed their wordmarks within ornate emblems framed by round or organically shaped borders, enhancing their artisanal and premium appeal. Akbar introduces a monogram flanked by a tea bud above the wordmark, housed in a rectangular frame, merging modern logo hierarchy with traditional motifs.

In contrast to these emblematic designs, several brands rely solely on typographic treatments for visual identity. These typographic-only compositions emphasize legibility, recognizability, and minimal interference on crowded retail shelves. Brands such as Royal Elixir, T-sips, Imprá, and Origin Tea frame their wordmarks within rectangles, using no additional iconography. While typeface weights and styles vary across these examples, the overarching design intent remains focused on clarity and directness. Zesta and Halpé Tea introduce a hybrid typographic strategy,

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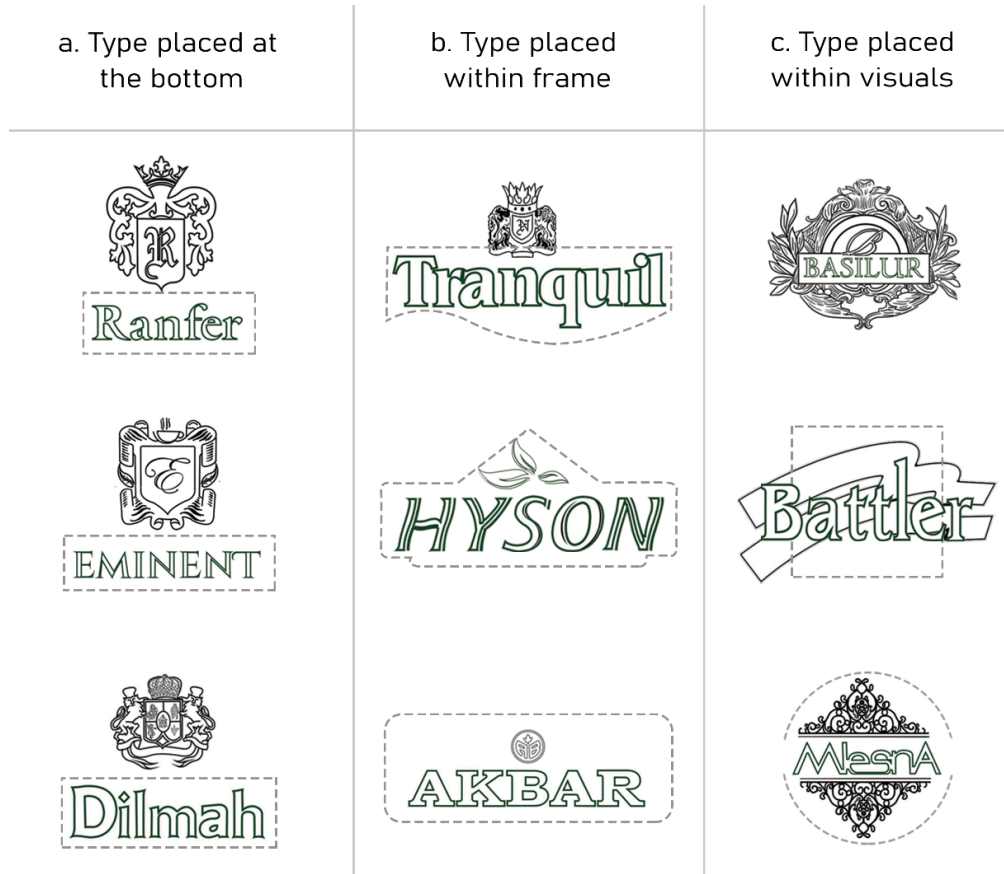
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integrating a tea leaf motif into the letter 'T' of their wordmarks, thus rendering the typography itself illustrative. Jaf Tea pairs an abstract leaf icon with the wordmark, maintaining visual separation while achieving compositional harmony. These designs reflect a minimalist ethos aligned with modernist design principles.

**Figure 05**

*Sample of How Type is Placed Within the Icon*



A third group of logos exhibits a more integrated use of motifs, embedding tea-related icons such as leaves, cups, pots, or buds directly into or alongside the wordmark. These compositions aim to evoke freshness, nature, and sensory experience through metaphor and illustrative detail. Brands like Hyson, Ceyleaf, Tealia, and Akbar incorporate botanical elements into the typography or position them strategically above the wordmark. Hyson and Ceyleaf use organic-shaped frames that enhance the natural motifs. Tea4u and GreenLands place decorative icons centrally or above the wordmark and often include ornamental borders to establish identity. Tealia and Basilur balance leaf motifs within a symmetrical logotype layout, while Tea Tang utilizes a teapot icon above the wordmark to suggest everyday ritual. Alwazah Tea is recognizable for its swan icon adjacent to the wordmark, preserving longstanding brand equity. Similarly, Ceylon Kisses employs a lotus motif, invoking South Asian symbolism and purity.

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Across the sampled brands, (extracted and visualized in figure 05) the most prevalent compositional strategy is the vertical stacking of an icon or emblem above the wordmark, frequently enclosed within geometric or ornamental borders. This structure supports visibility and reinforces brand symbolism. The continued reliance on crest-based compositions signals a deep-rooted affinity with colonial-era visual codes that communicate longevity and export heritage. Meanwhile, contemporary or niche brands are increasingly adopting minimalist or motif-integrated approaches, suggesting an evolving design sensibility. Overall, packaging logos serve as more than just identifiers; they encode narratives of cultural memory, product authenticity, and national identity.

### ***B. Typographic Categorization of Ceylon Tea Wordmarks***

To evaluate the role of typography in Sri Lankan tea branding, this section presents an analysis of 30 digitally redrawn wordmarks using a standardized x-height grid. Each logo was examined in terms of typeface style, stroke modulation, weight, and expressive or cultural references.

A dominant presence of serif typefaces was identified across brands such as Hyson, Eminent, Halpé Tea, Tranquil, Hyleys, Basilur, Royal Elixir, Greenlands, IMPRA, and Akbar. These logos exhibit moderate to high stroke contrast, with decorative elements such as sweeping terminals and bracketed serifs especially evident in Basilur and IMPRA, signaling a sense of luxury and historical depth. Others, like Eminent and Akbar, use robust slab-like serif structures that convey reliability and durability. These serif treatments align with branding objectives that emphasize legacy and trust.

A contrasting group of logos utilizes sans-serif letterforms, suggesting modernity, neutrality, and global alignment. Brands such as Dilmah, Ceyleaf, Battler, T-sips, Tealia, Lions, Origin Tea, Tea Tang, Mackwoods, and Ceylon Kisses exhibit humanist or geometric sans-serif styles. Dilmah uses rounded counters to soften its appearance, while Tealia and Ceyleaf favor sharp terminals and vertical proportions. Bold sans-serif forms are evident in Tea Tang and Ceylon Kisses, reflecting mass-market appeal and high visibility.

Script and calligraphic typefaces, found in Zesta, Samley, and Ayubowan, are used to convey warmth, elegance, and cultural authenticity. Zesta's brush-style script and Samley's monoline curves imply artisanal quality, while Ayubowan's ligatures and extended strokes are reminiscent of South Asian calligraphic traditions.

Display and decorative typefaces appear in logos such as Mlesna, Mackwoods, Tarlton, Ranfer, JAF TEA, and Alwazah Tea. These brands feature custom letterforms that are visually distinctive. Mlesna uses asymmetric baselines and angular forms, while JAF TEA plays with diagonal and

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stacked configurations. Mackwoods and Alwazah Tea incorporate dense, gothic-style letters that evoke colonial signage, contributing to a sense of historical continuity.

Several brands, including Tea4u, Halpé Tea, Zesta, and JAF TEA, demonstrate hybrid styles where pictorial elements are embedded directly into the letterforms. These integrations include leaves as crossbars, cups replacing counters, or flourishes suggesting natural motifs. This fusion of imagery and typography allows for symbolic richness within a compact visual system.

In terms of stroke characteristics, brands like Basilur, Hyson, IMPRA, and Royal Elixir display high contrast modulation typical of calligraphic or classic styles, whereas Dilmah, T-sips, Tealia, Tea Tang, and Ceylon Kisses maintain monoline consistency. Logos such as Tea Tang, Origin Tea, and Akbar exhibit heavier weight, projecting mass-market confidence, while lighter treatments in Ayubowan, Samley, and Tranquil convey delicacy and refined positioning.

Overall, the typographic spectrum across Sri Lankan tea wordmarks illustrates a predominant preference for serif and hybrid serif styles, reflecting an industry-wide commitment to prestige and authenticity. However, the increasing adoption of sans-serif and display styles indicates responsiveness to global design trends and evolving consumer preferences. This visual diversity serves not only aesthetic purposes but also strategic branding, allowing companies to signal identity, market segment, and cultural lineage through letterform selection and treatment.

## **V. Conclusion: Visual Language and Typographic Strategies in Ceylon Tea Branding**

The analysis of visual composition and typographic style in the logos of Ceylon Tea brands demonstrates a hybridized approach to branding—one that balances historical influence with contemporary market needs. The vertical stacking of icons above wordmarks, particularly in crest-based logos, underscores the ongoing relevance of colonial-era visual traditions in signaling export authority, heritage, and institutional credibility. These visual choices play a crucial role in reinforcing consumer trust and distinguishing Sri Lankan tea in a competitive global marketplace.

Serif typefaces dominate the typographic landscape, especially among established brands that seek to underscore their legacy, premium quality, and authenticity. High-contrast and ornamental features further amplify these associations. However, the presence of sans-serif and minimalist designs among newer or rebranded entities indicates an emerging trend toward clarity, modernity, and accessibility. Script and calligraphic forms introduce an emotional and cultural resonance, while decorative treatments and motif integrations offer opportunities for distinctiveness and storytelling.

Taken together, the visual language of Sri Lankan tea branding reveals a complex interplay of historical codes, cultural narratives, and modern design strategies. For designers, the findings provide a foundation for developing brand identities that are both visually resonant and

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contextually meaningful. For marketers and strategists, they illustrate how typographic nuance and visual composition can be leveraged to shape brand perception, drive shelf impact, and communicate national provenance. For typographers, this body of logos offers a rich case study in the role of form and legibility in constructing layered, culturally grounded brand identities.

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