

Application Research of Traditional Chinese Motifs in Cultural and Creative Products

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Abstract

As the treasures of Chinese history and culture, Traditional Chinese motifs have attracted extensive attention around the world. Over thousands of years of development, these time-honoured traditional motifs have been used in many areas of modern design, especially in Cultural and Creative product designs. These products are endowed with rich connotations and cultural features by designers and inherit Chinese traditional culture in their own unique way. Based on this, this paper focuses on the overview of traditional Chinese motifs, artistic characteristics and the significance of integration of traditional motifs with Cultural and Creative products, and explores the application of Traditional Chinese motifs in Cultural and Creative products.

Keywords

Traditional Chinese Motifs, Cultural and Creative Products, Traditional Culture, Cultural Connotation, Artistic Characteristics

1. Introduction

China is an ancient civilisation with a long history, and the traditional culture accumulated over the years has become one of the oldest and most complex cultures in the world (Wu, 2015). Cultural and Creative industry is closely related to traditional culture and is an important direction for the development of soft power of Chinese culture. Since China's State Council issued the Opinions on Promoting the Integration and Development of Cultural Creativity and Design Services with Related Industries in 2014, it has provided unprecedented opportunities for the development of Cultural and Creative industry. At the same time, in the design of Cultural and Creative products, the design industry has been concerned by important issues on how to excavate, collate and refine the tradi-

tional cultural elements with the most cultural and artistic value and how to organically integrate the traditional cultural elements with the product design, so as to create the Cultural and Creative products with the most Chinese characteristics. In traditional Chinese culture, the traditional motif is one of the most unique cultural symbols (Li et al., 2022a). From the initial need for decoration, traditional Chinese motifs have undergone historical development over thousands of years with a great variety of exquisite motifs continuously appearing, which not only embodies profound culture, but also have a complex and exquisite workmanship, providing modern cultural and creative product design with reference value.

2. Overview of Traditional Chinese Motifs

2.1. Background

China has undergone thousands of years of civilization interpretation, and has established an enormous cultural system, which is expressed in the form of writing, motifs and techniques. Among these, the shape and expression of motifs are the most symbolic and expressive, and the degree of artistry is also the highest (Gao, 2018). Traditional Chinese motifs have a long history of development, ranging from 6,000 to 7,000 years, with different development styles and artistic expression characteristics in each period. **Figure 1** provides the history timeline of the Traditional Chinese motifs.

Traditional Chinese motifs originated in the period of the Neolithic, when tools were usually made of stoneware and earthenware. During this period, forefathers expressed their desire to catch more fish and their reverence for the gods by drawing fish patterns, such as single, double and triple fish on the vessels (Hu & Zheng, 2005). During the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties, a unique bronze art was formed, on which various patterns with diverse themes, unique techniques, strict structures, and exaggerated and condensed shapes were used. The most common pattern was called the Taotie motif, which was the medium of communication between humans and gods conjured up by the ancestors, and was a symbol of power with strong religious significance (Zhang, 2007). During the Qin and Han Dynasties, due to the rulers' enthusiasm for myths and legends, in addition to continuing to use the previous traditional motifs, some new motifs also appeared, such as the Vermilion Bird, the Xuanwu, the Dragon and the White Tiger. During the Wei and Jin Dynasties, influenced by Buddhism, traditional motifs incorporated new content on the basis of the previous motifs, displaying the characterization of diversity and variety (Wang, 2018). During the Sui and Tang dynasties, arts and crafts made unprecedented progress, and the traditional motifs showed brand-new changes both in style and content. The decorative motifs were full of auspicious symbols that became an important part of traditional Chinese motifs, and the most popular motif arts during this period included the Floral Medallion motif, the Peal-linked motif, and the Lotus motif (Liu, 2006; Zhen et al., 2017). During the Song and Yuan dynasties, traditional



Figure 1. The history time-line of the traditional Chinese motifs (Summarized by this study).

motifs entered a period of highly popularised application and development, and the motifs became more ascending, realistic and elegant. Many animal, plant, and figure motifs fully embodied people's pursuit and yearning for good fortune and happy life (Wu, 2009). During the Ming and Qing dynasties, traditional motifs paid attention to the affinity between art and nature, and the connection with human nature, which made traditional Chinese motifs become diverse in subject matter and more complex in expression (Hong, 2008). Traditional Chinese patterns have been handed down through the generations and have been accumulated over a long period of time. According to daily life, and in line with the social, economic, political and cultural development at that time, people's aspirations for a better life and their spiritual hopes are expressed in the form of motif imagery. As a result, Traditional Chinese patterns contain a deep cultural heritage and fully reflect the great artistic creativity of the working people.

2.2. Artistic Characteristics of Traditional Chinese Motifs

First, it is spiritualisation. Most themes of traditional Chinese motifs come from various forms of daily life and nature, and the creators perfectly combine the motifs with auspicious and beautiful symbols and use the motifs to express their higher-level associations with reality. They personify and idealise the traditional Chinese motifs, giving the good wishes of harmony and unity between human beings and nature at the spiritual level.

Second, it is diversity. The composition of traditional Chinese motifs is diversified and complicated. Its modelling techniques mostly adopt exaggeration, generalisation, realism, symbolism and so on, and the structural form of its motifs pursues delicacy and perfection, which gives the traditional Chinese motifs a strong sense of formal beauty. There are three types of traditional Chinese motifs: individual motifs, suitable motifs and continuous motifs, and the forms of different motifs have many variations depending on the form of composition. In the composition of motifs, individual motifs are independent individuals, not subject to any graphic limitations, and when designed, structural rigour and overall integrity need to be emphasized. The suitable motifs, on the other hand, are motifs drawn within a certain specific shape, which is a clever integration of the pattern shape and the internal pattern structure. Continuous motifs are repeated by one or several unit pattern-linked combinations, which are rich in rhythm and rhythmic aesthetics. Two-square continuous and four-square continuous motifs are two commonly seen.

Third, is planarisation. Traditional Chinese motifs mainly use planar structure in composition, focusing on the bold combination between various motif elements. Motif modelling is not bound by specific images but uses repetition, contrast, spacing, filling and other decorative techniques, making its modelling embedded in the minds and greatly enhancing the decorative beauty of the motif.

Fourth, it is an allegory. The creation of traditional Chinese motifs is not only for artistic expression, but also for the expression of deeper connotations and cultural meanings. People convey the love of nature and the desire and longing for a better

life through the motifs, and most of the traditional motifs pay attention to the symbolism of “A Graphic reveals something, and its meaning must be auspicious”.

Fifth, it is colourization. Traditional Chinese motifs mainly use high-purity colours such as red, yellow, brown, gold, silver and so on in their applications. The use of these colours in a variety of traditional motifs tends to give people a feeling of warmth, excitement and jubilation.

3. Cultural and Creative Products

3.1. Definition of Cultural and Creative Products

In the age of local design in the global market, the combination of culture and design is a trend in economic development (Liu & Chang, 2013; Li, 2021). In recent years, the term “Cultural and Creative products” has frequently come into people’s vision. Cultural and Creative products refer to high-value-added products that meet the aesthetic and spiritual needs of modern people by taking Culture and Creative concepts as the core, transforming “culture” into “creativity” and attaching them to products (Hasio, 2015; Chiou & Wang, 2018). To be simple, cultural and creative products are products that have been transformed from ‘culture’ to ‘creativity’ and attached the latter to the product. The relationship between the conditional and purposeful objects and people extends from the core to the outside according to the cultural connotation and the characteristics of the product itself, which forms a ‘benefit’ type of commodity containing functions in terms of use and psychology.

3.2. Categories of Cultural and Creative Products

Cultural and Creative products are in fact a relatively broad concept. According to current divisions, they can be divided into three types:

1) Cultural and Creative Products in Museums

The design of Cultural and Creative products in Museums focuses on extracting cultural elements from museums, exploring new ideas for the design of Cultural and Creative products, enriching the connotations of cultural relics in collections, and using museums as platforms to provide online and offline sales and promotion channels for Cultural and Creative products (Li et al., 2022b). Museum’s Cultural and Creative products feature high added value, being culture-based and creative, along with the nature of culture, commercials, aesthetics and promotion. They are an important vehicle for cultural exchange between museums and the public with an emphasis on uncovering the stories behind the cultural elements of museums, and impressing consumers through the historical, storytelling and interesting nature of the cultural elements.

2) Cultural and Creative Products in Tourism

Tourism Cultural and Creative products refer to the excavation, refinement and re-creation of traditional culture, historical architecture, ethnic customs and regional culture, giving themselves new cultural connotations and transforming them into products (Ma, 2023). Tourism Cultural and Creative products are no

longer limited to the design of the “object”, which not only allows consumers to experience the local culture and increase the memory of tourism, but also allows consumers to more intuitively understand the regional culture, local customs, traditional crafts and values.

3) Cultural and Creative Products based on IP Culture

Cultural and Creative products based on IP (Intellectual Property, hereinafter referred to as IP) culture mean to shape products on the basis of a certain culture theme of IP's. The most common types include museum cultural IP, film and entertainment IP, and brand IP, and etc. (Wang, 2023). As a result, IP-image-based creative products are said to be the ones with a huge fan base, using their figurative images as a carrier and combining new technologies and cross-border cooperation and other creative ways to embody their own unique cultural stories and emotional attachment.

3.3. The Value and Significance of the Application of Traditional Chinese Motifs in Cultural and Creative Products

1) Using the cultural connotation of Traditional Chinese motifs to give artistic value to Cultural and Creative products

In China's cultural history of 6,000 to 7,000 years, Traditional Chinese motifs from the totem of primitive society to the patterns of the Ming and Qing dynasties have the cultural connotations of different historical periods, which are not only decorative patterns but also an expression of very important value and significance, carrying people's aspirations and longings for a better life. Incorporating Traditional Chinese motifs into the design of Cultural and Creative products can help people have a more three-dimensional and all-around understanding of their historical background by digging and extracting the forms and connotations of the traditional patterns and fully displaying their cultural origins. At the same time, it can also awaken people's sense of cultural belonging to Traditional Chinese motifs, and then better inherit, protect and carry forward the spirit and ideas contained in Traditional Chinese motifs. For example, ceramic handicrafts with a kind of traditional Chinese motif called the Floral Medallion motif as a design element not only have a beautiful appearance but also convey the symbolism of people's aspirations for good luck and prosperity. Such Cultural and Creative product design not only meets the spiritual needs of consumers but also allows consumers to feel the unique charm of traditional Chinese motifs. Therefore, traditional Chinese motifs have strong artistic value in Cultural and Creative products.

2) Cultural value of Cultural and Creative products given by elements of Traditional Chinese motifs

Today's product design is no longer just simply to meet visual aesthetics but also is designed to meet people's emotional needs. Traditional Chinese motifs with beautiful symbols can express people's pursuit of a better life and emotions in the design of Cultural and Creative products. Design is essentially a process of continuous creation and deconstruction of culture (Yang, 2017). Therefore, by

extracting the cultural connotation, humanistic spirit and other symbolic elements from Traditional Chinese motifs and combining them with modern Cultural and Creative product design, we can complete the deconstruction of traditional culture and modern product design, so as to design Cultural and Creative products that meet the needs of the modern society and also have the connotation of traditional culture and spiritual significance. For example, home products inspired by the peony pattern in traditional Chinese motifs can show the unique style of traditional Chinese culture and create distinctive products, whether in appearance, colour or meaning. Therefore, traditional Chinese motifs have strong cultural value in Cultural and Creative products.

4. The Application of Traditional Chinese Motifs in Cultural and Creative Products

4.1. Motifs Application

4.1.1. Direct Application

In the design of Cultural and Creative products, some traditional Chinese motifs apply elements such as motifs and colours directly to the products. The direct application we mentioned does not mean that the traditional Chinese motifs are directly applied to the surface of the product, but rather that they need to be designed to fit the characteristics of the product for a flattering effect, and at the same time generate new functions, such as tool functions or instruction functions and so on (Yun, 2020), in order to satisfy the consumers' aesthetic needs. For example, in the cultural and creative product called "Fulu Shou" Cup launched by the Palace Museum of China, the designer made a direct application of three traditional Chinese auspicious animal patterns, namely bats, deer and cranes. They are designed on the cups for people to carry around, which not only serve as a daily necessity, but also convey the beautiful meaning of "Fortune, Luck and Longevity".

4.1.2. Application to "Accept or Reject"

As an important part of Chinese traditional culture, traditional Chinese motifs are the accumulation and inheritance of history and civilisation, and are the wisdom of Chinese people formed in the course of history (Wang, 2021). Therefore, the use of traditional Chinese motif elements adding colour to Cultural and Creative products cannot be completely "copied". Through modern graphic design creativity, designers make reasonable trade-offs, combine colour psychology with colour-emotional communication design techniques, and retain the connotation of traditional Chinese motifs with the use of modern design software, all together to make the characteristics of traditional Chinese motifs more prominent. The "Accept or Reject" we mentioned is not simply taking some details of traditional Chinese motifs and adding them to the surface of Cultural and Creative products. These motifs can not only highlight the centre and subjective characteristics, but also express the connotation of the more representative elements of traditional motifs.

For example, in the series of Cultural and Creative products launched by the Palace Museum of China—“Flourishing Flowers Stationery Set” (**Figure 2**), the designer extracted the Chinese traditional motifs in the “Square Box with Twisted Branch Lotus motif in Qing Dynasty painted Enamel” (**Figure 3**) called the Twisted Branch Lotus motif and the Ruyi Cloud motif as the main body of the design of the Cultural and Creative product. However, the shape has a certain tediousness. The form is rather old-fashioned, and the colours are dull. In order to make it more artistic and beautiful to adapt to the pursuit of beauty of contemporary consumers, the designer uses the method of “Accept or Reject”, retaining the original cultural relics of the dark blue background and the unique rhythm of the distribution of the elements of the motif, and combines it with the enamelling process. It not only brings people the visual feeling of complex beauty and the blessing of “Intellectual and Artistic efflorescence”, but also maintains the cultural connotation of traditional Chinese motifs.

4.1.3. Application to Replacement and Reconstruction

In modern art design, the use of replacement and reconstruction can give people



Figure 2. Flourishing flowers stationery set (Source: Palace Museum, 2023).



Source: the collection of Chinese patterns: Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing (2009)

Figure 3. Square box with twisted branch lotus motif in Qing dynasty painted enamel.

a refreshing feeling (He & Wang, 2021). Using the exaggerated and deformed techniques in modern design, the image of some original Chinese traditional motifs is changed and enlarged into special shapes or colours in order to obtain special cultural creative motifs, and this replacement and reconstruction can interpret the personality of unique traditional motifs. Cultural and Creative products always show the logic of individuality (Lu et al., 2017; Naga & McGill, 2018). Therefore, the replacement and reconstruction approach is often eye-catching, and sometimes the shapes of traditional Chinese motif images are cleverly expressed in modern design styles, and cooperated with museums under authorization, thus forming a complete “Design-Manufacture-Sale” process.

For example, in the Dunhuang series of Cultural and Creative products, some representative artistic images are put into the Cultural and Creative products, including the nine-coloured deer (Figure 4), the Floral Medallion motif, the image of “Flying Apsaras” and so on. In order to make the artistic images in the frescoes more adaptable to the design needs of the Cultural and Creative products, the designers use the method of replacement and reconstruction, which replaces the ordinary colour blocks with the representative elements of Dunhuang frescoes, and adds a large gradient of colour blocks, so as to make the motif not only retain its interesting image, but also make the original creativity modern (Figure 5). This exquisite design not only reflects the beauty of traditional Chinese motifs, but also gives traditional Chinese cultural elements a new spirit in the new era and a new vitality in the new social context (Song, 2021).

4.2. Application of Colours

Colour is an indispensable part of the appearance of Cultural and Creative product design, and is also an important part of the application of fashion ele



Figure 4. Dunhuang mural—Nine coloured deer.



Figure 5. Nine coloured deer metal bookmark
(Source: Dunhuang Acedemy, 2020).

ments (Liu & Hu, 2022), a rich and reasonable colour system can bring people good visual enjoyment. Colour is one of the important factors in the design of Cultural and Creative products, and without the support of colour, Cultural and Creative products will lose their original vitality and energy. In traditional Chinese motif colours, each colour has its own different symbolic meaning. For example, red symbolizes the vitality of life, joy and good fortune (Sun, 2022), and its rich cultural connotation makes red the most representative colour in China. In order to better stimulate consumers' desire to purchase, designers adhere to the connotation of traditional Chinese culture and at the same time, break away from the old and establish the new, deconstructing and restructuring them according to the modern aesthetic orientation and colour design concepts, on the basis of which, designers make a high degree of integration between traditional colours and modern art design by drawing on the classic colours of traditional Chinese motifs.

For example, in the second-prize-winning entry in the 2020 Huawei Global Mobile Cultural and Creative Products Competition (Figure 6), the designers used smoke made from flowers, birds and traditional Chinese motifs to create a private space that was "Close to Nature" for the user. The colours of the background not only varied in traditional green, but also incorporated the brushstrokes of paintings, visually enhancing the changes in reality and reality, and the use of gold foil and luminous colours was also beyond the traditional colours, making the image more gorgeous and giving off a dazzling light.

5. Conclusion

In summary, traditional Chinese motifs are the wisdom of Chinese forefathers, which is a manifestation of their desire for a better life and their reverence for nature, and it is also an important representative of Chinese traditional culture.



Figure 6. Cultural and Creative product called “Birds, Flowers and Lush Grass” by Wu Yaoqian, 2020 (Source: <https://maimai.cn/article/detail>).

Traditional Chinese pattern elements are integrated with cultural and creative products based on rich cultural connotations and profound characteristics. The quality of the appearance of the product design is effectively improved and the cultural connotation of modern Cultural and Creative product design is enhanced to a large extent by means of direct application, “Accept or Reject”, replacement and reconstruction and so on.

With the increasing demand for diversified Cultural and Creative product designs from the general public, in future, Cultural and Creative product designers should review and excavate traditional Chinese motifs from a broader perspective, utilise more distinctive design techniques, create sustainable designs, and improve the level of the cultural and creative industry. At the same time, they should create cultural and creative products that are both nationalistic and in line with modern concepts, so as to inject new vigour into the dissemination and development of traditional Chinese culture in modern society.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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