

Analyze the auspicious patterns in ancient signboards

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Abstract: Signboards are symbolic trade signs used by ancient Chinese shops to attract customers. With rich concrete forms and abstract allegorical elements as the carrier, it constitutes the market landscape with rich connotations in ancient China. Signs are also symbolic and use signifiers to convey certain information. There are a lot of auspicious patterns in the use of signs. These patterns are the main symbol in the sign, or a detailed decoration. Signboard design process references Chinese folk customs and has a strong emotional color included. Different design languages are also expressed through different pattern combinations. These auspicious patterns are representative of symbolic culture. Symbolic culture exists widely in Chinese culture, but it has not been fully appreciated and understood. Characteristics is very important for the sustainable development of contemporary design. These auspicious patterns are used in each detail of the signboard. From the symbolic point of view, the deep meaning behind the sign is not only to attract business customers to patronize. We acknowledge the form of pattern is so simple, it is used to convey humanity through the ages which included their value beliefs and the cultural codes that have been followed from ancient times. These auspicious patterns are the aesthetic pursuit of the people, signboards have rich cultural accumulation worth learning from us.

Keywords: Signboard, Auspicious pattern, Symbolic culture, Aesthetic regularity, Cultural connotation

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background and purpose

Some archaeological data show that since the Neolithic period, the primitive people began to trade in the form of display objects, and these objects acted as signboards. With the development of the market and the demand of trade, the form of signboard has been evolving. After the Song Dynasty commercial innovation stimulation, to the Ming and Qing dynasties, signboards have been widely used, becoming rich and colorful form market advertising. Chinese traditional signboard is a valuable cultural heritage. The design concept extracted from the ancient traditional signboard can provide guidance for the contemporary signboard design.

Through the traditional signboard, rich cultural deposits and various details of the cultural charm, the modern store into the traditional signboard culture to guide. At the same time, explore the creative techniques and composition rules of auspicious patterns in the design of signboards, to look forward to giving practical reference to modern design. Finally, through research of the cultural connotation and expression of patterns found within traditional signboards, the audience can glean a deeper impression on traditional Chinese thoughts and promote the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture.

1.2. Research methods

In this paper, literature research, qualitative research, and semiotics are used to analyze the auspicious patterns in the design of ancient Chinese signboards. The modeling features of auspicious patterns are separated from semantics, the aesthetic rules of auspicious patterns are analyzed, and the creation techniques and composition rules for auspicious patterns are discussed.

2. An overview of ancient Chinese signboards

2.1. Ancient Chinese signboard concept

Signboard is the ancient Chinese shop used to attract customers through pictorial logos referencing the industry conducted within the shop [1]. Display objects, models, pictures, words, or specific symbols conveyed information about the business and the products to consumers. To facilitate the identification

of consumers, the stores, industries in the production of signs, in the material, creative, set up have their own characteristics, in order to achieve the establishment of a brand, attract customers. Ancient Chinese thousands of hundreds of signs to create a rich representational form and abstract allegorical elements as a carrier, constitute the ancient Chinese rich connotation of the market landscape. (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Ancient chinese signboards

The history of ancient Chinese signboard development is very long, about in the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States period has been about the signboard records, China's earliest signboard records can be traced back to the Warring States period "Han Feizi": "Song people have to sell wine, hanging school very high." The hanging wine flag (see Figure 2) represents the liquor store. Early signboard in ancient China to physical signboard, but with the development of ancient commerce, people's living standards improve, the increase of a variety of life categories, some goods are difficult to show in kind, so a variety of forms of signboard, materials gradually developed.

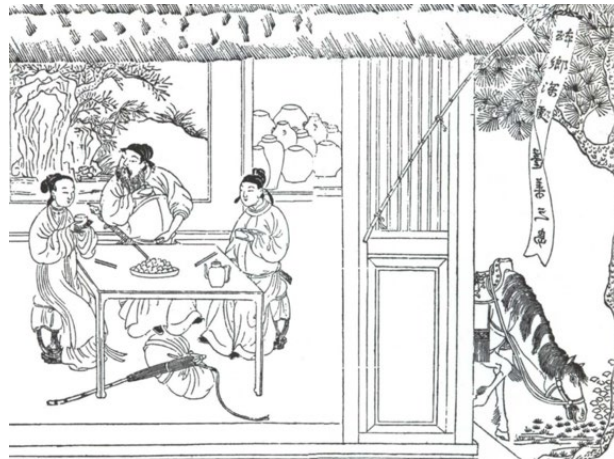


Figure 2: Ancient tavern

2.2. Classification of ancient Chinese signboards

Signboards in the development of the past dynasties, different forms, myriad changes. The author Mr. Wu Bingan has collected and sorted out the information of signboards for a long time. In the book Chinese Folklore, Mr. Wu Bingan, a Chinese folklorist, divides China's shop signs into about seven different types: physical Signboards, model Signboards, commodity appendage Signboards (including commodity appendage models), suggestive Signboards, lamps and lanterns Signboards, flag curtain Signboards and text Signboards [2].

The physical signboards is to sell what goods to hang the goods to attract customers, this is the most economic and direct way of publicity, businesses do not need to bother publicity, buyers can immediately understand what type of store, so it can be durable. For example, cloth shops with original dyes would hang dyed cloth as signboards (see Figure 3).

The model signboards in most cases if the sell physical goods is too small, even hanging object is not attractive, then create and sell goods similar to the model as a shop logo image and to convey it can vividly, exaggeration to convey the information to the consumer, make up for the defect of a lot of physical signs, so often adopted by businesses. For example, the giant sock model hanging in front of the knitting sock shop is Signboard (see Figure 4).

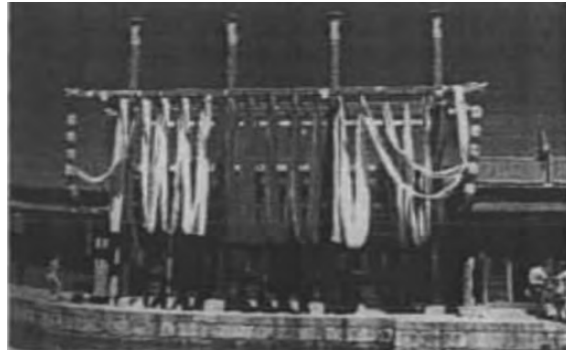


Figure 3: Cloth shop physical signboard



Figure 4: Model signboards for shoe shop

The commodity appendage signboards, when the goods cannot be hung, the objects related to the goods sold are used to express the main body of the goods, and people's association is used to stimulate the desire to buy. For example, when selling vegetable oil in ancient times, the liquid oil could not be displayed, but the container for holding the oil could only be hung (see Figure 5).

Suggestive signboards is a sign with special cultural significance, indicating the main feature of the product or the scope of the shop. For example, the red ear circle and blue ear circle on the signboard of a small hotel imply the ethnic difference of the hotel respectively. The former represents the sign of a Han hotel, while the latter is the sign of a Hui shop (see Figure 6).



Figure 5: Signboard for merchandise appendages



Figure 6: Suggestive signboards

Lamps and lanterns Signboards which are mainly used in the night market, can not only increase the decorative atmosphere of the store but also increase the identification of the store at night. The name of the store will be written on the lamp to enhance customer memory (see Figure 7).



Figure 7: Signboards of lamps and lanterns

Flag curtain signboards, such as ancient pubs will hang a lot of flags, some wine flags will also write text, Beijing's wine flag is written on the "too white wine poem 100", such as professional eye medicine shop hanging a picture of someone's eye graphics flag, more express the shop characteristics (see Figure 8).

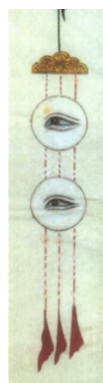


Figure 8: Flag curtain Signboards

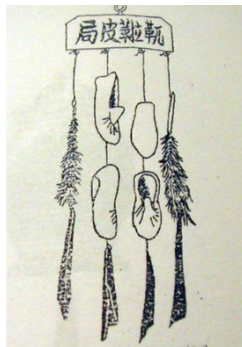
Text signboards, such signboards are simple and clear, the ancient teahouse on the hanging of a tea word, rice shop on the hanging of a rice word, pastry shop is hanging the name of all kinds of cakes (see Figure 9).



Figure 9: Text signboards

2.3. The creation idea of ancient Chinese signboards

Traditional signboards can be regarded as a kind of folk arts and crafts with rich national style from the point of view of their ideological connotation and craft. It is the materialized form of ancient merchants and craftsmen expressing their pursuit of beauty and life. One of the earliest works on technology in China, *The Kao Gong Ji*, says: "The sky is sometimes, the earth is gas, the material is beautiful, and the work is skillful. If you combine these four things, then you can become good" [3]. The production of any handicrafts is not an isolated act, but the result of the comprehensive influence of various conditions in nature or human society. Climatic conditions, geographical conditions, performance. Conditions of craft materials, business personal aesthetic conditions are very important factors in the production of Signboards. In different areas of China, due to the differences in the natural environment, will lead to the existence of a particular Signboards or not. Cold climate, such as northeast China in ancient times, the people of the north will use Wu La grass to make shoes, to achieve the effect of warm, then local appeared many stores specializing in this kind of warm shoes, and for suspension physical Signboards. And humid climate, warm in southern China, there is no Wu La grass in natural resources, climate has also led to southern China does not have such business market, so there is no such shops and brand. Similarly, jianbing was a typical food in the north of China in ancient times, while there was no such eating habit in the south. Therefore, the Signboards of half a pancake model could not have appeared in the southern cities of ancient China (see Figure 10).



(1) Shoe store Signboards



(2) Ancient pancake Signboards

Figure 10: Signboard differences caused by geographical conditions

Signboards of the creation of the idea is in the specific social environment, living habits, folk customs, aesthetic, craft, and other factors under the action of the produced. As the famous Taiwanese designer Wang Xinggong said, "Ancient Chinese signboards, to some extent, may be the continuation of ancient business houses. The huge internal system in them can reflect family customs, various forms of human experimentation, and also form the basis of Chinese social system"[4]. What is said among them reflects folk thought. The various design elements in the signboard reflect the living habits, folk customs, aesthetic taste, secular psychology and social values of ordinary people in the traditional society, which is the comprehensive embodiment of Chinese traditional Confucianism and the spirit of integrity.

Since ancient times, Chinese folk have the concept of gods and spirits, and everyone reveres them. The belief that good will be rewarded with good and evil with evil under the blessing of the gods. Out of the psychology of seeking good fortune and profit, merchants generally revered and offered sacrifices to their ancestral gods, such as Marshal Zhao and the God of martial wealth Guan Yu. This is a folk belief in the pursuit of wealth, mainly to pray for blessings and to protect the interests of the shop. In particular, the ancient Jin merchants were mostly engaged in the operation of banks, bills, tea houses, pawns and so on. Facing various difficulties and risks on the way of operation, as well as the competition in the market, they very much hoped to get the blessing of the gods out of the psychological need of praying for success, seeking wealth and avoiding evil. Signboard is a kind of commercial folk custom, its production and development and people's life and secular aspirations, expectations are closely related. Traditional Chinese folk auspicious characters or patterns are often endowed with the meaning of "good luck" and "attract wealth and treasure". Therefore, the ancient craftsmen make full use of all sorts of auspicious words or design in the design of symbol and using pun, metonymy, etc. Various rhetorical devices to symbolic interpretation, and produce various set of traditional culture, aesthetic temperament and interest, auspicious meaning of signature model, by businesses and ordinary people alike. Many exquisite signs above not only a symbol of auspicious ruyi grain, corsage auspicious decoration, as well as ganoderma lucidum, auspicious clouds, longevity fairy, kylin, goldfish and other folk are known as the God of wealth image, the details of the sign structure reflects the pursuit of happiness.

3. The meaning of the auspicious pattern of ancient Chinese Signboards is conveyed

3.1. Definition of semiotics

According to the semiotic analysis of things, "the relationship between signifier and signified is reduced to its generated meaning, and the way to ask is: how does it express its meaning" [5]. Ferdinand De Saussure (1857-1913), a linguist and founder of semiotics, believed that the relationship linking linguistic lexical items could be expanded along two planes, in which each plane produced its own value term. These two planes correspond to two forms of mental activity. The first plane is the combinatorial segment plane, which is malleable. All lexical items are actually linked together in the form of appearance in the speech chain, and the program suitable for combinatorial segment analysis is segmentation. The second plane is the plane of association [6]. A semiotician, proposed an analytical method: to divide the infinite information that reveals the overall composition of the information at the research level into the smallest and most meaningful units by comparing substitution paragraphs, and then to form them into longitudinal aggregation categories. Finally, the horizontal combination of these organizational units is classified [7]. The Chinese have a rich vocabulary for good luck, and people believe in the charm of inscriptions on signs. The magical charm of Chinese characters goes beyond their literal meaning. They can make people feel invisible power. This is the function of ideograms such as "shou"(longevity), "xi"(lucky) and "fu"(happiness). They are words, but not just words, they are part of the signboard. Zhang Yaoxiang Beijing higher normal school professor (1893-1964), the comprehensive study of nearly 5000 signs indicate the characteristics of the word, he selected signs is often used in the study of Chinese characters, total estimated that each sign on average 2.5 words words, also found that the use of high frequency of just 800 words, the most commonly used word list as follows: "xing"(prosperous), "tian"(sky), "shun" (smoothly), "feng" (sumptuous), "qing"(celebrate) etc. These words represent the dominant ideas in the mind of the business. The relationship between the parts of the sign language is a very important problem, because different good meaning of the word can be derived to represent its auspicious patterns. Among these auspicious meanings, people mostly express them with various auspicious patterns.

The author divides the representative auspicious words into auspicious artistic symbols for analysis, trying to find out the hidden structure and association rules from the complicated ancient signboard auspicious symbols, so as to reveal how the creator transformed the auspicious meaning such as "flying

dragon rides the clouds" into symbols.

3.2. *Auspicious patterns in the signboard*

Table 1: *Classification of auspicious patterns on signboards*





Auspicious symbol system					
system	Signifieds	pattern	signifier	symbols	lenovo
fei Long cheng yun (Flying dragon riding clouds)	fei Long +cheng yun		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dragon • The clouds lines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image symbol • Designated symbol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portrait of lenovo • Portrait of lenovo
Fu Yuan Shan Qing(Good fortune is brought by doing many good deeds)	Fu+Yuan+Shan+Qing		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bat • Persimmon • The fan • The strings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbolic tokens • Designated symbol • Symbolic tokens • Symbolic tokens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consonant association • Portrait of lenovo • Consonant association • Consonant association
fu zi tian lai (Blessings will fall from the sky)	fu zi +tian lai		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bat • The birds • The branches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbolic tokens • Image symbol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consonant association • Portrait of lenovo
Fu lu fu gui (Rich and in an exalted position)	Fu lu+fu gui		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gourd • Gold stone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image symbol • Image symbol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consonant association • Portrait of lenovo

Table 2: *Signboard pattern symbolic meaning*

Signboard pattern symbolic meaning	
Signified	signifier
happiness	Gourd, Bat, Blessing, Moire
longevity	Peach, turtle, crane
wealth	Ingot, Copper coins, Gold mountains
Riches and honour	Osmanthus, Peony
As expected	Ruyi grain, magpie, Happy word
Continue long	Disc long grain, Swastika grain
Happiness and wealth	Gourd, Deer
Many men	Lotus seed, Pomegranate

In order to establish a real form of classification of the signified, it is necessary to try to recreate the series of opposites of the signified, and to derive from each of them a character. This method has been advocated by Yermislev, Sohuassen, Prito and Greimas. Yermislev, for example, divided the morpheme 'mare' into two smaller units: horse + female; These two units can be substituted by contrast to form new morphemes (pig + female = sow; Horse + male = The male)". The author has segmented the horizontal combination of auspicious symbol system, as shown in Table 1. Among them, the semantic meaning of "flying dragon riding cloud" is divided into two units: flying dragon and riding cloud; the semantic meaning of "Fu Yuan Shan qing (Good fortune is brought by doing many good deeds)" is divided into three units: Fu yuan and Shan qing and Fu zi Tian lai (Blessings will fall from the sky) is divided into two units: Fu zi and Tianlai. The corresponding unit of signified horizontal combination is the unit of

signified horizontal combination. The creator of the happiness of the signified often to bat, blessing word to express, longevity signified is often peach, immortal, longevity word. The signified of the meaning of wealth are often peony, osmanthus. The common auspicious symbol units summarized by the author are shown in Table 2.

3.3. Rules of combination of auspicious symbols

Semiotician Peirce Charles Sanders. 1839-1914 divided symbols into three different types, namely, pictorial symbols, symbolic symbols, and indicative symbols. According to the analysis, the horizontal combination of auspicious patterns in the signboard shows the following rules.

3.3.1. The auspicious patterns are completed according to the combination of different types of auspicious symbols

The auspicious pattern of “Flying dragon riding clouds” is centered on the dragon, and the moire pattern shows the attitude of many stars supporting the moon around its edge. Dragon and moire as visual elements for symbol signifier. The logical implication of the meaning of the word “cloud riding” belongs to the expression of the indicator. The complete “Dragon Riding the CLOUDS” symbol contains an image symbol and an indicator symbol. The Signboards for “dragon by cloud” is generally used in rent hired carriage stores, with the ancient officials or people intercourse dinner party to horses, some carriage is necessary in the home, some need to rent a car to rent, carriage shop signs usually decorate pennants, flags on the dragon pattern and moire, to represent the carriage speed characteristics, prayer travel wishes of peace.

3.3.2. Representational meaning with image symbols

“Fu Lu Fu Gui” directly adopts the gourd shape, so that the audience has the related association. Fu Lu Fu is divided into Fu Lu and Fu Fu two units. In Chinese, Fu Lu sounds like a homonym for calabash, which in traditional Chinese thought implies that wealth and prosperity will continue. Wealth is embedded in the gourd with the shape of gold beans, representing wealth. “Fu lu fu gui” is generally used as the signboard of banks or pharmacies, and calabash and golden bean are used as signifier to represent the expectation of a better life.

3.3.3. To represent abstract meanings with symbolic symbols

How to express the abstract meaning of happiness that “fu zi tian lai(Blessings will fall from the sky)” In order to complete the transformation from abstract meaning to concrete visual form, the creator should choose symbolic symbol expression. The symbol hides the deep meaning behind the surface meaning. Blessing from heaven is divided into two parts. Blessing from Heaven in Chinese uses homophonic associations with bats to signal happiness[8]. The sky signals the gods above, and the cranes and branches show the gods to bring good luck. The expression of symbols establishes a connection with the abstract concept of auspiciousness. “Blessings will fall from the sky” is commonly used in Signboards of gold and silver shops, because ancient people would wear ornaments to pray for good luck.

3.3.4. The indicator indicates a graphic association

Indicative symbols are often used between figures to imply and confirm the semantics of the whole auspicious pattern. Structuralism is a way of thinking that focuses on the relationship between things. It holds that every element of any cultural system derives its meaning from its relationship with other elements within the system. In the auspicious pattern of “Fuyuan Qingshan (Good fortune is brought by doing many good deeds)”. It is divided into four parts. Fu uses homophonic associations with bats, Yuan with portraits of persimmon, and Shan and Qing with homophonic associations with fans and strings. Each part represents a pattern, and the pattern composition implies the meaning of happiness to the viewer. The bat, persimmon, fan and piano string are logically related, and the final meaning of the overall auspicious symbol expression can be determined. If the position of the auspicious symbol is changed, the meaning of the whole auspicious pattern will be changed.

In the process of information symbol transmission, the most important is encoding (symbolization) and decoding (symbol interpretation). Symbolization and symbol interpretation are the key steps to communicate the psychological world of both sides[9]. The symbol convention is the bridge between symbol encoding and decoding. The author sorted out the main categories of Chinese ancient signs and the main body of auspicious decoration symbols.

Table 3: Signboard Symbology Analysis

Signboard Symbology Analysis					
industry	specific category	Signature types	main symbol	Decorative symbols	Ideological content
Catering class	The food store	Model Signboards, Commodity appendage Signboards, Flag curtain Signboards	Quantization Model, Packing model	The ruyi, The bat,	Wealth, Health, Happiness
	Pancake shop	Model Signboards, Commodity appendage Signboards, Text Signboards, The physical Signboards	Pancakes model, Circular, semicircle	He ruyi	Health, Happiness
	Steamed bun shop	Model Signboards, Text Signboards	Steamed bread model	Peach	Health, Happiness, Longevity
	A drinking shop	Suggestive Signboards, Commodity appendage Signboards, Flag curtain Signboards, Lamps and lanterns Signboards	The ring, The wine jar, The gourd, The lamp, The bowl	Cloud grain, Gourd, ruyi	Health, Happiness, In a long friendship, Smoothly
Condiments class	Sesame oil store	Suggestive signboards, Commodity appendage signboards, Text Signboards, Model Signboards,	Millstone, Calabash	Lotus, Ruyi	Wealth, Health, Happiness, Longevity
	Vinegar shop	Text Signboards, Model Signboards, Commodity appendage Signboards	Calabash	Tie up branch lines	Longevity, Wealth
Medicine	The medical library	Model Signboards, Text Signboards, Commodity appendage Signboards	Turtle cover, Calabash	The bat, Calabash lines, Clouds	Longevity, Wealth, Health happiness
	Ophthalmic shops	Commodity appendage signboards, Model signboards, Text signboards, Suggestive signboards, Lamps and lanterns signboards	Text, Plaster model, Herbal model, Calabash, Pills model	The fish, The dragon, The peach, The bat, Calabash lines	Longevity, Health, Happiness

Through the above analysis, it can be concluded that different semantic units can present different visual forms according to different associative ways. For the expression form of happy association, the creator can choose bat, moire. For the expression of the meaning of longevity, the creator can choose the life peach pattern, life fairy, longevity character. For the expression of long meaning, the creator can choose auspicious symbols such as pine and cypress. In horizontal combination of auspicious patterns, equivalent morphemes can be replaced. Auspicious signs are divided into parts, including happiness, longevity, wealth, long, auspicious, wealth and other common signifier units, and bat, blessing, peach, longevity, osmanthus, pan long, pine and cypress, orange, copper money and other common signifier units. It is this combination of elements that creates auspicious patterns. Different types of symbols constitute the horizontal combination: image symbols express the representational meaning according to the similarity; Symbolic symbols express abstract meanings and develop associations of homonyms, metaphors and contracts. The underlying logical symbol determines the complete meaning of the whole symbol. All the above rules constitute the structure and association rules hidden by the complicated auspicious patterns.(see Table 3).

4. Conclusion

As a popular symbol popular with ordinary people in traditional society, Chinese traditional signboards not only have the cognition of configuration and indication, but also have rich emotion and symbolism. Through the auspicious patterns of visual symbols to convey rich emotional implication and exquisite artistic conception to make brand strong subjective image, the habits and customs of the subjective image is a traditional society, lifestyle and aesthetic temperament and interest, religious beliefs, such as more profound connotation of national culture psychology of reflection, with considerable aesthetic value, contains rich emotional factors. As Mr Zhang Daoyi on folk art edge when objects are placed on the content of the auspicious implies "fu, lu, shou, happiness, wealth, kyrgyzstan, and, Ann, and the" ten words summed up, such aesthetic appeal extremely subjective image is "people, who, from concept to survive, is yearning, and the pursuit of ideal and desire of praises and good life, It is a true portrayal of auspiciousness, happiness and happiness. This auspicious meaning is also in line with modern people's emotional needs for a better and happy life and ideal has a certain practical significance. On the other hand, signboards are also the result of symbolization of specific historical and cultural customs in traditional society. These customary symbols are the abstract and summary of folk culture and folk culture at that time, and also an organic part of traditional Chinese culture. National culture is the source of modern design, to deconstruct of ancient Signboards, we will find some of the elements is to now can continue in our application of modern design, the revival of the traditional design of modern design to borrow shell, we will be the connotation of the traditional design among them, to push a more traditional styles of modern design.

In the contemporary design, we should also develop in the change, not invariable. At the same time, we should not only learn to use the appearance of the sign, more is to learn the cultural connotation of the Signboards, learn its application with traditional culture, actively refine the cultural symbol in the sign, and apply it in contemporary design. Signboards have a variety of rich meaning of auspicious patterns worth learning from, these are our contemporary design to provide rich design elements. Signboards change and extremely national characteristics, is an indispensable cultural symbol in the traditional society, we through the refining and reprocessing of Signboards, can better promote the modern design of the national character.

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