

Research on the inheritance and development of Chinese traditional culture in design

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Abstract: *Chinese traditional culture has a long history, and its rich historical and cultural heritage has left us with a wide range of cultural treasures. In the context of the new era of globalization, how can we inherit and spread Chinese traditional culture through design? This article mainly analyzes the current situation and existing problems of inheriting and spreading Chinese traditional culture through contemporary design, and proposes that Chinese traditional cultural elements should be introduced into design to improve functionality and combine emotionality, so as to better inherit and spread Chinese traditional culture in design.*

Keywords: *Chinese traditional culture; design; emotionalization*

1. Introduction

Traditional culture is a kind of culture that reflects the characteristics and style of a nation through the sedimentation and evolution of civilizations in various periods of a nation. It is the sum of all material and spiritual wealth created by various nations. Chinese traditional culture is the cultural root of the Chinese nation that has been nurtured for more than 5,000 years. It is the unique spiritual symbol of the Chinese nation and the root and soul of the Chinese nation. Chinese traditional culture includes Chinese philosophy and thought, Chinese characters, art and other unique Chinese culture. It contains the core of the thought and spirit of our people and provides a strong spiritual support for the Chinese nation.

2. The importance of design to the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese culture

Today, the world is in a "great change that has not happened in a century". The Chinese miracle has made the world stage look forward to Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions. This is an opportunity to promote the excellent traditional Chinese culture. In the new era, we must adhere to the ancient and modern, and the most important and sufficient condition for the inheritance and dissemination of traditional culture is to connect with contemporary life. Once things have no practical significance and are separated from the times, they will inevitably lead to lack of vitality and be forgotten. Gao Xiaokang pointed out that traditional culture is the "past" on the timeline. However, in the contemporary cultural ecology of time and space juxtaposition, the "past" as a different quality of coexistence with the "present" makes the cultural space have complex heterogeneous and diverse ecological characteristics. ^[1]"Adhere to creative transformation and innovative development, find the connection point between traditional culture and modern life", "Integrate artistic creativity with Chinese cultural values, combine contemporary aesthetic pursuits, and activate the vitality of Chinese culture." ^[2]The essence of traditional culture entering the "present" society from the "past" is that the cultural group needs to reconstruct and regenerate in the current social context based on historical and cultural memory through some innovative means, so as to integrate traditional culture into contemporary life and the development process of modern society.

With the development and changes of society, traditional culture needs to adapt to modern life in order to maintain its vitality and influence. Design is actually a cultural design. It is not only about creating beautiful objects or spaces, but also carries cultural connotations and values. It is a means of integrating traditional culture with modern life. By combining the spiritual elements of traditional Chinese culture with the needs of modern society and transforming them into material products through design, attractive and modern material products can be created. This kind of innovation can explore a new development path for traditional culture, attract more people to be interested in traditional culture, promote the spread of traditional culture in modern society, and help promote the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional Chinese culture.

3. The current situation of contemporary design inheriting and spreading Chinese traditional culture

After the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2002 clearly put forward the basic task of "actively developing cultural undertakings and cultural industries", the development of cultural industries has been elevated to an unprecedented strategic height. Incorporating Chinese traditional cultural elements into contemporary design and realizing the materialization and commercialization of traditional cultural resources provide multiple possibilities for the development of cultural industries.

3.1 Graphic design

Graphic designers should understand the meaning behind various Chinese traditional cultures, make reasonable innovations and use of elements, and enable Chinese traditional cultural elements to be organically integrated into works in combination with modern design concepts. Not only can the artistic value of the works be improved, but also the traditional culture of our country can be spread and promoted through the works.

As a leading figure in the Chinese film poster industry, designer Huang Hai was praised by Western media as a poster design master of "Chinese design is rising". In his works, you can not only feel the artistic conception, but also the unique Chinese flavor hidden in the posters. In the series of posters designed for the movie "Shadow", he used black, white and gray to construct an ink world with the charm of Chinese traditional culture. In Chinese culture, black and white symbolize yin and yang. Yin and yang complement each other, and black and white blend into each other. The Tai Chi version of the poster in the Shadow series uses black and white as the main colors and adopts the Tai Chi elements of Chinese Yin-Yang philosophy (see Figure 1). The Tai Chi diagram reveals the opposition and unity of yin and yang. The interdependence and transformation of the two divided yin and yang echo the protagonist's two roles in the movie, combining the purpose of the movie with the traditional meaning it expresses, presenting a dynamic visual effect, and creating a subtle atmosphere when the protagonist plays chess with his substitute^[3]. The whole poster contrasts with the white brush calligraphy and the gray and black ink-and-wash style background. The visual tension it brings is full of Chinese aesthetics, alluding to the direction of the film's plot development, setting off the tragic ending of the film, and attracting the interest of the audience.



Figure 1: Tai Chi version of "Shadow" poster.

"Take its shape and extend its meaning", extracting traditional cultural elements and organically integrating them with graphic design in the design can not only better reflect the artistic level of graphic designers, show the connotation of design works, but also inherit and spread my country's excellent traditional culture.

3.2 Architectural Design

Traditional architecture is generally designed based on the regional characteristics, cultural background and social environment of its location. Therefore, the concept and design principles of traditional architectural design are often closely related to traditional culture. With the development of globalization, the integration of foreign culture has brought great crisis to traditional architecture. Chinese contemporary architectural design faces the challenge of retaining traditional architectural style under the trend of globalization.

Chinese-American designer I.M. Pei used a variety of traditional cultural symbols in the architectural design of Xiangshan Hotel (see Figure 2). "Dark tiles and white walls" is a traditional color symbol system with black, white and gray as the main tones, which is unique to the residential buildings in the Jiangnan region of my country. It reflects the unique tranquility, comfort, elegance and simplicity of the Jiangnan region. In the color design of Xiangshan Hotel, the color system of Jiangnan residential buildings is adopted. The hotel is dominated by white as a whole, such as most of the walls are painted white; gray is the intermediate tone. For example, the roof uses black and gray bricks and tiles; yellow-brown is used as an embellishment color, such as wooden stairs. These three color combinations combined with the surrounding landscape make people easily think of traditional gardens, adding a literati atmosphere to the building based on cultural memory.



Figure 2: Xiangshan Hotel.

Palace lanterns are popular lamps in my country during the Qingming period. The shape of palace lanterns is symmetrical, and the frame is generally made of precious woods such as mahogany, sandalwood, and rosewood. Each corner of the top is connected to a red tassel, and the lamp body is mostly painted with exquisite traditional auspicious patterns. The overall palace lantern is exquisite, elegant and luxurious (see Figure 3). I.M. Pei borrowed from the traditional four-corner palace lantern form to redesign it (see Figure 4). The basic frame of the palace lantern is retained, and its lamp head is rotated 45 degrees, making it more three-dimensional and simpler, which conforms to the aesthetics of contemporary furniture. In terms of color, white is used as the main color, and black and gray are used as the secondary color, which is visually consistent with the overall building. Palace lantern-style lamps are irregularly distributed in the lobby and main garden, echoing other traditional decorative elements, presenting an artistic beauty that combines tradition and modernity. The margins must be set as the following:



Figure 3: Palace Lantern.



Figure 4: Palace lantern-style lamps in Xiangshan Hotel.

The Xiangshan Hotel designed by I.M. Pei points out a new design innovation path for architectural design - drawing inspiration from the profound Chinese traditional culture, getting rid of the impact of foreign culture, and designing buildings that can reflect China's excellent traditional culture through the recoding of cultural symbols. Incorporating traditional cultural elements into contemporary architectural design cannot simply copy and paste them, but should be redesigned in the current humanistic context to meet the aesthetic and functional needs of modern people. As one of the carriers of human civilization, architecture has the function of inheriting and spreading culture. Excellent architectural designers should correctly convey and transform cultural information in architecture.

3.3 Packaging design

If my country's modern packaging design wants to occupy a corner in the world, it must learn to use traditional cultural elements to improve its own recognition. If traditional cultural elements are to play a positive role in packaging design, they must not only be able to attract consumers' vision, but also be able to reflect the cultural value of traditional cultural elements and meet consumers' spiritual needs for their own cultural identity.

Huaxizi, with the brand concept of "Oriental cosmetics, using flowers to nourish makeup", uses a lot of traditional cultural elements in its packaging design^[4]. In terms of color, the traditional Chinese color - dark blue is used as the main color of the brand, and it is matched with pink, which is coded as feminine, in the packaging design, presenting an elegant and feminine atmosphere unique to the East. In 2021, Huaxizi launched a gift box called "Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix". The design of the gift box quoted the allusion of "Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix" - when Fuxi was inspecting, he saw auspicious clouds carrying two large birds with colorful feathers landing on the phoenix tree, and the rest of the birds paid homage to them. The outer box combines the elements of opera culture, and uses three-dimensional paper-cutting technology and hot stamping technology to vividly depict the scene of "Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix" (see Figure 5). In addition, the eyeshadow box also incorporates traditional relief technology and window design (see Figure 6).



Figure 5: Xizi Centennial Chaofeng Gift Box.



Figure 6: Part of Huaxizi eyeshadow box.

3.4 Product Design

Today, in the context of the new era of global development, the government is paying more and more attention to the cultural and creative industries that are the industrialization of traditional culture. The cultural and creative industry, especially cultural and creative products, plays a significant role in the inheritance and dissemination of traditional culture. Traditional cultural elements are concentrated in product design, conveying its unique oriental charm. It can promote the dissemination of culture and enhance national cultural confidence internally, and also promote the development of cultural products externally. It is conducive to promoting Chinese traditional culture.

With the broadcast of the program “New Arrivals at the Forbidden City”, cultural and creative design products from the Forbidden City and other museums have entered the lives of the general public. For each museum, its own superior traditional cultural resources provide a large amount of design resources for its cultural and creative design. As an ancient palace, the Forbidden City’s palace elements are one of the important symbols that distinguish it from the design elements of other museums. In the third issue of “New Arrivals at the Forbidden City”, a cultural and creative designer designed a portable timer called “Work at Sunrise” based on the sundial outside the Palace of Heavenly Purity in the Forbidden City (see Figure 7). The sundial is an instrument used to tell time in ancient China. Palace servants judged the time based on the length and direction of the sun's shadow. Emperor Kangxi once summoned all the ministers outside the Palace of Heavenly Purity to compare the accuracy of time controlled by sundials and Western clocks, and concluded that the two were equally accurate^[5]. This "Sunrise Work" timer effectively collides and combines the traditional Chinese timekeeping instrument - the sundial with the Western timekeeping instrument - the clock. The timer is embedded with a 365-day circular calendar, each of which forms a gradient color ring according to the astronomical phenomena of the day, precisely corresponding to the daily sunrise and sunset times.



Figure 7: “Work at Sunrise” portable timer.

In 2020, the Palace Museum collaborated with People's Daily to design a series of Palace Museum cultural and creative stationery based on the Palace Museum's representative cultural elements as a source of inspiration. One of the mortise and tenon erasers incorporates traditional culture into the product, enhancing its functional and emotional value (see Figure 8). The design is inspired by the mortise and tenon structure of the Forbidden City architecture. The overall design of the eraser combines the entertainment form of building blocks. Consumers can splice and assemble each individual eraser, adding fun and entertainment.



Figure 8: Mortise and tenon eraser.

The most important thing in designing traditional cultural and creative products is to integrate them into modern life and to re-endow traditional cultural elements with functional value, usage scenarios and existence significance. The combination with traditional culture can not only enhance the product experience, but also arouse the emotional resonance of contemporary people. Only when traditional culture has value in modern society can it have social benefits and be actively "inherited" and "spread" by society.

4. Analysis of the problems of design incorporating traditional Chinese culture

With the continuous growth of cultural consumption, there are more and more designs with cultural factors, but a large part of the designs are relatively old and conservative, and there are still some problems in the inheritance and dissemination of traditional culture.

4.1 Similarity and singleness in form

Although many traditional cultural elements have been applied to design, they lack the recognition and understanding of cultural symbols and do not integrate cultural elements into the design. They simply copy the original graphics and patterns of the elements into the design. The design forms are similar and lack innovation, especially in the design of cultural and creative products. Some cultural and creative products are based on the daily needs of consumers. Many cultural and creative designs use stationery, canvas bags, cups, fans and other products, but simply pasting patterns on product prototypes leads to a high degree of overlap in product categories and a single form that cannot attract consumers. How to stand out from the trend of homogenization is a major challenge for the application of traditional culture in design.

4.2 Unbalanced combination of traditional cultural elements and design

When design creativity cannot be rooted in the profound Chinese traditional culture, the works are far from the culture, and these designs cannot be integrated into the local culture and modern life. Traditional garden design, palace design, and even the interior of the mausoleum are carefully designed in combination with the environment and humanities. They are not simply designed by patching together^[6]. Shilixiangzun Building is a new landmark in Cangzhou (see Figure 9) and the core function of Shilixiang Grand Canal Cultural and Museum Park. However, it was selected as one of the top ten ugliest buildings in China on the 2022 Architecture Changyan website. The overall shape of the building is based on the representative bronze ritual vessel "Four Sheep Square Zun". The entire architectural design is very concrete, using objects to shape the shape, which deviates from the sense of scale that the building should have. Although the building does not look very ugly, its actual utilization rate is low and it is not in harmony with the surrounding environment. At this stage, most designs do not take into account the intrinsic connection between traditional cultural elements and design creativity. They often focus too much on modeling and ignore the integration with the humanistic and social environment, thus losing the meaning of the design itself.



Figure 9: Shilixiangzun Building.

5. Design application methods to better inherit and spread Chinese traditional culture

The combination of Chinese traditional culture and design should not only focus on "form" but also "meaning", and more importantly, win with "meaning". There are undesirable phenomena in the market such as homogeneous design content and single form. How should design be combined with Chinese traditional culture to make it stand out and form a differentiated competitive advantage?

5.1 Traditional cultural elements intervene in design to improve functionality

Many designs on the market that combine with traditional culture only focus on the expression of cultural elements, but do not pay attention to the practicality of design. The combination of cultural elements is only superficial^[7]. We should start from the needs of users, pay attention to the performance of products, and pay attention to the functional intervention of Chinese traditional cultural factors in design. As mentioned above, the mortise and tenon eraser is a combination of products and cultural elements in function. In addition to the original function of the eraser, the product also has the educational function of mortise and tenon assembly combination.

5.2 Integrating traditional cultural elements into design with emotional intervention

Donald A. Norman, an American cognitive psychologist, believes that incorporating emotions into design can solve the main contradiction between product practicality and visuality, that is, while meeting the product's usage needs, it also pays attention to consumers' spiritual needs. Norman divides emotional elements into three levels, namely, the instinctive level, the behavioral level, and the reflective level. The instinctive level refers to designing from the appearance, making reasonable use of traditional Chinese color matching, traditional materials, and shapes, and visually conforming to consumers' cognitive feelings^[8], such as the Xiangshan Hotel, which uses the color matching principles of Jiangnan residential buildings. The behavioral layer refers to starting from the product function and purpose, continuing the use of traditional Chinese culture in the operational behavior of the design, and providing an interesting operation experience, such as the mortise and tenon eraser provides an interesting splicing operation experience. The reflective layer refers to starting from the "thought" of the product, based on the implication of traditional Chinese culture and the story expressed by the design, and then arousing the user's emotional needs for design, and through the design itself, the culture can be effectively output and the user's cultural recognition of the design can be improved. For example, the Tai Chi version of "Shadow" poster designed by Huang Hai combines the implication of the Tai Chi diagram with the story expressed by the movie, so that the viewer can "see at a glance" the movie poster.

In the design process, appropriate traditional Chinese cultural elements should be selected, their spiritual core should be extracted, and combined with the design to give the design spiritual meaning. Modern graphic works, products, buildings and the lifestyles they contain should be used together to convey traditional culture to the public, so that it can establish an emotional connection with the public, arouse the public's cultural emotional resonance, and improve the public's sense of identity with

traditional Chinese culture.

6. Conclusions

"National is the world", only by continuing traditional Chinese culture through design can traditional Chinese culture be recognized by the world and Chinese design can be on the world stage. As Chinese designers, we should consciously improve our cultural literacy and establish correct cultural values. We should learn to extract the cultural essence of traditional culture in design, explore the traditional Chinese cultural heritage, optimize and reorganize traditional cultural elements in combination with modern needs, give new forms and meanings to our works, and inherit and spread traditional Chinese culture through design works.

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