

Research on Modern Translation of Traditional Auspicious Characters

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ABSTRACT

Based on the new media perspective of multicultural integration, adhering to the thousand-year-old charm of traditional culture, this paper attempts to integrate traditional auspicious characters with modern design, combine the current consumer society and the culture of the times, as well as the new concepts, new thinking, and new carriers of the times, and use the inductive analysis method combining theory and case to carry out the research on modern translation of traditional auspicious characters through the perspectives of "symbolization, graphics, and interaction" to create new visual forms. The translation of tradition to modernity not only demonstrates the long historical and cultural accumulation of auspicious characters, but also activates the unique artistic charm of traditional auspicious characters, which is conducive to the inheritance and development of Chinese traditional auspicious culture.

Keywords: *auspicious characters, translation, symbolization, graphics, interaction*

I. INTRODUCTION

Auspicious characters are an indispensable part of Chinese traditional auspicious culture; at the same time, they are also one of the cultural carriers of the Chinese nation's spiritual characteristics and life pursuits. In the context of new media where multiple cultures are blended, traditional auspicious characters derive newer and deeper spiritual concepts and aesthetic symbols through the diversified development trend based on people's longing and yearning for a better future. This paper attempts to analyze the cultural connotation of traditional auspicious characters in the new era from the perspective of modern translation.

II. AUSPICIOUSNESS AND AUSPICIOUS CHARACTERS

A. Interpretation of "auspiciousness"

"Auspiciousness", as the name implies, means luck and propitious omen. In ancient times, people lived a nomadic life, with the aesthetic idea of "a big sheep was beautiful", making a fat sheep flock became a very "auspicious" thing. In the study of the oracle bone inscriptions, it was discovered that the word "吉祥" (auspiciousness) was written as "吉羊" (auspicious sheep), and even the bronze artifacts excavated from archaeology had the inscription "吉羊" ("羊" and "祥" were in common use in ancient times). It can be seen that the concept of auspiciousness has existed in very ancient times.

According to relevant textual research, the word "吉祥" first appeared in "The Book of Changes". It is recorded in "The Book of Changes • Xi Ci Xia": "Auspicious things have auspiciousness signs". The auspicious is goodness and is in accord with one's will; the auspiciousness is a sign of good or ill luck. In "The Commentary of Zuo Sixteen Years of Xi Gong", there is also a record of "What is the outcome, is it good or ill luck?" In "Shuowen Jiezi", there are even more sayings: "The auspicious, is also goodness"; "The auspiciousness, is also good fortune". The note in "Book of Rites. Golden Mean" mentions that: "The goodness, is also good fortune." "Han Feizi's Interpretation of Lao Zi" mentions that: "The preservation of life, and the acquisition of longevity, wealth and noble power, are called good fortune." It can be seen that with the development of the times, the implied meaning of the character "吉" is continuously extending, covering the implied meanings of all auspicious characters such as "福" (good fortune), "禄" (emolument), "寿" (longevity), "喜" (happiness) and "财" (wealth). People's pursuit and yearning for a better life in the future are expressed and displayed in the form of praying for auspiciousness and good fortune, which has a typical idealistic color.

B. Auspicious characters

Before the creation of characters, people's auspicious concepts were displayed through paintings and symbols. Throughout the long history of China, Chinese characters have undergone a long development

and evolution. Since the carved symbols on pottery in the Neolithic Age, the clues of characters have already appeared. These graphic symbols with the characters prototype not only beautify and decorate the utensils, but also convey people's hope for a better life in the primitive period. In the following oracle bone inscriptions and bronze inscriptions of the Shang and early Zhou dynasties, people prayed for a better future life to be realized through "divination". For example, there were records of "luck" and "great luck" in the oracle bone inscriptions. The characteristics of characters as decorative symbols made them have a strong artistic expression, and auspicious characters also came into being and began to develop. The era changes, and things also change. Since the Han Dynasty, people have paid attention to the beautification and graphic processing of Chinese characters. The eaves tile characters of the Han Dynasty are the most typical, and their content is mostly auspicious words. The most common ones are "长乐未央"(a long joy that never ends), "延年益寿"(prolong life), "千秋万岁"(long live the future generations), etc. From the ideological level, this kind of auspicious words show the Taoist thought of people praying for immortality and being with the heaven. This is also the bud form of expressing auspicious ideas in auspicious words. Later, literati and officialdom (in feudal China) began to use calligraphy to create, using poetry, couplets and other cultural carriers to express auspicious ideas. With the promotion and development of history, the content of auspicious characters has also been enriched. The content is no longer just a single pursuit of longevity, but also gradually incorporates new hopes such as praying for good luck, happiness, wealth, and promotion. The development of auspicious characters has become more and more mature, and its meaning has become more vivid, rich and full, becoming a wonderful flower in the history of auspicious culture.

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MODERN TRANSLATION OF TRADITIONAL AUSPICIOUS CHARACTERS

A. *The interpretation of "translation"*

"Translation" refers to the special translation act in which one language is translated into another language under the influence of the medium language.¹ And the modern translation of the so-called traditional auspicious characters is based on the accurate interpretation of traditional auspicious culture, with the help of the theory and methods of design, and the use of modern design techniques to change abstract folklore

¹ Lu Peng, Zhou Ruoqi, Liu Yanhui. Engaged in "translation" with "prototype" — Analysis of the mechanism of building energy-saving technology affecting building form generation [J]. *Architectural Journal*, 2007 (3): 72.

concepts such as "seeing auspicious signs, asking for auspiciousness" into recognizable modern design language, and directly apply to the creativity of auspicious characters. In the modern translation based on traditional auspicious characters, the designer is like a translator, integrating new ideas, new thinking and new elements of the times, combining the current consumer society and the culture of the times to reinterpret the auspicious culture, making the connotation of auspicious characters more all-encompassing and modern in shape, and activating the new charm of the traditional auspicious characters of the times.

B. *The meaning of "translation"*

Traditional auspicious characters are deeply influenced by traditional Chinese Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and other philosophical thoughts. They are a traditional folk art that integrates traditional auspicious concepts, moral ethics, aesthetic sentiments and many other factors. They are a relic of traditional Chinese culture. However, modern society is changing rapidly, design concepts are changing with each passing day, and Western cultural thoughts are beginning to prevail day by day. The living space, ideology, aesthetic taste and consumer demand of the traditional auspicious culture have undergone changes in varying degrees, and have gradually faded and fallen into a crisis situation of increasingly marginalized. Therefore, the protection and inheritance of traditional auspicious culture has become imperative. Research on "translation" of traditional Chinese auspicious characters, innovation and redesign in combination with new concepts, new elements and new carriers of the times, and realization of the re-interpretation of traditional cultural values are conducive to further extending the traditional Chinese auspicious culture, so that the public can more fully understand the connotation of Chinese traditional auspicious characters and the cultural value contained in them.

IV. THE WAY OF MODERN TRANSLATION OF TRADITIONAL AUSPICIOUS WORDS

As a visual language, in the process of modern "translation" of traditional Chinese auspicious characters, people need to re-understand and dig out the embodiment of Chinese traditional auspicious characters to obtain cultural context, aesthetic expressions, and formal rules, try to refine, deconstruct, and reorganize the visual arrangement of traditional Chinese auspicious characters and symbols, and recreate modernly according to the meaning of traditional auspicious characters, so as to form a sense of cultural texture with the atmosphere of traditional Chinese auspicious characters and create a modern design with traditional Chinese style finally.

A. Symbolization

Traditional auspicious characters were deeply influenced by the folk activities, moral concepts, ideals of life and many other factors in the society at that time, and pursued the modeling characteristics of "big", "whole" and "full" in creation, with a strong folklore and decoration. Therefore, they were more cumbersome in characters modelling. However, with today's increasingly significant globalization trend, the integration of the "era of picture-reading" has given auspicious characters a new direction in the creative process. In addition to continuing its pictorial features, auspicious characters should be more in line with the modern fast-paced lifestyle, try to use the refined design style to convey information with more implications of the times, investigate its essence, and simplify the complex. At this time, the symbolic design is born at the right moment, and releases the new energy of the era of traditional auspicious characters.

The student Lian Jingqing's "'福财寿'(blessing, wealth, longevity) Creative Characters Design" ("Fig. 1") is a new interpretation of the traditional auspicious characters "福财寿". By refining and generalizing the Hui style architecture, it symbolizes the important feature of Hui style architecture — Ma Tau Wall, and cleverly combines it with characters strokes. Because Hui style architecture is mainly black and white in color, the external form of Huizhou folk dwellings is mainly composed of large block white walls. From sunrise to sunset, the projection of light is constantly changing. In the design, this artistic conception is reproduced through the form of rich layers of black, white and gray, which is really ingenious beyond description, conveying the thought and spirit condensed in the symbol.

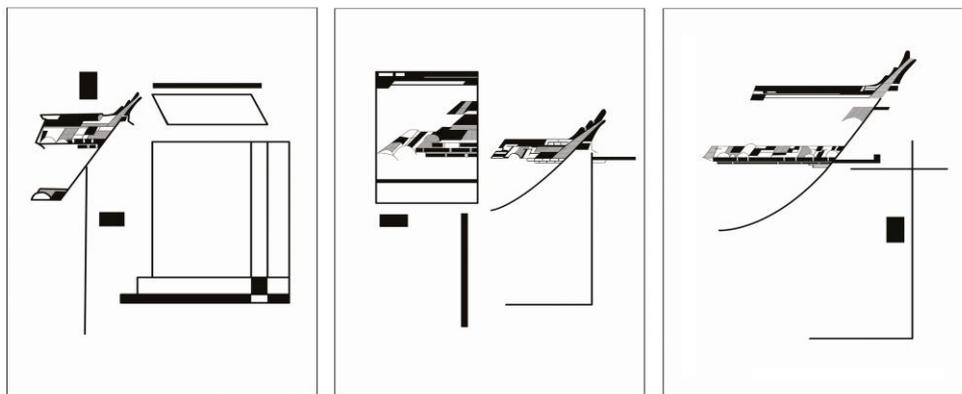


Fig. 1. Lian Jingqing: "'福财寿' Creative Characters Design".

In the designer Liam Lee's work of "Creative Glyph Design of 福禄寿喜 in 2018" ("Fig. 2"), it uses auspicious words to form 4 phrases "福海(a sea of good fortune), 丰禄 (considerable emolument), 寿山 (a mountain of longevity), 喜气 (happy atmosphere)", breaking through the traditional Spring Festival couplets form. The overall design uses a purely planar composition method for symbolic presentation. For example, it simplifies the strokes of auspicious characters and uses traditional copper coin shapes for abstract combinations. In the design process, the organic combination of the "deliberate" and "casual" is displayed, and part of Mongolian character interpretation is integrated, giving auspicious characters new vitality.

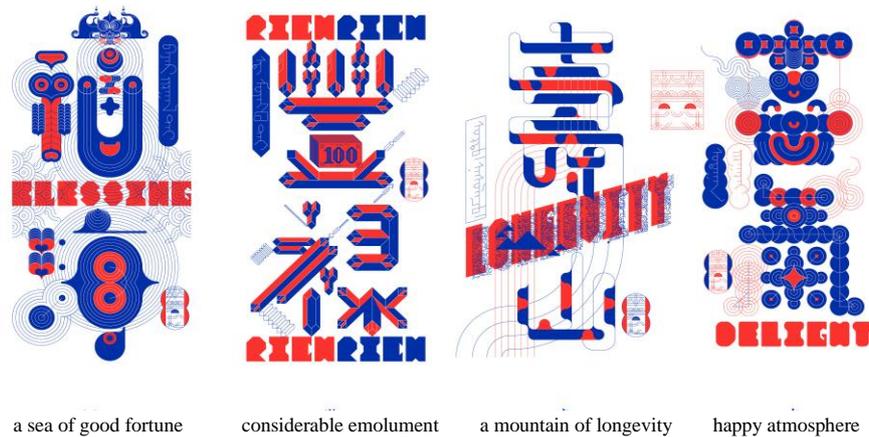


Fig. 2. Liam Lee: "Creative Glyph Design of 福祿壽喜 in 2018".

B. Graphics

The graphics translation of traditional auspicious characters is to process the original abstract characters structure graphically, combining the two concepts of "characters" and "graphics" together, and forming a new characters images with both textual ideology and graphic concreteness. As a carrier of information transmission, auspicious characters themselves imply the beauty of graphics.

In the eyes of traditional folk craftsmen, auspicious characters are sentimental, rich, and dialogic. Each character has its own expression, and it conveys a certain meaning, which can be said to be "each character has an artistic inspiration". And these so-called facial expressions are skillfully integrated into the characters design by craftsmen using life-like images of flowers, insects, and fishes, and use the horizontal and vertical strokes of the characters to vividly adapt to these natural forms. The ingenuity is enough to make people breathtaking. However, as everyone knows, people now are in the "era of picture-reading". The popularization of the Internet and the integration of multimedia have produced a series of concise and easily recognizable visual symbols and logo languages. Viewers can easily comprehend the information carried by these symbols regardless of their cultural background. Therefore, graphical characters visual symbols are used to convey emotions, which not only have the characteristics of characters ideology, but also have the intuitiveness and vividness of graphics, so that pictures and characters are compatible and complement each other.

The poster of "Celebrating the Return of Hong Kong to China" designed by Jiang Hua ("Fig. 3"), cleverly borrowed the outline structure of the character

"囍" and the English "HONGKONG" of Hong Kong for the isomorphic² graphic processing to form quite innovative visual graphics, highlighting the inner meaning of the word "囍" — highlighting and creating a festive atmosphere of Hong Kong's return to the motherland, and also cleverly reflecting the cultural characteristics of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region that blends Chinese and Western cultures, which can be described as a pun, accurately conveying the new artistic conception of traditional auspicious characters.

"Auspicious Words Font Design" ("Fig. 4") highlights the image function of characters, and cleverly combines the auspicious phrases "Every Year There Is Fish, Wishing You Prosperity, and May All Go Well with You" with abstract "fishes, gold ingot, Chinese knot" images.

² The so-called "isomorphic" means that Chinese characters associate the shape and meaning of the characters when they are decorated and beautified, find the visual relationship between the images and characters, and process the form and meaning into graphics. Excerpted from page 36 of Zhang Shu's "Font Design and Arrangement", 2006 edition.

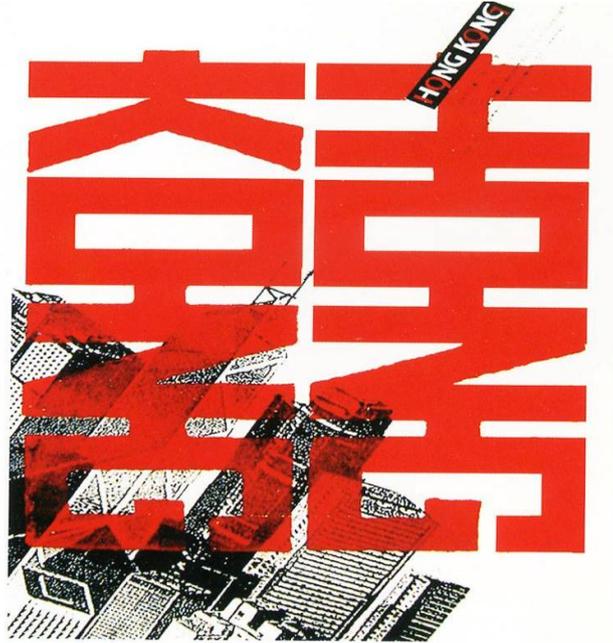


Fig. 3. Jiang Hua: "Celebrating the Return of Hong Kong to China".

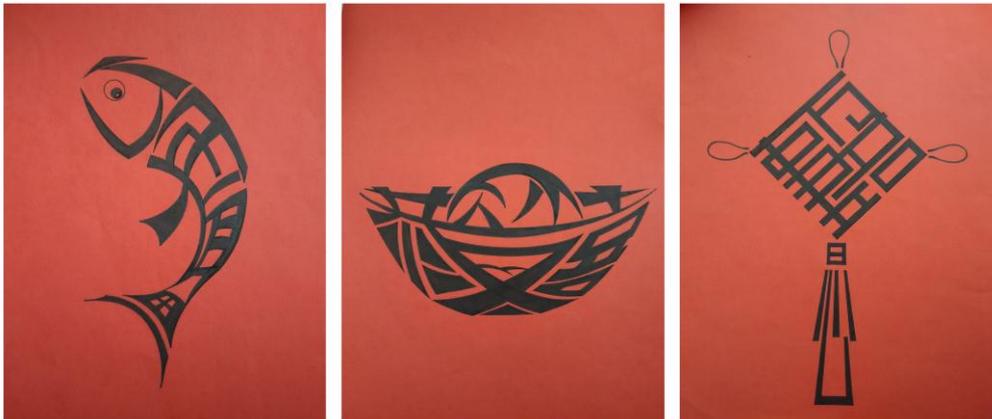


Fig. 4. "Auspicious Words Font Design" by a student.

The connotation of the auspicious characters is conveyed through visual graphics, and the characters and patterns complement each other, clearly showing people's psychological pursuit of praying for blessings, and appropriately highlighting the meaning of traditional Chinese auspicious characters.

The factory spring festival couplets designed by Taiwanese designer Echo Yang ("Fig. 5") are specially printed for the factories in the lanes and alleys of Taiwan's Triple Processing Zone. In this industrialized area full of machinery and greasy dirt, spring festival couplets are often the only change that can be brought to people during the New Year's Day. This group of

spring couplets design attempts to replace the traditional Chinese calligraphy spring couplets with new auspicious characters. The three spring festival couplets posters are inspired by spring making, lathe processing and electroplating processing, and aim to give the meaning of blessing to the processed form and translate them into graphics to become the new year couplets exclusively for the factory.



Fig. 5. Taiwan designer Echo Yang: "RENEWAL".

C. Interaction

With the diversification of social culture and the rapid development of pan-entertainment in the "era of picture-reading", the traditional auspicious characters design has also received a new definition, and began to pay attention to the public's entertainment and interactive perception experience. Traditional Chinese auspicious characters gradually get rid of the fixed mindset and try to mobilize the public to participate in a series of dynamic processes such as reinterpreting traditional culture, letting people experience the vividness and interest of the integration of traditional Chinese culture and modernity in the experience of contacting traditional auspicious culture. With the widespread use of digital media, electronic media and interactive media, information multimedia technology has increasingly penetrated into the field of traditional graphic design, and traditional auspicious characters design has also begun to have new media forms. For example, traditional auspicious culture can be combined with modern multimedia technology to bring a more realistic and comprehensive visual experience. Through the new visual medium to complete the "interactive" visual image translation, the traditional auspicious characters design stimulates the visual nerve of the audience, and also promotes the interactive behavior between the designer and the audience, innovating the way of artistic perception, thus designing more contemporary and humanized font design works.

With the popularization of personal digital media mobile terminal devices, the application and dissemination of dynamic graphics has shown an explosive development trend. For example, during the Spring Festival, there will be a variety of interesting and vivid New Year greeting emojis on WeChat and QQ platforms ("Fig. 6"). Traditional auspicious characters dynamically interpret the New Year's

blessings through different characters and graphic symbols, and become the best auspicious words for everyone to pay a New Year call, which is very warm and sweet. Here, the new visual medium is no longer a single and one-way expression to the audience, but through the new medium form to give the audience the most intuitive experience. It releases all senses such as touch, hearing and vision in order to achieve the purpose of perceiving things and the translation of visual expression. The traditional auspicious characters are so dynamic and multi-dimensional, bringing rich content artistic conception and visual beauty to the audience, presenting a visual interaction full of fun, expanding the space-time performance dimension of auspicious characters, and adding a kind of new vitality and experience.



Fig. 6. New Year greeting emojis.

V. CONCLUSION

The modern translation of traditional auspicious characters is an innovation of traditional auspicious art, as well as the inheritance and development of traditional auspicious culture. The translation of tradition to modernity is not to deny the value of traditional culture, but to try to converge, collide and merge modern culture with traditional culture, rely on the profound cultural foundation of Chinese auspicious characters, and realize the re-interpretation of traditional cultural values on the basis of preserving its origin, thus forming a brand-new cultural form recognized by the public. As a visual language symbol, Chinese traditional auspicious characters have encountered unprecedented opportunities for their development under the impact of contemporary visual culture and economic globalization. The emergence of new visual media has enriched people's visual experience and created a comprehensive visual feast of "symbolization, graphics, and interaction", realizing the translation process of image visual language of traditional auspicious characters, opening up a new form of art experience, increasing the elastic range of art, and at the same time, enriching the visual expression connotation of auspicious art.

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