

# A Study on the Current Status of Cross-cultural Communication of Traditional Chinese Decorative Patterns

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an in-depth study and analysis of the current situation of cross-cultural transmission of traditional Chinese decorative patterns overseas. By providing an overview of the definition and history of traditional Chinese decorative patterns, it clarifies their wide application and rich connotations in the fields of architecture, handicrafts, and costumes. The cross-cultural transmission methods and applications of traditional Chinese decorative patterns overseas, including their applications in modern products and architecture, are explored. Issues and challenges faced in the process of cross-cultural dissemination such as cultural adaptation, intellectual property protection, language and dissemination channels, and cooperation with local artisans and designers are then analyzed. Finally, strategies and recommendations to address these challenges are presented, emphasizing the importance of joint efforts and cooperation between governments, cultural institutions, businesses, and all sectors of society.

**Keywords:** *Decorative patterns, Cross-cultural communication, Traditional Chinese culture, Overseas communication.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional Chinese decorative patterns have a long history, condensing the essence and wisdom of China's ancient civilization. With the acceleration of globalization and the deepening of cultural exchanges, the spread of these patterns overseas has shown an increasingly active trend and has become an object of study, appreciation, and reference for people all over the world. This cross-cultural dissemination not only enriches the cultural heritage of overseas societies but also builds a bridge between Chinese and foreign cultural exchanges. At the same time, the spread of traditional patterns also brings a series of challenges and problems, such as how to preserve its unique charm while integrating with local culture. Therefore, an in-depth study of the cross-cultural dissemination of traditional Chinese decorative patterns overseas is of great practical significance and far-reaching impact on promoting cultural diversity and strengthening international cultural exchange.

## 2. OVERVIEW

### 2.1 Purpose and Significance of the Research

The aim is to explore in depth the current situation of cross-cultural communication of traditional Chinese decorative patterns overseas, the mechanism of communication, and its impact on cultural exchange and integration. By analyzing the characteristics, influencing factors, and challenges in the process of dissemination, the study aims to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the promotion of Sino-foreign cultural exchanges, the enhancement of cultural diversity, and the promotion of the international dissemination of traditional Chinese culture.

An in-depth study of the cross-cultural dissemination of traditional Chinese decorative patterns overseas is of great significance for strengthening international cultural exchanges, promoting cultural diversity and cross-cultural

integration, and helping to promote mutual understanding and respect among people of all countries in the world, as well as the common prosperity and development of human civilization.

## 2.2 Definition of Decorative Patterns

Chinese decorative patterns refer to a variety of decorative patterns and motifs in traditional Chinese culture that are widely used in architecture, handicrafts, clothing, and other fields. Decorative patterns can be transformed into either figurative or abstract or geometrical graphic schemes by distorting techniques, such as generalizing, summarising, refining, and exaggerating, to turn realistic figures of people, animals, plants, landscapes, etc., in the natural world. For example, figurative patterns include animals and beasts, flowers, fruits and trees, treasures, figures and deities, etc. Abstract patterns are based on geometric lines, including the square victory pattern, the ten thousand character pattern, the tortoise-back pattern, the back pattern, and so on.

## 2.3 Definition of Cross-cultural Communication

The earliest theorisation of intercultural communication was by Simmel as "the main idea of interaction between two or more individuals at a perceptible distance". Edward Hall, the father of intercultural communication research, first coined the term "intercultural communication" in *The Silent Language*. According to him, intercultural communication is the process of interaction between individuals, collectives and countries with different cultural backgrounds.

The study of intercultural communication in China began in the 1980s, mainly focusing on linguistics and pedagogy in the early days, but gradually spreading to the field of communication in the later days.

## 3. CHARACTERISTICS AND HISTORY OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE DECORATIVE PATTERNS

Traditional Chinese decorative patterns have a long history and carry rich cultural connotations and historical significance. Since ancient times, the Chinese people have made extensive use of all kinds of decorative patterns and motifs in architecture, handicrafts, clothing, and other areas,

which are not only the embodiment of aesthetics, but also the carrier of cultural inheritance.

In the field of architecture, ancient Chinese palaces, temples, gardens, etc. were decorated with exquisite decorative patterns on their walls, doors, and windows, which were not only pleasing to the eye but also reflected the people's understanding and pursuit of the universe, nature, and life at that time. Our country's largest royal courtyard the Forbidden City, has preserved a lot of buildings with decorative patterns. For example, the windows in the Forbidden City with the three-crossed and six-engineered lozenge pattern (see "Figure 1") symbolize the orthodox state power, connote heaven and earth, and signify the four directions, a symbol of the intersection of heaven and earth that gives birth to all things.

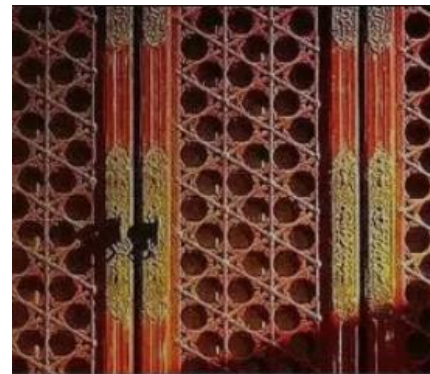


Figure 1 Three-crossed Six-Engineered Diamond-pattern Window in the Forbidden City.

In terms of handicrafts, traditional crafts such as ceramics, lacquerware, and embroidery also used colorful decorative patterns, demonstrating the superior skills and aesthetic pursuits of Chinese craftsmen. China's ancient classic handicraft patterns are countless, such as the cloud and thunder pattern, the cloud and thunder pattern.

There are countless classic artifact patterns in ancient China, such as cloud and thunder patterns, auspicious cloud patterns, Lonicera patterns, Taotie patterns (see "Figure 2"), etc. We are familiar with the national cultural relics. The national cultural relics, such as the Simuwu Ding, contain many kinds of patterns, such as beasts, phoenixes, birds, dragons, and human figures.



Figure 2 National Museum of China - Simuwu Square Tripods.

In the field of dress, traditional garments such as hanfu and cheongsam are often embellished with a variety of decorative patterns, which not only demonstrate China's special knowledge of dress culture, but each pattern often carries a rich symbolism. For example, there is a blue wool robe with a golden dragon and cloud pattern of Manchu in the Qing Dynasty in the Museum of Ethnic Costume of Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology (see "Figure 3"). This work adopts the wool technology, weaving eight golden dragons and such auspicious motifs as ruyi clouds, bats, longevity peaches, and eight auspicious patterns, showing a high level of craftsmanship and vivid pattern design. In particular, the mountain and stone treasures at the hem of the dragon's robe and the rolling waves of the water decorations signify the country's prosperity and peace, and the eternal stability of the river and the mountains, reflecting the aesthetic pursuit and deep cultural symbols of the decorative motifs on the Chinese costumes.



Figure 3 Qing Dynasty Manchu blue wool and gold dragon and cloud-patterned robe, Beijing Institute of Fashion and Clothing, Ethnic Costume Museum Collection.

Traditional Chinese decorative patterns are in various forms, including but not limited to animal and plant patterns, geometric patterns, figure patterns, and so on. These patterns not only show exquisite skills in form but also contain rich cultural connotations. For example, animal and plant motifs such as dragons and phoenixes, lotus flowers, peacocks, etc. are often regarded as auspicious, symbolizing power, beauty, and happiness, while natural motifs such as clouds, water, mountains, etc. reflect the Chinese people's reverence and longing for nature.

#### 4. CROSS-CULTURAL TRANSMISSION OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE DECORATIVE PATTERNS OVERSEAS

Traditional Chinese decorative patterns have been spread overseas in a variety of ways.

Firstly, as the influence of Chinese culture continues to grow in the international arena, more and more traditional Chinese decorative patterns have been introduced overseas through international art exhibitions, cultural exchange activities and other channels. For example, in 2022, an exhibition of Chinese traditional decorative patterns and innovative designs under the theme of "Tattoos Carry the Way" opened in the Pitt Building of the University of Cambridge in the UK. The exhibition took Chinese traditional patterns as an entry point, and visualised the transformation and development of Chinese traditional decorative patterns in the context of the times, with strong and unique artistic characteristics. It has strong and unique artistic characteristics.

Secondly, with the popularisation and development of the Internet, traditional Chinese decorative patterns have been widely disseminated through online platforms. Whether shared on social media or displayed and sold through online art trading platforms, it has made it easier for overseas people to understand and obtain information and works of traditional Chinese decorative patterns. For example, at the launch of the "Wenchang Star Traditional Culture Renewal Programme" at Ali Design Week in 2021, a unique patterned cloth bag attracted a lot of attention. Unlike common cultural and creative products, the design of this bag is inspired by the classic pattern on the antique Yue Wang Goujian sword. From the initial design stage of the pattern, the bag has shown distinctive

cultural value and design significance. The designers skilfully combined the ancient pattern with modern design elements, preserving the traditional cultural flavour and giving the product a modern and stylish touch.

Owen Jones, one of the most influential pioneering British architects and designers of the 19th century, once commented on Chinese motifs: "These works have never been seen before, and they are striking to the eye, not only in the refinement of the workmanship but also in the perfection of the colours and the harmony of the decoration of the whole body. It is my humble hope that all practitioners of the decorative arts will be able to see the patterns in this book, which is a style of decoration little known to the present world. The Chinese painted natural objects to the utmost, and the softness of their colours and outlines greatly enhanced the artistry". In the process of spreading overseas, people in some countries and regions have shown great interest in traditional Chinese decorative patterns and regarded them as a novel and attractive cultural element, which they have actively absorbed and learnt from.

#### **4.1 Traditional Chinese Patterns in Modern Overseas Products**

In the early stage of the rise of the "China Trend", the very sensitive luxury goods companies and the head enterprises of various industries have turned their attention to traditional Chinese patterns. The beauty and uniqueness of traditional Chinese patterns have been washed and evolved over the years, and have been borrowed by luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton, Van Cleef & Arpels and Givenchy.

Internationally renowned luxury brand Louis Vuitton's Monogram Old Flower, consisting of four-leaf flowers, a four-pointed star, a diamond-shaped inner bag four-pointed star and the LV logo, and used to this day to become a classic. Monogram Old Flower was designed and promoted by George Vuitton. His design was inspired by the graphic design style of Japanese badges in the late Victorian era, which was precisely inspired by the Datang rosewood painting through the lute now in the collection of Japan's Shokurain (see "Figure 4").



Figure 4 Comparison of the Da Tang Rosewood Pipa with Louis Vuitton Monogram in the Shokurain Collection, Japan.

Another well-known foreign jewellery company Van Cleef & Arpels, its iconic four-leaf clover Alhambra series of jewellery (see "Figure 5") is also inspired by China's architectural decorative pattern perspex pattern window (see "Figure 6").



Figure 5 Van Cleef & Arpels Clover Alhambra Jewellery Collection.



Figure 6 Persimmon patterned window.

Similarly, the luxury brand Dior, which has gained popularity among consumers both at home and abroad, uses Chinese decorative motifs in its products, which are modelled on the classic Chinese elements of flowers and birds (see "Figure 7").





Figure 7 Comparison of Dior's Bird and Flower Bag and Chinese Bird and Flower Painting.

The reason why foreign companies favour traditional Chinese motifs goes far beyond this is that the application of traditional Chinese motifs in modern products not only reflects a unique charm in design but also has a positive impact on the market performance of luxury brands. By incorporating traditional Chinese patterns into their designs, brands of modern products not only show their respect and understanding of Chinese culture on the international stage but also attract the attention and recognition of more international consumers, thus enhancing the international influence and competitiveness of their brands.

#### **4.2 Traditional Chinese Patterns in Modern Overseas Architecture**

The application of traditional Chinese patterns in modern overseas architecture is an area of creativity and cultural collision. With the international spread and popularity of Chinese culture, more and more overseas architects and designers have begun to incorporate traditional Chinese motifs into their works, demonstrating respect for and recognition of Chinese culture, as well as injecting a unique artistic charm and cultural heritage into the architecture.

Ming Xuan (see "Figure 8"), completed in 1980 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, is a typical modern overseas building and an outstanding example of the use of traditional Chinese motifs in international architectural design. Ming Xuan adopts traditional Chinese patterns as its main decorative elements, skilfully combining traditional Chinese culture with modern architectural design. Such as the cloud pattern, dragon pattern and phoenix pattern.



Figure 8 Ming Xuan Pavilion at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The spread of traditional Chinese decorative motifs was even more evident in the countries around it. Gyeongbokgung Palace, built in 1395, is located in Seoul, the capital of the Republic of Korea, and was the official royal palace of the Joseon Lee Dynasty. Influenced by the tribute system of the Joseon dynasty, the architectural style of Gyeongbokgung Palace (see "Figure 9") was largely influenced by traditional Chinese motifs.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, a striking term, "chinoiserie", appeared in European cultural history. At that time, Chinese porcelain, wallpaper, embroidery, clothing, furniture and architecture were popular in Europe, represented by England and France. Of particular importance were Chinese gardens, which profoundly influenced the art of gardening in Europe, causing it to change dramatically. In just a few decades, the European continent built a lot of Chinese-style buildings. Such as Sweden's "China Palace", and France's "Red House" (see "Figure 10"). The interior of the building is mostly used Chinese decorative patterns as decoration, there are often kinds of Chinese flowers and birds, auspicious patterns, and animal patterns.



Figure 9 Inside Korea's Gyeongbokgung Palace.



Figure 10 The China Palace in Sweden.

Even in Australia, which is far away from Oceania, the use of Chinese decorative patterns in architecture abounds. Located in the city of Sydney, Yi Garden (see "Figure 11") is built along the bay. The construction structure of the garden follows the traditional methods of Chinese gardens, cleverly chiselling the terrain into lakes, stones stacked into mountains, with the water as the centre, the mountains, water, rocks, trees and buildings cleverly laid out to form a series of such as the "gateway scene", "bamboo and stone mountain house", "Mountain Stream Waterfall", "Cui Rang Cloud Pavilion", "Mountain Forest" and other scenic spots. The buildings and pavilions, landscape bridges and rocks, trees and flowers in the garden are all embellished with traditional decorative patterns, making the whole park present a colourful and characteristic landscape. Above the main gate of the Garden, the Chinese character "wan zi" is used as the decoration, fully reflecting the charm of Chinese beauty.

Traditional Chinese decorative patterns have been used in numerous ways around the world. The application of traditional Chinese decorative patterns in modern overseas architecture reflects the spirit of cultural exchange and innovation. By incorporating traditional Chinese motifs into architectural design, overseas buildings not only

display a unique cultural flavour but also present a perfect combination of tradition and modernity. This application can be seen in all aspects of the building, from the decoration of the building exterior to the design of the interior details, the use of traditional patterns can be seen. This not only enriches the cultural connotation of the building but also adds a unique artistic flavour to overseas buildings, highlighting the importance of cultural integration and innovation.



Figure 11 Friendship Gardens, Sydney, Australia.

## 5. PROBLEMS FACED BY TRADITIONAL CHINESE DECORATIVE PATTERNS IN OVERSEAS CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The spread of traditional Chinese decorative patterns overseas has not been smooth. Although these patterns contain rich cultural connotations and artistic values, they have faced many challenges and obstacles in the process of crossing borders and integrating into foreign lands. Firstly, cultural adaptability has become an important issue. The design style of traditional Chinese patterns is significantly different from that of Western architectural traditions, so when applying them to overseas buildings, it is necessary to consider how to integrate them with local architectural styles to ensure their rationality and aesthetics in the new environment. This requires an in-depth understanding and research of the cultural background, aesthetic preferences and architectural styles of the target market, as well as the designer's ability to communicate and innovate across cultures.

Secondly, the protection of intellectual property rights is another issue that needs to be resolved urgently. As part of the national cultural heritage, the design and production of traditional Chinese patterns involves a lot of historical accumulation and inheritance. However, overseas, there is a risk

of unauthorised use or misappropriation due to differences in intellectual property legal systems and different levels of awareness of traditional culture. Therefore, it has become a very urgent task to protect the intellectual property rights of these traditional patterns and ensure their legal and compliant use. This requires the cooperation of government departments, cultural organisations and relevant enterprises to set up an effective IPR protection system and strengthen the supervision and management of overseas markets.

Apart from that, language and communication channels are also difficulties in the dissemination of traditional patterns overseas. Effective communication of the history, cultural background and significance of patterns requires appropriate language expressions and communication channels. However, due to language barriers and the complexity of cultural communication, very often these messages cannot be accurately conveyed to the target audience, resulting in the value of traditional patterns not being fully understood and recognised. Therefore, it is very important to establish a variety of communication channels, including books, exhibitions and online platforms, to enhance the publicity and promotion of traditional patterns.

Finally, cooperation with local craftsmen and designers is also crucial. The craftsmanship and techniques of traditional Chinese tattoos usually require a long period of inheritance and training before they can be mastered, so cooperation with local artisans and designers is crucial. They need to understand and be able to accurately apply these traditional patterns to maintain their original flavour while integrating them with modern architecture. This requires greater international cooperation and exchanges to provide more training opportunities and exchange platforms for craftsmen and designers to promote the inheritance and innovation of the skills.

In summary, the dissemination of traditional Chinese decorative patterns overseas faces many challenges that require the joint efforts of the government, cultural institutions, enterprises and all sectors of society to effectively address. Only by strengthening cooperation and innovation and giving full play to the cultural value and artistic charm of traditional patterns can the goal of cross-cultural exchange be achieved and the prosperity and development of cultural diversity be promoted.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The cross-cultural transmission of traditional Chinese decorative patterns is a compelling field of study, involving various aspects of history, culture, art and design. In the context of globalisation, traditional Chinese decorative patterns are not only widely used in China, but also widely spread and influenced in cross-cultural exchanges. These patterns are diverse and rich, with deep historical connotations and symbolic meanings. With the opening of the Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road, traditional Chinese decorative patterns began to spread around the world, influencing local art and design. In modern design, many designers have combined traditional Chinese patterns with modern elements to create unique design styles that have had an impact on the international design community. Despite the success, there are some challenges and problems that need to continue to be studied and explored in depth to promote the inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese culture.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Fund projects: Phase results of the Art Project of the National Social Science Foundation of China, "Research on the Dissemination of Chinese Traditional Decorative Patterns on the Maritime Silk Road" (Project No. 20BG132).

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