

The Spread and Development of Traditional Chinese Decorative Patterns Under Western Gaze

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ABSTRACT

Driven by the wave of globalization, especially in the early 21st century, the rapid development of information technology has enabled Chinese traditional cultural elements to spread more quickly and widely. Chinese traditional decorative patterns have attracted widespread attention from the West due to their unique aesthetics and profound cultural connotations. From the perspective of gaze theory, this paper explores the Western gaze, focusing on Chinese traditional patterns as a power relationship and dominant behavior. In reality, ethnic groups with racial consciousness and cultural superiority often "stare" at other races and cultures, so there are stereotypes in the West's cognition of Chinese traditional decorative patterns. Faced with this situation, future designs should have a deeper understanding of cultural exchange mechanisms, correct cultural misunderstandings, and explore more effective strategies for cross-cultural communication. They can focus on the communication effects of different art forms and the impact of social and cultural changes on disseminating these patterns.

Keywords: *Gaze theory, Traditional Chinese decorative patterns, Cultural communication and exchange.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese traditional decorative patterns are the external manifestation of Chinese traditional culture. Chinese conventional culture determines the expression form of Chinese traditional decorative patterns. The two complement each other. With the deepening of cultural exchanges, Chinese traditional decorative patterns bear the burden of external communication and exchange. Chinese traditional decorative patterns have a rich and long history. The origins of these patterns can be traced back to the Neolithic period, spanning various historical periods, and each period has left unique traces. From the geometric patterns and primitive dragon patterns of the Neolithic period to the Taotie patterns and cloud-thunder patterns of the Shang and Zhou dynasties to the twined flower patterns of the Warring States period, the Baoxiang flower patterns and scroll grass patterns of the Tang Dynasty, and finally to the cloud-crane patterns of the Qing Dynasty, each has its characteristics. With the continuous development of globalization, cultural exchanges have shown an increasingly high

trend in international exchanges, and traditional patterns have become the most intuitive communication symbols. Especially in the early 21st century, the rapid development of information technology has enabled traditional patterns to spread more quickly and widely. Chinese traditional decorative patterns have attracted widespread attention from the West due to their unique aesthetics and profound cultural connotations, triggering many "Chinese style" designs.

Gaze theory is integral to Western cultural criticism in the late 20th century. It refers to a way of viewing that carries the entanglement of power, will, and desire. Lacan's psychoanalysis is an essential source of gaze theory. He pointed out that "gaze" is related to insufficiency, lack, and desire, representing the subject's desire and symbolizing the subject's fall into desire. Later, Foucault (2003) believed that gaze is the projection of eyes and a visual mode of power.[1] Foucault added the dimension of power to the "gaze." In communication, gaze theory is often considered a power relationship and a dominating behavior. In

reality, people with racial consciousness and cultural superiority frequently "stare" at other races and cultures.

2. OVERVIEW

2.1 Purpose and Importance of the Study

On the theoretical basis of gaze theory, by analyzing actual design cases, this paper studies the degree of Western understanding of traditional Chinese decorative patterns and the dissemination forms and influence of traditional Chinese decorative patterns on the West. On the one hand, it is to prove the profound influence of traditional Chinese decorative patterns on Western design from ancient times to the present, protect the sovereignty and integrity of traditional Chinese culture, and promote the development of cultural diversity of traditional Chinese culture. On the other hand, it is to help subsequent researchers clarify the problems that arise in the dissemination process of traditional Chinese decorative patterns, inspire Chinese and Western designers to innovatively apply traditional Chinese decorative patterns, and further enhance the cultural confidence of the Chinese nation, thereby promoting positive, good and equal cultural integration between the two sides. The above is the primary goal of this paper.

Starting from the perspective of gaze theory, this paper combines actual design cases to study the profound influence of traditional Chinese decorative patterns on the dissemination of cultural communication and enhances the self-connotation of cultural communication in the process of perspective conversion between "gaze" and "being gazed." First, in terms of cultural inheritance, by studying the understanding and acceptance of traditional Chinese decorative patterns in the West, on the basis of protecting the sovereignty and integrity of traditional Chinese decorative patterns, it is helpful to positively integrate the design of the East and the West; secondly, in terms of cultural exchange and identity, by studying the re-creation and application of traditional Chinese decorative patterns in the West, exploring how the West understands Chinese decorative patterns and clarifies the dissemination channels, it is helpful to enhance China's cultural confidence and promote the development of cultural diversity; in addition, in terms of design innovation, studying the re-interpretation and application of traditional Chinese decorative patterns by Western artists and designers

is helpful to inspire innovative thinking and promote the development of contemporary art and design; finally, in terms of politics, the differences in the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture in the West are found, which helps to clarify the stereotypes of conventional Chinese decorative patterns in the West and lay the foundation for the innovative design of subsequent designers.

2.2 Overview of the Paper Structure

The paper will be divided into seven main parts: cultural communication and Western aesthetic tastes, gaze theory and relevant theoretical interpretations of traditional Chinese decorative patterns, conventional Chinese decorative patterns under the Western gaze, specific cases of pattern communication, and conclusion.

First, through field investigation and literature review, the origin and historical evolution of the concepts of cultural communication, Western aesthetic taste, gaze theory, and related theories of traditional Chinese decorative patterns are systematically summarized, and the differences in decorative patterns of traditional Chinese decorative patterns at different times and in other places are outlined. Secondly, based on the Western gaze thought, the reorganization and reference of Western artist brands to traditional Chinese decorative patterns are collected to explore the cognitive pathways and cognition of Western audiences to traditional Chinese decorative patterns. Finally, specific design cases are analyzed to summarize the degree of Western understanding of traditional Chinese decorative patterns and the forms of communication and influence of traditional Chinese decorative patterns on the West. The subsequent research clarifies the stereotype of conventional Chinese decorative patterns in the West and inspires Chinese and Western designers to apply traditional Chinese decorative patterns innovatively.

Through these parts, we will explore the origin and development of traditional Chinese decorative patterns, the design of cultural exchanges between China and the West, and the comprehensive interpretation of the research on the dissemination of traditional Chinese decorative patterns under the Western gaze, from theory to practice.

3. CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND WESTERN AESTHETIC TASTE

3.1 Concept of Cultural Communication

Cultural communication, also known as cultural transmission or cultural promotion, refers to the process by which a particular subject transmits or exchanges information such as knowledge, opinions, emotions, and wishes through speech or a symbolic system such as gestures, expressions, images, and text, and influences a specific audience.[2] This process is about information transmission and involves understanding and reconstructing cultural symbols. In the context of our research, cultural communication focuses on introducing traditional Chinese patterns in the West and how Western audiences interpret, accept, and spread these patterns. Under this theoretical framework, we will analyze the cognitive process of Western audiences on traditional Chinese patterns. This includes not only the understanding of pattern forms and patterns but also the cultural misunderstandings and interactions that may occur in the process.

3.2 Western Aesthetic Taste for Traditional Chinese Decorative Patterns

This section will provide a more in-depth analysis of the West's interest in traditional Chinese patterns. We will analyze the unique curiosity that Western audiences show about traditional Chinese patterns in cultural exchanges and how this curiosity affects their acceptance and understanding of patterns. This interest may involve art, history, or the pursuit of exotic aesthetics. By gaining a deeper understanding of the roots of this interest, we can better understand the two-way influence on cultural communication.

4. GAZE THEORY AND THE HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE DECORATIVE PATTERNS

4.1 Gaze Theory Concepts

Gaze theory is integral to Western cultural criticism in the late 20th century. It refers to a way of viewing that carries the entanglement of power, will, and desire. Lacan's psychoanalysis is an

essential source of gaze theory. Lacan pointed out that "gaze" is related to insufficiency, lack, and desire, representing the subject's desire and symbolizing the subject's fall into desire. Foucault added the dimension of power to the "gaze." In Foucault's view, the viewer constructs their subject status through "gaze." In contrast, the viewed will be "disciplined" in the process of being "gazed at," thereby passively accepting and internalizing the viewer's value judgment. [3] The subject's identification with the other under the gaze of another subject, such as the "small other"; the subject's identity under the gaze of the "big other" such as the social background.[4]

In summary, gaze theory is the relationship between the subject's "looking" and the object's "being looked at." Gaze is understood as the sum of the subject's feedback given by the object and self-cognition after looking at the object.

4.2 The Origin and Development of Traditional Chinese Decorative Patterns

4.2.1 Historical Origin

Traditional Chinese decorative patterns were ornaments in different historical periods and carried social, religious, and even political symbols. For example, during the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the ruling class focused on the social ritual system and hierarchy. To promote their supreme ruling authority, the upper class used bronze vessels and decorative patterns attached to the ship to express their noble political symbols. The tone of ancient Chinese bronze decorations was roughly determined in the Yinxu bronzes, with the Taotie pattern as the theme decoration in the Shang bronzes.[5] By deeply exploring the evolution of patterns in these periods, we can perceive the rich connotations of Chinese culture and understand how these patterns carry different cultural elements over time, which has an essential impact on promoting their overseas dissemination. ("Figure 1")



Figure 1 Taotie pattern.

a Source: Complete Collection of Chinese Patterns - Neolithic Age and Shang, Western Zhou, Spring and Autumn Period Volume - Page 27.

4.2.2 Regional Differences and Cultural Symbols

4.2.2.1 Regional Differences

China's vast land has nurtured a diverse culture, and patterns in different regions show unique regional characteristics. Traditional Chinese paper-cut patterns, for example, show not only obvious differences in form between the north and the south but also reflect the cultural atmosphere of different regions. These regional differences are often rooted in local historical traditions, geographical environments, and ethnic customs.

Chinese traditional paper-cutting patterns are classified by region into three categories: southern paper-cutting faction, Jiangsu and Zhejiang paper-cutting faction, and northern paper-cutting faction. Southern paper-cutting is similar to Jiangsu and Zhejiang paper-cutting. Southern paper-cutting is delicate and beautiful with smooth lines; Jiangsu and Zhejiang paper-cutting focuses more on the simple visual experience and exquisite composition style. On the contrary, northern paper-cutting has a rough and thick structure, a simple artistic style, and a deformed, exaggerated, vivid, and full expression. The design themes of paper-cutting are mainly divided into traditional decorative patterns such as flowers, birds, fish, insects, fruits, auspicious symbols, and humanities anecdotes.

4.2.2.2 Cultural Symbols

At the same time, each pattern contains profound cultural symbols and meanings. Traditional Chinese decorative patterns are mainly animal patterns and geometric patterns. For example, dragon patterns represent the supreme status in traditional Chinese culture. With the strengthening of centralization, the number of

dragon claws is used to distinguish the status level. Generally, they are divided into three, four, and five claws. The status decreases in turn with the number of claws. For example, five claws are only for the emperor, and the prince uses four. After Buddhism spread to China, the Chinese dragon was also given the "Dragon King" idea. People in Buddhism believe that worshiping the Dragon King has the auspicious meaning of good weather and good harvests. There was no concept of the dragon in Indian Buddhism. It absorbed the concept of "dragon" in China and created the idea of the "Dragon King." Therefore, the dragon in Chinese Buddhism does not have as high a status as traditional Chinese culture. It is usually the food of Garuda.

Since the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, lotus patterns have been a traditional Chinese pattern. The patterns are generally divided into two forms: front and side. The front lotus pattern is centered on a round lotus pod, with petals symmetrically spread out ("Figure 2"); the side lotus pattern comprises multiple layers of staggered petals ("Figure 3"). Since the introduction of Buddhism into China, the lotus has been used as a Buddhist symbol, symbolizing purity and auspiciousness. It has, therefore, become a central decorative theme in Buddhist art. With the localization of Buddhism, the open social atmosphere of the Tang Dynasty promoted the development of lotus styles, and based on the lotus, a painting of Baolianghua patterns was formed with lotus and peony as the main body, and grapes, pomegranates, or a mixture of the two as the fruit, with complex and unpredictable changes.

By interpreting these cultural symbols in detail, we can better understand the cultural connotations of patterns in communication and how they become carriers of culture.

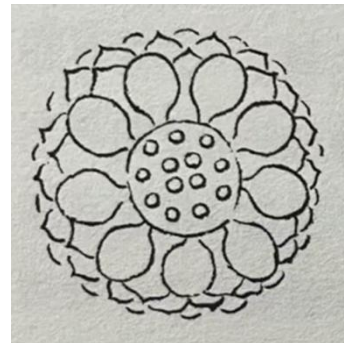


Figure 2 Lotus pattern Han Dynasty caisson.

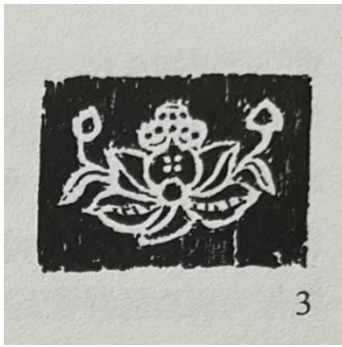


Figure 3 Lotus pattern Han Dynasty portrait brick.

a Source: Complete Collection of Chinese Patterns - Warring States , Qin and Han Dynasty Volume - Page 8.

5. TRADITIONAL CHINESE DECORATIVE PATTERNS UNDER WESTERN GAZE

5.1 Western Audiences' Cognition and Interests

In gaze theory, postcolonialism holds that the West's gaze on the East is a power relationship and a dominating behavior. As a cultural reality, people with racial consciousness and cultural superiority often "stare" at other races and cultures, making other cultures subordinate to their own culture. In the era of images, where postmodern cultural landscapes, or visual culture, are prevalent, with the changes like images themselves and the historical changes in the way of "looking," gazing at images has become the situation in our current lives. What it truly reproduces is undoubtedly a postmodern cultural logic.[6]

Western audiences show great interest in traditional Chinese patterns, which is reflected in their appreciation of patterns and interest in Chinese culture. As their gaze deepens, the audience may begin to notice the details in the patterns and explore their cultural significance and historical background. In this process, their cognition may be influenced by Western media, education, and social culture, thus shaping their understanding and interpretation of traditional Chinese patterns.

Although the Dabaoen Temple glazed pagoda was destroyed in the Taiping Rebellion, the eight-sided pagoda painted by John Nieuhof and the nursery rhyme mentioned in Andersen's book "The Garden of Heaven" have been deeply rooted in people's hearts, setting off a wave of China fever in European countries. In terms of architecture, the

British built the Kew Gardens Pagoda with a similar shape; in terms of packaging, due to the far-reaching influence of the pagoda, the Dabaoen Temple pagoda has become a representative of the West to describe China and even Southeast Asia. Takeaway boxes printed with the image of the Dabaoen Temple pagoda have appeared in many film and television works such as "Love Elixir" and "The Big Bang Theory" ("Figure 4").

This cognitive process may be influenced by art education, cultural media, or travel experiences, but this kind of pattern cognition is a stereotype. The Western cognitive process of traditional Chinese decorative patterns involves a gradual transition from overall impression to detailed interpretation. It is also influenced by the audience's cultural perspective, forming a unique visual understanding of these patterns.



Figure 4 Takeaway package with the image of the Dabaoen Temple pagoda.

a Source : Sohu.

5.2 Innovation and Reference from Western Artists and Brands

In the West, many artists and brands are happy to incorporate traditional Chinese patterns into their creations, such as the insert-screen clock designed by Cartier in 1926 ("Figure 5"), whose hands are decorated with dragon patterns. This innovation and reference enriched the appearance of Western artistic creation and gave the patterns new contemporary connotations.

Russian jewelry designer Ilgiz Fazulzyanov also combines the richness and magnificence of traditional high-end jewelry with the agility and versatility of contemporary jewelry, achieving an excellent balance between aesthetic inheritance and innovation. One of his works, the Mysterious China series, has an impressive ring. The upper part of the

Imperial gold ring ("Figure 6") is decorated with the traditional Chinese lotus.

Leaf patterns and waterfowl animal patterns are used as inlay inspiration, covering the jade with a unique artistic conception of Su-style stained glass windows; then, to the middle ring base, the designer uses blooming lotus patterns for decoration and finally uses enamel craftsmanship to make the ring base in red, white and blue. This shows how designers integrate traditional Chinese patterns into contemporary art and design through innovation and reference, enriching the expression of culture.



Figure 5 Cartier - Chinese style jade screen clock.

a Source : ilgiz.com.



Figure 6 Ilgiz- imperial gold ring.

a Source : ilgiz.com.

6. CASE STUDY

This chapter lists outstanding works from the 20th and 21st centuries, illustrating how Chinese designers actively spread traditional Chinese decorative patterns abroad under the gaze of the West and gained widespread attention.

6.1 1992 "Graphic Design in China Exhibition" Cheng Shaohua

As one of the earliest graphic designers in China, Cheng Shaohua used a combination of traditional Chinese decorative patterns and modern design in his posters for the "Graphic Design in China" 92 exhibition held in Shenzhen in March 1992, promoting conventional Chinese patterns at home and abroad and giving the West a novel visual experience.

"Graphic Design in China Exhibition" uses isomorphic design techniques to intertwine two slender legs, expressing the close ties between Chinese and international graphic design. The background color is the traditional Chinese color of wood leaf yellow. In traditional Chinese colors, yellow is an auspicious color. It represents the color of the orthodox upper aristocracy and symbolizes majesty and solemnity. In addition, yellow is the earth's color of the five elements: rich land, fertile farmland, and vibrant nature. There are two legs in the picture. The black and yellow of the left leg strongly contrast, stabilizing the whole picture; the right leg is white as the base, and the trouser legs are decorated with auspicious cloud patterns in green, red, and blue. The right foot is wearing cloth shoes with dragon or bat patterns.

Thanks to outstanding Chinese graphic designers such as Cheng Shaohua, Wang Yuefei, Wang Xu, and He Maohua, the exhibition system of the Chinese design industry was standardized. For the first time, it was entirely based on international standards, which led to the vigorous development of Chinese graphic design. This directly led to the establishment of the first Chinese folk graphic design association in 1995. The Chinese design team continued to grow and was widely accepted by the international design field, breaking through the barriers between Chinese and international graphic design. It was a successful case study on the dissemination of traditional Chinese decorative patterns. ("Figure 7")



Figure 7 "Graphic Design in China Exhibition" poster 1992.

a Image source: NetEase.

6.2 2023 Hangzhou 9th Asian Games Mascot - Cong Cong

The 9th Asian Games, held in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, in 2023, will be the first carbon-neutral

Asian Games in history and the first large-scale international sports event held after the COVID-19 pandemic. With the passionate sportsmanship, the Asian Games also conveyed China's 5,000-year history and civilization to foreign audiences, such as the medal design derived from jade cong, the torch design decorated with Liangchu spiral patterns, and the mascot image design that integrates three major cultural basins.

Among them, the mascot Congcong IP image ("Figure 8") designed by Zhang Wen and Yang Yihong is inspired by the jade cong culture in Liangchu culture. The mascot is decorated with yellow as the primary color, and the traditional decorative pattern on the head is taken from the iconic symbol of Liangzhu culture, the "God-man-beast face." God-man-beast face is a combination decorative pattern used to decorate jade in Liangchu culture. It is a pattern composed of three significant pottery motifs: circle, arc-edged triangle, bird image, and spiral pattern. It is also a collection of conceptual forms in the heyday of Liangchu culture. Finally, Congcong's legs are decorated with fish scale patterns.

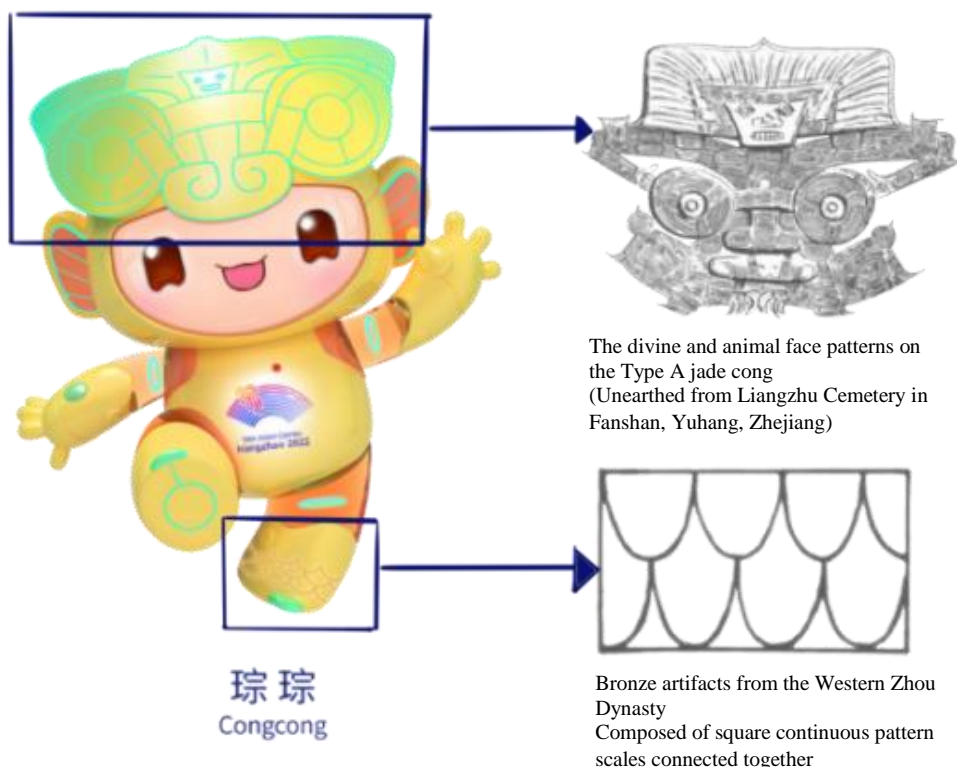


Figure 8 IP image of Cong Cong, the mascot of the 9th Asian Games in Hangzhou (analysis diagram).

a Image source: produced by the author.

7. CONCLUSION AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

7.1 Conclusion

To summarize the main findings in this paper, under the gaze of the West, traditional decorative patterns still have stereotyped influences, and the design mainly focuses on simple pattern replication with dazzling colors, lacking the control of artistic conception and elegance in traditional Chinese culture. In future designs, we should emphasize the significance and inspiration of promoting cultural exchanges, promoting artistic innovation, and enhancing social interaction. Cross-cultural communication is the output of culture and a process of mutual learning, from which every participant can benefit greatly. This includes a deeper understanding of the cultural exchange mechanism, the correction of cultural misunderstandings, and exploring more effective strategies in cross-cultural communication. Future research can focus on the communication effects of different art forms and the impact of social and cultural changes on the communication of these patterns.

7.2 Development Trends

Through the new perspective of gaze theory, the study has brought new opportunities to the "research on the dissemination of traditional Chinese decorative patterns," which is gradually becoming a hot topic in cultural exchange and art. Its development trend includes, on the one hand, in-depth exploration of the Western understanding and re-creation of traditional Chinese decorative patterns, exploring its application in contemporary art and design, promoting cross-cultural dialogue and learning, and strengthening cultural identity and diversity. On the other hand, studying the re-interpretation and application of traditional Chinese decorative patterns by Western artists and designers will help inspire innovative thinking and promote the development of contemporary art and design. However, disseminating traditional Chinese decorative patterns also faces some problems. First, in recent years, the external dissemination of conventional Chinese decorative patterns lacks typical images (for example, the pagoda of Nanjing Da Baoen Temple has gradually become a visual symbol for the West to describe China and even Southeast Asia after the 19th century). At the same time, the West's cognitive approach to traditional Chinese decorative patterns is single, and its proper

understanding of them needs to be further explored, which will lead to cultural misunderstandings and distortions in practice.

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