






From Tradition to Modernity: The Evolution of Design Creativity in Chinese History

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of Chinese culture over five millennia has instilled profound cultural self-assurance among its people, sparking a resurgence of interest in traditional values. This resurgence has catalyzed a proliferation of cultural product designs that encapsulate China's rich heritage. This thesis aims to explore the evolution of ancient Chinese design and its contemporary relevance. By tracing the historical development of Chinese design, we uncover its foundational principles and enduring legacy. Additionally, we analyze the adaptation of traditional design elements amidst the transition to modernity, shedding light on their continued relevance in contemporary design. Through a nuanced examination of this relationship, we offer theoretical insights and practical implications for design professionals. Furthermore, by incorporating specific examples and case studies, we illustrate how ancient Chinese design motifs are seamlessly integrated into modern design paradigms. In essence, this thesis serves as a scholarly inquiry into the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation in Chinese design, offering guidance for navigating this complex terrain in the contemporary design landscape.

Keywords: Chinese Traditional Design; Design Creation; Traditional Elements; Contemporary Design.

INTRODUCTION

Chinese traditional culture is a kind of national culture reflecting national characteristics and styles that evolved from the Chinese civilization (Liu, 1995), and it is the general characterization of various thoughts, cultures and concepts in the history of the nation (Johnston, 1998), which refers to the culture created by the Chinese nation and its ancestors living in China and inherited and developed by the Chinese nation for generations with distinctive national characteristics, a long history, profound connotation and excellent tradition. It is not only an inexhaustible source of wisdom for Chinese art and design, but also the root of Chinese art and design (Jensen, 1997).

After thousands of years of cultural baptism, Chinese design has formed a unique national character, reflecting outstanding creativity in design function, form, material, and other aspects, and the achievements can be described as brilliant (Davis, 2004). However, in the 1980s and 1990s, with the influence of economic "globalization", not only were economic ties between countries closer than ever (Kellert, Heerwagen, & Mador, 2011), but also cultural exchanges presented an unprecedented situation, the relationship between local and foreign cultures became increasingly acute, and traditional culture was subjected to a strong impact on Western concepts and ways of thinking (Adamsky, 2010), which was overwhelmed by new technologies, new cultures, and new ideas. Traditional culture is strongly impacted by Western concepts and ways of thinking, and new technologies (Anderson, 1990), new cultures and new ideas are washing the minds of the people of China (Totoricagüena, 2015). At the same time, design as a carrier of cultural, development has also encountered such problems, after experiencing the stage of "blind westernization" and "cultural return", the "Chinese

characteristics" of design are not sure where to go. After the phases of "blind Westernization" and "cultural renaissance," design imbued with "Chinese characteristics" finds itself at a crossroads, uncertain of its direction. Simultaneously, traditional culture grapples with the challenge of innovative integration into modern design paradigms. Therefore, under the background of unprecedented cultural integration, it is especially urgent and necessary to combine traditional culture and modern fashion, explore the Chinese way, and think about modern product design methods that can be interpreted globally and have Chinese cultural characteristics.

Chinese culture has a history of 5,000 years and has developed to its present height, and nothing is more amazing than the continuity of traditional culture from ancient times to the present day (Zhang, 2015). Some of the other ancient cultures with the same length of history as Chinese culture have reached a certain level of development and suddenly disappeared and ceased to exist due to some well-known or unknown reasons, and some have continued to develop (Feng, 2013), but have shown a "jumping" and extremely unstable course of development (Newman, 2004). Only Chinese culture, with Confucianism as its foundation, has continued to develop and grow slowly, steadily, and continuously over thousands of years of history (Deng, 2015).

However, during the May Fourth Movement, Chinese culture experienced a short period of "cultural discontinuity" (Clinton, 2017; Saich, 2019). During the May Fourth Movement, China opened its doors to the West, a time when it had been closed to the West, and the New Democratic Revolution of 1919–1949, which inevitably brought with it the negative effects of war (Wu, 2023). The development of traditional culture was greatly limited and impeded during this period by the poverty of the domestic population, the strong invasion of Western culture, the suppression of the traditional culture of the country (Spring, 2016), and the demonstration of its strong seductive power, and the fact that people, without much thought in the social and historical context of that time, began to reject the traditional culture and to propagate the Western culture. In 1949, the new China was founded, the country was not yet fully liberated at the beginning of the founding period, China was still waiting to be rebuilt, and faced with many difficulties (Dittmer, 2024). Starting from 1953, China began to implement the first Five-Year Plan, and large-scale socialist construction, including the construction of culture, was carried out one after another. In the following decade of the Cultural Revolution (Jian, Song, & Zhou, 2015; Hutchings, 2021) some wrong decisions and behaviors caused serious losses to the Party and the people of the country, and economic development stagnated and retrogressed, impacting the normal development of cultural undertakings (Hanson, 2019; Samitani & Onuche, 2022). However, fortunately, after the reform and opening up in 1978, China gradually appeared on the international stage as a big country, with economic development, political development, and cultural development (Selden, 2016). The enhancement of national power has played a subversive role in the development of Chinese traditional culture, and "East learns from the West" has become a general trend, nationalism, Chinese culture, and the Chinese way have begun to receive widespread attention in the world (Whyte, 2021). Of course, in our opinion, the revival of traditional culture is not only about getting the traditional Chinese culture to continue to carry forward today but also about developing a new culture with traditional Chinese characteristics under the new historical conditions and on top of the modern Western culture (Yue, 2018). Such a new culture should have two requirements: one is to continue to retain the charm of traditional culture, without losing the traditional connotation, secondly, it can be interpreted globally, and people in foreign cultures should be able to understand and analyze it without any barriers. Therefore, the use of the Chinese way of contemporary product design is a very good way to develop traditional Chinese culture, away from the inherent traditional elements and symbols of the constraints, from the Chinese people's aesthetic and lyrical, hierarchical concepts, the use of materials, the production and use, social life, etc. to reflect the unique concepts of Chinese people will be an important direction of the Chinese cultural characteristics of the design of the product.

In recent decades, China has undergone rapid socioeconomic transformations, propelled by globalization and the pervasive influence of Westernization. These multifaceted forces have not only redefined the cultural landscape within China but have also exerted a profound impact on the evolution of contemporary design practices and the international reception of Chinese cultural products. While globalization has facilitated unprecedented interconnectedness and cultural exchange, it has also engendered a complex interplay of cultural assimilation and preservation. Similarly, Westernization has introduced new aesthetic sensibilities and design paradigms, challenging traditional Chinese design conventions while concurrently fostering opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue and innovation. In this context, understanding the nuanced dynamics of how these forces have shaped contemporary design practices in China and influenced the global reception of Chinese cultural products becomes imperative. By unraveling these intricacies, we can glean valuable insights into the evolving nature of design in a rapidly changing global landscape and elucidate the multifaceted intersections between tradition, modernity, and cultural identity in contemporary design discourse. Thus, this study endeavors to delve deeper into this complex tapestry, shedding light on the nuanced nuances of cultural exchange and innovation that underpin contemporary design practices in China and their reverberations on the international stage.

THE GERMINATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF DESIGN IN ANCIENT CHINA

The most basic ideas of ancient Chinese design mainly arose in the early slave society, i.e. the period before the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period (Fang, 2023). A hundred schools of thought had already emerged during the Warring States period and then developed greatly after the Wei, Jin, Qin, and Han Dynasties (Lagerwey, 2018). Thus, the ideas of ancient Chinese design philosophy originated from certain basic features common to both slave and feudal societies in China (Ding, 2020).

Before our country entered the slave society, it was a long primitive society, and the relics and customs of the primitive society, as well as social values and ethics with primitive blood relations, had a significant impact on the design and creation of the slave society and even the feudal society. Primitive society from barbarism to civilization is the experience of the design of the art of germination and later design has a profound impact on the part: flint invention of fire, Fu Xi's Eight-diagram, knotting for the net, Shen Nong's Lei Si Plowshares, planting cereals, the invention of medicine, ceramics, knotting to remember things, the time of the Yellow Emperor, the creation of boats, cars, weapons, casting tripods, Lei Zu began to raise silkworms, Kung Fu's as a pottery specialization "Tao is", Cang Jie create text, Shi Huang for pictures, this time also painted the image of Chi You, and the "Shen Tu", "Yu Lv" painted on the mahogany board in order to Royal Ghosts, Yao and Shun era of sacrifice The Yao and Shun era systematized the rituals and the jade artifacts that indicate the hierarchical status: "Five Rui", "Five Weapons", and designed the colorful uniforms, Yu cast nine tripods, which were decorated with the shapes of ghosts and gods, so that the people could distinguish between the "God" and the "Boom", and the "God" and the "Boom", so that the people could distinguish between the "God" and the "Boom". "and "Boom". Therefore, the creation culture of primitive society is also an important aspect for us to examine the characteristics of design philosophy (Sandall, 2018). Design, as a selective and creative activity, has a stronger functional purpose and formal purpose, which points to a certain functional value and practical value as well as formal value and spiritual value (Walker, 2021). It satisfies people's practical needs as well as their aesthetic needs (Buchanan, 2019).

Therefore, when people made objects, they not only simulated natural objects in terms of form but also utilized their mastery of the laws therein to combine with the objects to creatively construct products rich in formal laws and meanings (Lastowka & Hunter, 2017). The bronze rhinoceros zun from the Shang Dynasty, as depicted in [Figure 1](#), stands out as a pinnacle of artistic ingenuity in three-dimensional artifact design during the Shang-Zhou period. The entire vessel is shaped like a rhinoceros, with its upturned nose serving as a hollowed spout, adorned with a depiction of a tiger-bird combination and a snake motif below the nose. The forehead of the rhinoceros features a pair of swirling serpent patterns, while its ears are adorned with cloud-thunder motifs, and its back with phoenix motifs. The surface of the vessel is intricately decorated with dragon and animal face motifs. Though the lid is missing, based on similar artifacts, it is inferred that the lid knob may also be in the form of a rhinoceros. Through an analysis of its features, this vessel is identified as originating from the excavation site at Lion-Shaped Mountain, Xianxia Commune, Liling City, Hunan Province. It is currently housed in the Hunan Provincial Museum. This vessel represents a harmonious blend of surface emulation of natural forms with deeper symbolic meanings. Particularly intriguing is the fusion of animal anatomy with functional vessel design, imbuing it with vividness and interest, thus showcasing a manifestation of creative thought.

These kinds of bionic artifacts will be skillfully combined with the actual function of life artifacts and the Han Dynasty bronze Zhuquiao lamp, Song Dynasty children's pillow, etc., to name a few. Interest is the design of works of art vitality and mood of the performance, is life, the embodiment of natural vitality, but also the maker of personal interest, meaning of the show, full of human nature of the creation.

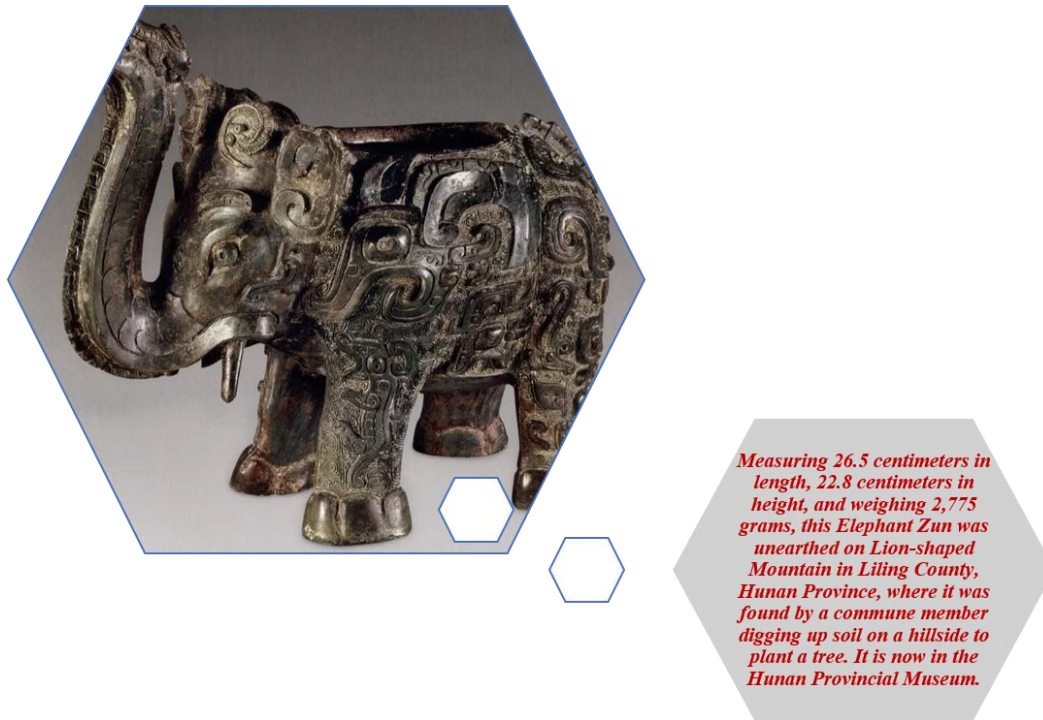


Figure 1. Shang Dynasty Elephant Zun, Hunan Provincial Museum Collection

In short, design is not only a purely material construction and organizational behavior, nor is it only the pursuit of practicality and functionality of artifacts production activities, at the same time, it is also an artistic and aesthetic spirit of practical activities. The art of design is the art of life, the pursuit of people's life in the pursuit of fun is also the main purpose to be achieved in the design, but also the reason why people are people's spiritual needs.

The British historian Collingwood has argued: "The process of history is not a process of mere events but of action. It has an intrinsic aspect constituted by processes of thought, and it is these processes of thought that the historian seeks. All history is the history of ideas." Although we can't fully agree with the above viewpoints, the understanding of historical ideas, not only helps us to recognize the historical events but also can be more profound to understand them (Black & MacRaild, 2016). For design, understanding the existence and development of art and design ideas should be an indispensable part. Perhaps if there is a creation and a design for the creation, there will be a simultaneous realization and thinking of design and creation. Therefore, both in China and abroad, art and design thought is very rich, and it reflects the development and change of art and design practice in the society at that time from one side.

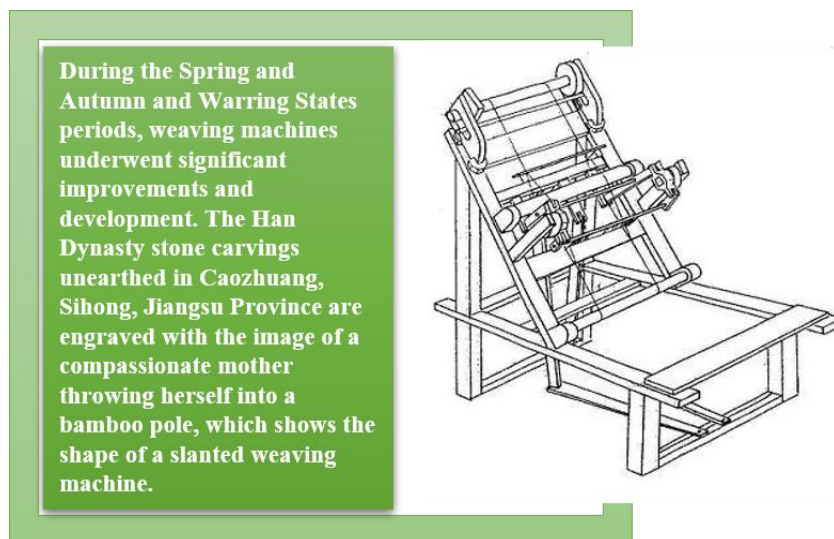


Figure 2. Twill Weaving Machines

The Ancient Chinese art and design ideas have rich historical connotations, from pre-Qin scholars to Ming and Qing literati and scholars, from monographs such as "Kaogongji", "Tianguongwu", "Changwu Zhi", "Decoration Zhi", "Tao Shuo", "Xiupu", as well as vast historical materials such as "Yan Xianqing Appreciation Notes" and "Leisure Love Occasionally Sending", to countless orally transmitted craftsman's mnemonics and graphic illustrations, with countless contents and infinite ideas, showcasing the ideas of art and design in various eras and people's understanding and thinking about it. The oblique loom weaving machine is a type of textile weaving apparatus. Depicted on a stone carving from the Han Dynasty unearthed in Caozhuang, Sihong, Jiangsu Province, is an image titled "The Loving Mother Tossing the Shuttle," which illustrates the structure of a foot-treadle oblique loom. This depiction indicates that the oblique loom already had a frame, with the warp and horizontal seat forming an angle of approximately fifty to sixty degrees. As a part of the overall social trend, art and design ideas are also dominated by the overall social consciousness and philosophical thinking (Parson, 2015). As the so-called wisdom of introspection, the philosophy of ancient China did not pay attention to the cognitive perception and analysis of the external world of the ontology of human beings but mainly focused on the achievement of a personality and morality in line with the needs of society. Therefore, ancient Chinese art and design thought inevitably carried strong political and social ethical colors, and deposited the specific values and aesthetic consciousness of that era. One of the earliest design monographs existing in China, "Kao Gong Ji", records a lot of design historical materials and sparkling design ideas from the pre-Qin period. For example, the idea of "beautiful material and skillful work" is representative. Figure 2 shows the oblique loom is a typical representative.

THE EVOLUTION OF DESIGN IN THE MODERN TRANSITION PERIOD

The Opium War was the beginning of a qualitative change in the concept of modern Chinese design. Before that, the "closed-door policy" of the Qing Dynasty for more than a hundred years not only blocked the introduction of Western science and culture but also affected the progress of modern Chinese people's concepts for a long time, resulting in the antagonism between Eastern and Western cultures. Especially in the Qing Dynasty at the end of feudal society, feudalism was more intense than in the Ming Dynasty, the closed-door thought is serious, closed socio-economic culture constitutes a super-stability of thinking stereotypes, manifested in the design concepts, that is, the contempt and rejection of foreign culture. Take packaging design as an example, the big red sticker, the famous thorns, and red square wins can a thousand years consistently continued to modern times, and refused to accept foreign packaging skills, visible design concepts and socio-economic basis is consistent. However, the cannons of the great powers blasted open the closed door of China, and at the same time opened a window, enabling the Chinese to "open their eyes to the world", which brought about "a strange change of concepts never seen before".

First of all, the Chinese people woke up, to gunpowder - China's Tang and Song Dynasty had been invented, the Europeans indirectly by the Arabs learned the manufacture of gunpowder, and soon created a musket, and artillery against the door of China (Wan & Reins, 2021), the poor Chinese Ming and Qing Dynasty since the much more ingenious system of cold weapons, but also can not withstand these foreign guns and foreign artillery. No matter how brilliant the ancient Chinese design was, at this time the Chinese people could not help but face the law of "superiority and inferiority" (Li, 2023). Lin Zexu, Wei Yuan, and other pioneers studied and introduced European countries to historical and geographical knowledge, science, and technology, especially military technology. Wei Yuan in the "Sea State Atlas" boldly put forward the idea of "learning from the barbarians to control the barbarians", in the closed-door psychological situation, not only to recognize the advanced material civilization of the West but also proposed to learn from the West, to catch up with the advanced and open-minded, the preview of the transformation of China's modern design, the basic direction of the change.

"Learning from the West" is an important driving force for the progress of design concepts in modern times. If not for the West learning advanced science and technology, there would not have been many craft design influx into China: In 1881, in Shanghai, Nanjing Road, a small number of people began to use the telephone, the following year, the electric light appeared, 1901, the earliest car transported to Shanghai appeared in the Nanjing Road, 1908, Nanjing Road, the emergence of the tram, subsequently, the telegraph, ships, trains, warships and other modern means of transportation and communication have emerged one after another in the southeastern coastal cities, many large-scale national industries in semi-colonial, semi-feudal society on the mother body of the sprouting of the concept of progress. Cities, many large-scale national industries in the semi-colonial, semi-feudal society on the mother sprouted new shoots and stimulated the industrial and commercial enterprises on the demand for design knowledge and professional talents.

The establishment of the "Western School" laid the intellectual foundation for the advancement of design concepts. To cultivate diplomatic and engineering talents, the Qing government also organized many new-style academies, forming the so-called "Western School". In school education, the implementation of "secondary school

for internal learning, Western learning for external learning, secondary school for physical and mental health, Western learning to deal with world affairs," the practice, and added a lot of "sound, light, chemistry, electricity" "Western language" and "Western art". And "Western art", the opening of the engineering surveying and mapping courses in the academy enabled Chinese students to receive direct education in European craft design and decorative arts. For example, in 1896, the "Bibliography of Western Studies", in addition to natural sciences, and social sciences subjects, also set up "graphology", "ship government", "newspaper" and other subjects, in 1898, "the imperial dynasty," its knowledge structure system presents a new model, divided into "literature and education", "geography and public opinion", "geomancy" and so on 10, of which Among them, the "Ministry of Examination and Industry" included eight subjects, including crafts, manufacturing, mines, railroads, machines, textiles, telegraphy, and postal services, and emphasized the introduction of engineering technology, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. 1898 General Catalogue of the Imperial Classic and Universal Texts

Subheadings	Basic contents
Ministry of Culture and Education	Academics, scriptures, history, scholars, character study, translation and commentary, rites and music, school, and 15 other subjects.
Department of Geography	General introduction to earth affairs, national history, geography, customs, waterways, agriculture, and 11 other subjects.
Ministry of the Interior	Nineteen departments of governance, science, control, employment, parliament, customs, criminal law, and fire control.
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Negotiation, commerce, envoys, charters, alliances, peace, and war.
Wealth Management Department	Wealth, banking, coinage, tea service, company, national debt, taxation, salt service, and 14 other departments.
Examination Department	Crafts, manufacturing, mining railroads, machinery, textiles, telegraph, postal service, and 8 other subjects.
Grid Material Department	Five departments: Geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, geography, and medicine.
General Theory Department	Five departments
Miscellaneous Works Department	Three departments

Western design directly impacted the old design concepts. In the process of learning Western "long skills", the traditional Chinese design of the "beauty and inferiority of the Palace of the evil completion of the building" and other old concepts have undergone a complete shake, people began to aesthetic, health, comfort, use and other new angles, re-evaluate the traditional design, such as housing construction and living Environment, under the influence of Western architecture, put forward new requirements.

Initially, foreign-style buildings appeared in some convenient transportation, merchants gathered in the metropolis, some built by officials from different countries, merchants of the classicism of Italian, Greek, Victorian, or medieval style, etc., so far still standing in the Chinese land, has become a witness of history. Such as Xiamen Gulangyu Island's European-style architectural complex, Shanghai Huaihai Road's four-slope French Renaissance-style buildings, Qingdao's Badaiguan complex, etc., not only the architectural style is very different from that of the traditional Chinese residence but also affects people's housing concepts, the combination of Chinese and Western style, completely Western-style urban housing came into being. 1872, the Shanghai Xingren Lane area appeared in the three rooms, two rooms and two-story townhouse-style building, which is the earliest in China, the Lilong house, at the same time, Chinese officials and merchants built classical buildings in Italian, Greek, Victorian or medieval style. At the same time, the traditional residential courtyard in the north is developing in the direction of a large miscellaneous house, as shown in Figure 3.

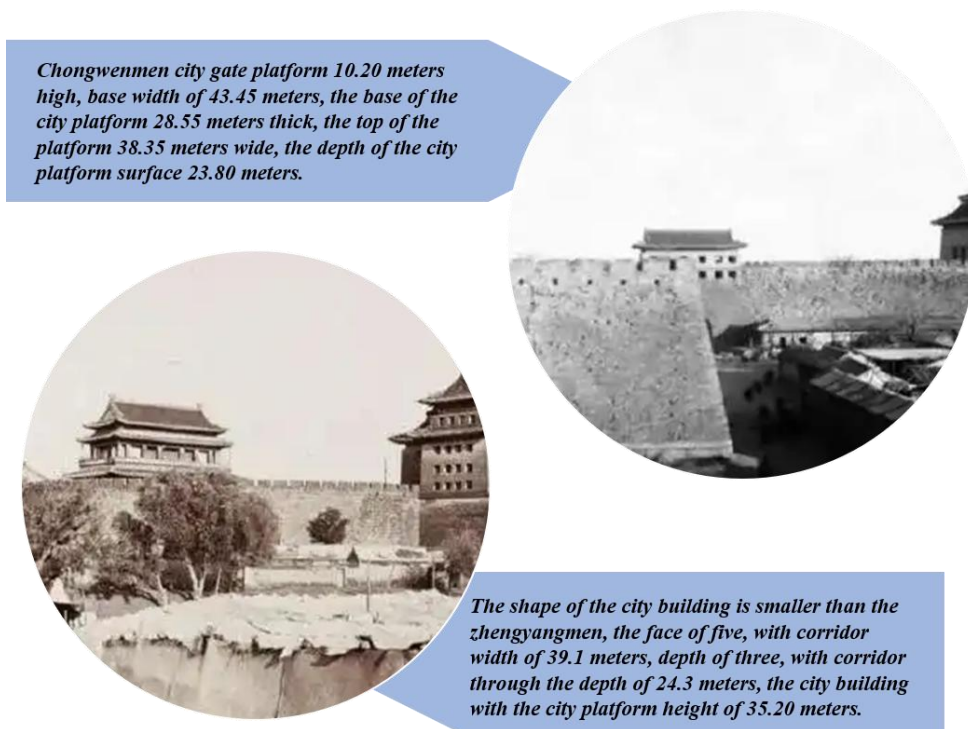


Figure 3. Overlook in the Courtyard Houses on Either Side of the Hadmun (now Chongwenmen) in Beijing

After the Opium War, the increasingly frequent cultural exchanges between the East and the West were also one of the fundamental reasons for the changes in the concepts of modern people. Some scholars believe that the transformation process of China's modern design is the process of "Western learning", which seems to be incomplete. From the Han Dynasty "Silk Road", and the Tang Dynasty "Maritime Silk Road" to the Ming Dynasty Zheng He went to the West, and then to the early Qing Dynasty, China's porcelain, textiles, lacquer, and other crafts in Europe has always had a vast market, and influence the development of arts and crafts in European countries. The commercial and cultural ties between the East and the West have always been interactive. It is this interactive cultural exchange, the modern Chinese concepts step by step oriented to the West.



The coffee pot used by Soong Ching Ling (left) has the same functional shape as the octagonal shaped Moka Express aluminum moka coffee pot designed by Renato Bialetti in 1933, a product of Italian modernist design that has sold more than 100 million copies worldwide

Figure 4. Coffee Pots Used by Song Qingling and Italian Coffee Pots

As the external embodiment of modernity, some scholars say that there are three modernization efforts in China in modern times: the first is the late Qing dynasty foreign affairs campaign to the sound of high YunShe stop, its improvement can not be separated from the "Chinese body and Western": the second is the period of the national government, to the outbreak of the war and suspended, the Republic of China's modernization is the Chinese and Western half, the third is the reform and opening up, and so far in the ascendant or even a big step forward! "Westernization". Whether it is "Chinese and Western" or "half Chinese and half Western", China is

undergoing a kind of "modernization", as shown in [Figure 4](#), which compares the shape of the coffee pot used by Song Qingling with that of the Italian coffee pot. In [Figure 4](#), the coffee pot used by Song Qingling is compared with the Italian coffee pot. This transformation of cultural modernity has become an active and destabilizing factor in the course of Chinese modern design. Bruno Latour, in curating the exhibition *Reset Modernity* in 2016, argued that China would have different answers to the question of modernity under different conditions of confusion of identity and belonging. This statement, despite its postmodern context, is feasible even in the pre-modern phase.

INHERITANCE AND INNOVATION OF TRADITIONAL DESIGN ELEMENTS IN MODERN DESIGN

Reinterpretation of Cultural Symbols

In today's society, with the continuous fusion of Eastern and Western cultures, modern and traditional cultures continue to collide fiercely, and globally, more and more developed countries from the product development of the various aspects of the role of regional culture more and more attention, to timely adjust the methodology and strategy of the competition in the international market and to strengthen the cooperation widely, in this situation, China's design is faced with a huge challenge and opportunity.

At present, to reduce product costs, the global manufacturing base and consumer markets are further transferred to the third-world developing countries, product quality and price are no longer the market competition in the magic weapon, creativity and personality are more and more attention and become a key factor in determining the design competition life and death. It is not difficult to find, can reflect the regional culture, absorb the traditional characteristics of the elements of the product in the market competition is more able to win the favor of local consumers. More and more excellent enterprises and brands in the "localization" strategy to invest more energy. At present, the success of the vast majority of multinational corporations does not rely on the simple output of product sales but is often combined with the market demand, for the product to fully consider the sales of regional culture and customary needs of the local community, the timely incorporation of local cultural characteristics and traditional elements of sentiment, and then successfully refining the design resource strategy for the local community. These subtle changes show that this part of the enterprise in the product development and promotion of competition is trying to do market expansion and cultural protection win-win sustainable development business philosophy, no doubt, these successful case models are bound to become China's design in the trend of globalization towards the international market a wealth of experience and resources to learn from.

The survival of traditional folk crafts is intricately tied to specific local environments, yet the pervasive influence of modernity has significantly transformed their original contexts. Even in regions where the objective environment remains unchanged, the younger generation, increasingly exposed to external influences, has undergone a paradigm shift in their perceptions. Consequently, a fusion of traditional folk arts with modern craftsmanship and ideologies has emerged, paving the way for the development of innovative forms of expression. Individuals now endeavor to modernize certain traditional handicrafts, preserving their classical aesthetic values while refining their essence. This evolution is exemplified in contemporary ceramic design, where artists employ novel techniques to articulate their reflections on modern society and humanity, departing from traditional modes of expression. Such works require audience engagement for interpretation, transcending unilateral artistic communication to foster a symbiotic relationship between creator and viewer. Furthermore, with an increased cultural and artistic exchange, Chinese designers have embraced new materials and techniques, including "paper design," "fiber art design," and "metal decorative art design," thus enriching the traditional design landscape. Additionally, educational institutions are exploring innovative policies, such as Japan's "dual-track system," to nurture design talent and promote cultural continuity and innovation. Through these endeavors, the integration of traditional elements into the contemporary design not only preserves cultural heritage but also fosters its relevance and vitality in modern contexts ([Figure 5](#)).



Figure 5. Modern Ceramics

Henceforth, with strategic government endorsement and support, coupled with endeavors in scientific research and enhanced educational initiatives, China's traditional handicrafts are poised to endure, offering a complementary dimension to modern mechanical civilization and remaining integral to the nation's cultural fabric.

Nonetheless, the intrinsic disparities in thought between the East and the West underscore that modern Chinese design will not merely mimic Western paradigms. While Western civilization has historically prioritized scientific inquiry and technological advancement, China's cultural heritage, rooted in millennia-old traditions emphasizing humanity and holistic thinking, has undergone transformative shifts under Western influence. Recognizing the unique strengths of both Eastern and Western design philosophies, it becomes imperative to adopt a mindset of complementary collaboration rather than emulation.

As exemplified by Beijing's design ethos, depicted in Figure 6, it becomes evident that contemporary Chinese design resists facile categorization as purely "Western" or "Eastern." Instead, designers continually explore novel forms of expression and stylistic languages, resulting in evolving design concepts across different eras. Looking ahead, the future of design will embrace diversity and eclecticism, with Chinese designers striving for the organic synthesis of tradition and modernity, East and West. This entails more than a mere juxtaposition of traditional culture and modern technology; rather, it entails a nuanced fusion that respects heritage while embracing innovation. Through this holistic approach, Chinese design will continue to evolve, resonating with global audiences while retaining its cultural essence.



Figure 6. Bank of China Tower, Hong Kong (<https://www.shejiben.com/works/1788242.html>)

Analysis of the Application of Traditional Elements in Contemporary Design

As society progresses, cultural diversity flourishes, necessitating multifaceted approaches in logo design to resonate with diverse audiences. Traditional art, as a cornerstone of cultural heritage, imbues designs with

profound meanings that resonate with people's aspirations for life. In contemporary design practice, traditional elements are often employed to convey national sentiments, adding depth and character to designs. Through subtle incorporation, these elements evoke a sense of cultural identity and imbue designs with auspicious connotations, fostering resonance with the public.

When reinterpreting traditional themes, it is essential to adhere to thematic integrity while infusing contemporary aesthetics. In the design process, traditional elements serve as foundational motifs but are adapted to suit the context and purpose. This involves refining and reimagining these elements to ensure harmony with the overall design attributes. By purposefully integrating traditional elements in a nuanced manner, designers can strike a delicate balance between cultural heritage and modern expression, thereby enriching the visual narrative and enhancing audience engagement.

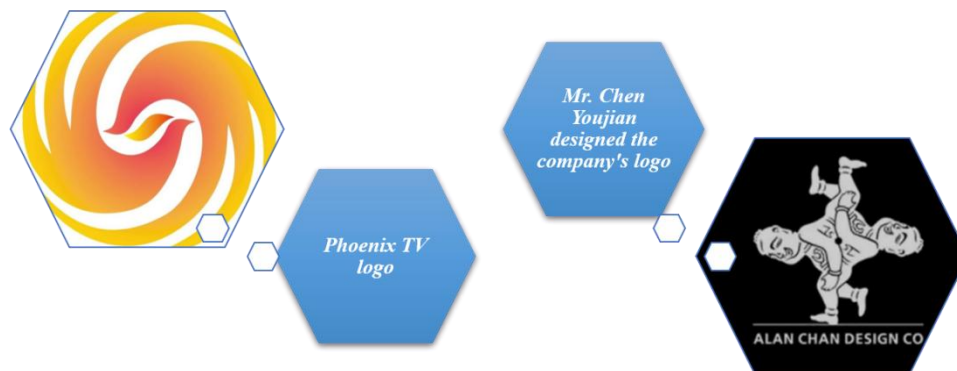


Figure 7. Traditional Elements in Modern Design

For example, the Phoenix TV logo in Figure 7 borrows the shape of the traditional lucky animal, the phoenix, which was worshipped as a god bird in ancient times and is the king of all birds, symbolizing beauty and peace. The male is the phoenix and the female is the phoenix, accommodated in a circle, extremely dynamic. The logo of Phoenix TV station is based on two classical phoenix patterns as the basic elements of the design, and the phoenix pattern is simplified to constitute the logo of Phoenix TV station, the logo represents the symbolism of the nation, the phoenix and phoenix, the wings of the two birds of the gods, after graphic design processing, all the feathers of the tail design are open and open state, a good interpretation of the openness of the news media and the spirit of tolerance! Connotation.

In addition, from this logo graphic, we can also clearly see that this logo adopts the unique "happy meeting" composition of the traditional Chinese pattern, the phoenix pattern rotating and changing form makes the logo dynamic, symbolizing the exchange and integration of Chinese and foreign cultures, and expresses the traditional cultural connotations and the spirit of the times to the fullest extent. Another example is the logo of the company designed by Mr. Chen Youjian in Figure 7, the pattern is derived from the traditional Chinese auspicious pattern "Four Happiness Dolls", which consists of four dolls composed of two children, two heads and two bodies, four-square, which is an auspicious object in the marriage in our country, implying the multiplication of children and grandchildren. After its shape is mutated and applied to the company's logo design, it gives people a strong visual feeling and a sense of the times, and at the same time, it has a very strong Chinese character.

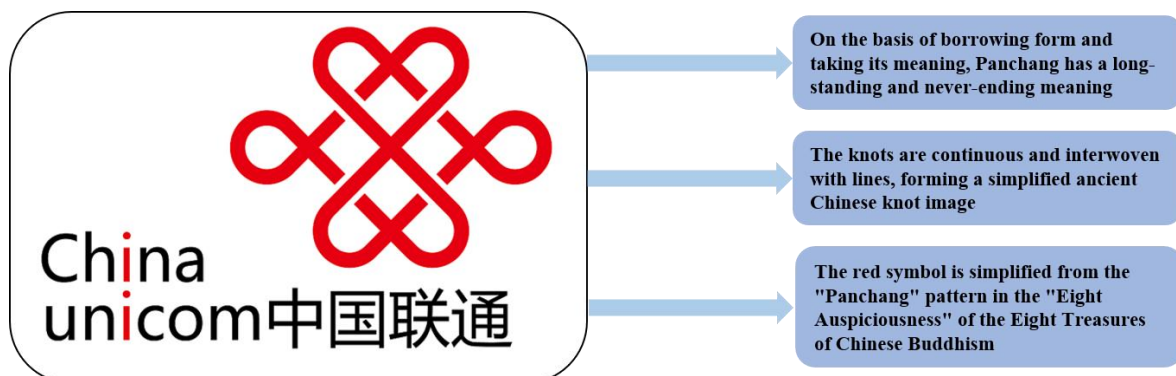


Figure 8. China Unicom Logo

In logo design, we not only leverage shapes but also imbue them with symbolic meaning. Many auspicious patterns endure through generations not solely for their appearance, but for the profound connotations they carry. These motifs, rooted in nature and totemic symbolism, have evolved over time to encapsulate diverse auspicious symbolism.

In the logo design of China Unicom depicted in [Figure 8](#), the red logo is a simplified rendition of the "Panchang" pattern from the "Eight Auspicious Symbols" of Chinese Buddhism. Drawing from both form and meaning, the Panchang motif, characterized by continuous knots and intersecting lines, symbolizes the seamless transmission of information. The incorporation of the ancient Chinese knot imagery evokes a sense of tradition and orderliness. The four squares and six circles at the center represent smooth traffic flow, while the intertwined hearts signify heartfelt connections, imbuing the design with deeper significance.

The use of traditional Chinese red exudes warmth, boldness, and vitality, while the black font conveys a sense of nobility and stability. Together, these colors create a visually striking and culturally resonant logo, memorable and emblematic of China's rich heritage. Its distinct imagery and high recognizability underscore its significance in contemporary design practice.



Figure 9. Works by Mr. KAN Tai-keung

Mr. Kan Tai-keung, a famous Chinese graphic designer, is a designer who has successfully applied traditional Chinese cultural elements to his design works. In some of his famous designs, he has created an original blend of modern styling and traditional ink elements to create a classical yet modern visual aesthetic. The Tai Chi poster designed by Mr. Kan Tai-keung, as shown in [Figure 9](#), is a very good application of the Tai Chi pattern of traditional auspicious motifs into a modern poster design. It can be seen that the contrast of this work is very obvious, and although there are many strong contrasts in this poster, the picture appears to be relatively harmonious, which is perfectly in line with the meaning of the Tai Chi pattern of one movement and one static movement and the interplay of yin and yang. Another poster by Mr. KAN Tai-keung is a series of "Chinese Characters" posters, this poster design uses the innovative application of collage, we can see the sharp contrast between the realism of the cloud inkstone and the spontaneity of the ink and cloud pattern, the large area of white space is a novelty, and the theme conveyed in the posters and the poetic meaning of the posters make the whole poster appear to have a unique charm of traditional art.

CONCLUSION

Aristotle's assertion that "All techniques, all planning, and all practices and choices aim at some kind of good" resonates profoundly with the central theme of this paper, highlighting how the pursuit of "good" in design aligns seamlessly with broader human aspirations and societal progress. Indeed, design evolution parallels the advancement of human productivity and societal development, as humanity navigates the dual processes of "humanization" and "alienation."

In essence, the trajectory of design development mirrors the continuous evolution of human conceptualizations of design. Recent years have witnessed a burgeoning interest among the Chinese populace in preserving their national culture, with scholars and individuals alike stepping forward to champion its values. This resurgence signifies a departure from the era of wholesale Westernization, as the nation reevaluates the cultural richness inherent within its heritage.

However, it is crucial to avoid the pitfall of cultural fetishism—an uncritical veneration of tradition.

Localization of culture does not entail an outright rejection of foreign influences, nor does it advocate for insular preservationism. Rather, it necessitates a nuanced approach that synthesizes traditional wisdom with modern elements, fostering a dynamic and adaptive cultural landscape that resonates with contemporary society.

Thus, as society progresses, our approach to traditional culture must be dialectical, discerning the essence from the obsolete. By embracing modernity while preserving tradition, we chart a course towards the revitalization and innovation of Chinese culture, forging a new path forward in the modern development of our collective heritage.

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