

# Exploration on Traditional Cultural Creativity in Poster Design from the Perspective of Cultural Diversity

Taking the Award-winning Posters of Students in Zaozhuang University as Example\*

Yuan Liu

Zaozhuang University  
Zaozhuang, China

**Abstract**—For students majoring in fine arts and art design in Zaozhuang University, conveying Chinese traditional culture in the diversified domestic and international cultural competitions has become a necessary strategy in the design process. By sorting out the problems in the guiding process of multiple competitions, the paper puts forward the improvement of traditional cultural creative design in poster design teaching from the perspective of cultural diversity, so as to provide feasible and effective creative guidance for Chinese cultural poster creation in the future.

**Keywords**—cultural diversity; student posters; traditional culture; creative exploration

## I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is the development history and unique value orientation of a nation. According to Tylor's definition of culture, "culture or civilization is a complex whole of knowledge, beliefs, arts, moral laws, laws, customs and other abilities and habits acquired by people as members of society."<sup>1</sup> The traditional Chinese culture we are inheriting, learning, facing and forming is in continuous changes. On the one hand, the whole society is trying to protect and promote traditional culture in various forms; on the other hand, foreign cultures with rich diversity and novel forms are also eroding, integrating and changing the Chinese people's life concepts and values. This is the multicultural background discussed in this paper. In the game between these two aspects, countless ideas and schools keep emerging, which have both advantages and disadvantages for the traditional Chinese culture. The rejection of negative elements and the absorption, transformation and promotion of positive elements are particularly important in artistic design.

The students of the College of Fine Arts and Art Design

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<sup>1</sup> Yan Lianduo. The dilemma of cultural diversity in contemporary China and its way out.

of Zaozhuang University are always influenced by the dual effect of cultural diversity in the process from the creation of ideas to the completion of finished products and winning awards in the competitions at home and abroad. In this context, this paper explores how to realize traditional cultural creativity in poster design.

## II. THE CREATIVE EXPRESSION OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE IN THE AWARD-WINNING POSTERS OF STUDENTS IN ZAOZHUANG UNIVERSITY

After the guidance of many competitions, the poster works of students in Zaozhuang University clearly present the general trend of taking Chinese culture as the creative starting point, and the study and practice of traditional culture in undergraduate courses are also reflected greatly. Students are able to take the initiative to the adopting traditional cultural elements as creation for their design in competitions at home and abroad.



Fig. 1. Haze.

The author of "Fig. 1" is Chen Fei from class 1 majoring in visual communication design, grade 2014, College of Fine Arts and Art Design, Zaozhuang University. The name of the work is "Haze" — a public welfare poster design with Chinese characters as visual elements. It was awarded the

finalist in the 5th design art competition of Chinese colleges and universities. Skillfully using the association of the black font for the color of haze, the work highlights the creative theme by showing the contrast of the readability of the text and the discomfort of unsmooth reading.



Fig. 2. Series of cultural posters on the artistic conception of font.

The author of "Fig. 2" is Song Peipei from class 2 majoring in visual communication design, grade 2014, Zaozhuang University. The name of the work is "Series of cultural posters on the artistic conception of font" — a great combination of Chinese characters with ink visual elements. It was selected in the fifth Moscow TYPOMANIA international typographic design festival. The Chinese layout method "operating position" is used in the work, such as the techniques of equilibrium and stability, harmonious density, echo of primary and secondary, false or true complement and alternating and overlapping, etc. The use of these techniques shows the dialectical unity of virtual and reality, non-existence and existence, black and white, leaving room for endless aftertaste in the blank space.<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 3. Poster design of virtue, kindness and filial piety.

The author of "Fig. 3" is Li Shanshan from class 1, grade 2015, majoring in visual communication design. The name

of the work is "Virtue, kindness and filial piety" — expressing abstract traditional moral values in the form of Chinese characters. The work gained the Nomination for German Designer. As the most ancient pictographic characters, Chinese characters are easy to be combined with graphics. This student gave full play to the way of combining characters and pictures in the poster design.

### III. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE IN THE AWARD-WINNING POSTERS OF STUDENTS IN ZAOZHUANG UNIVERSITY AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

By analyzing the winning poster works of students in Zaozhuang University, the following traditional cultural characteristics of award-winning posters are obtained:

#### A. Posters with Chinese Characters as Visual Elements Account for the Largest Proportion

Chinese characters are the most frequently used traditional cultural elements in daily life, and they are also the only pictographs still in use in today's world. In addition, it is easy to transform and associate Chinese characters graphically, so basically, every student of Zaozhuang University makes a creative design for Chinese characters in one of their drafts of poster design.

#### B. A Strong Sense of Identity for Chinese Painting

Although students majoring in visual communication design of Zaozhuang University have never studied professional Chinese painting, they get the edifying influence from whether their surroundings or school environment. They have a strong sense of identity with the core elements of Chinese painting — "brush and ink", including the elements of brush, ink and paper (Chinese art paper), and brush painting techniques, as well as the artistic conception of "presenting paint spirit by form and thus making both good appearance and spirit", etc.

#### C. A Great Influence of Moral Values in Traditional Culture on Students

Since ancient times, the main characteristics of Chinese society's moral values are emphasis on morality, human relations and family. These values are already perfectly fit into the life of students through instructive words and deeds of their parents at home and other publicity in society, therefor students in Zaozhuang University have great enthusiasm in taking part in related public-spirited poster competitions.

#### D. Initiative of Transmitting Chinese Traditional Culture in Domestic and International Environment

In the process of guiding students the author finds that students can consciously and actively use visual elements of traditional culture. Although influenced by international diversified design styles and cultures to varying degrees, students are striving to actively present the aesthetic taste of the Chinese nation when designing works, and they make a large number of creative designs on Chinese characters, ink,

<sup>2</sup> Yu Tian. Spirit-giving posters — the inspiration of spirit-giving theory on poster design.

white strokes, paper-cuts, New Year paintings and other elements.

#### IV. PROBLEMS IN COMPETITION

##### A. *Weak Understanding of Chinese Traditional Design Theories as a Whole*

At present, students majoring in visual communication design in Zaozhuang University are weak in understanding and applying cultural knowledge of traditional Chinese design theories. In the teaching of theoretical knowledge of design history and professional courses, it can be seen that a large part of students only study to pass the examination, and it is difficult for them to express systematic and detailed theoretical knowledge to support their creativity in the later design and production. In terms of design creativity, they have a good grasp of Chinese traditional culture and visual elements that are common in daily life. However, their understanding and experience of the overall traditional culture and the cultural customs only stay superficial and the content conveyed is not deep enough. Therefore it is difficult for viewers to resonate with their design ideas. In terms of graphic creative design, the problems are manifested by their repeated application of common elements such as ink, Chinese characters, Chinese knots and auspicious moire, etc., with less pattern sources and shallow levels, and no real investment in cultural excavation and delicate expression of national emotions. In terms of the application of color, they show a preference for the Chinese red. With the lack of understanding and casual use of the Chinese perspectives of other colors, the cultural connotation and spiritual quality of the works are missing again.

##### B. *Chaotic Design Vision Reducing the Credit for Originality*

Under the social background of unprecedented prosperity of modern digital media, the foreign modern design art with fresh and eye-catching form is very attractive to students. Due to cultural differences, students cannot understand some works, so they grasp them merely based on the graphic effect instead of studying the cultural connotation and background. Through the Internet, a large number of works students cannot relate to and beautiful materials are accessible to them. As a result, a batch of works that are various styles piling-up, a hodgepodge of Chinese and western styles and are given forms in the sake of form emerge in each time of homework and competition, making the poster designs into failures like water without a source, tree without roots, unable to evoke viewers' aftertaste. At the same time, in addition to chaos in the design vision, the concept of drawing on and copying is becoming increasingly vague and the originality of their works keeps declining. The result of following others' styles will eventually gain them nothing.

#### V. RESEARCH ON THE CREATIVE EXPRESSION OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE IN THE POSTER DESIGN OF STUDENTS IN ZAOZHUANG UNIVERSITY

##### A. *Urging Students to Attach Importance to Theoretical Knowledge of Design Culture*

In the teaching process of both theory and practice courses, every teacher should repeatedly stressed the importance of design history and Chinese design theory and the value, including the beauty of structure, material, modeling and decoration from the original period, to the modern times, combined with different courses for students to constantly learn and review systematically. This process runs through the four years of university, enabling students to grasp the sense of form of the nation and modeling ability, grasp the aesthetic taste and thinking characteristics, and understand the Taoist spatial design thinking with national characteristics. At the same time, in the specific teaching process of each course, teachers should make students understand the advantages of national cultural identity and realize that the Chinese culture with a long history is the basis of communication through a number of case studies, so that students can constantly improve themselves in the aspect of cultural aesthetics and stimulate their self-consciousness in the interest of beauty pursuing.

##### B. *Teachers Should Consciously Expand the Visual Content of Traditional Culture*

In view of students' repeated application of common elements such as ink, Chinese characters, Chinese knots and auspicious moire in the design, teachers have the responsibility to carry out a number of classroom training consciously and purposefully. For example, they can list excellent books like Chinese Motifs in Contemporary Design as reference books and carry out class teaching and hand drawing exercises corresponding to students' weak links after knowing the real situation of them. The exercises can be drawing taotie patterns in class to make them experience abstract and exaggerated design techniques of Chinese style and drawing traditional animal and plant patterns to feel its constitution rule and implied meaning etc. Through more systematic learning, students can further realize that in addition to common cultural graphics, there are a large number of lively folk art and graphic elements of palace art with stylized decorative aesthetic to be learned and used for creative design. Traditional Chinese art, such as mural painting, New Year painting, brocade embroidery, couplets, opera, seal cutting, porcelain, colored pottery, ceramics of the Tang Dynasty, architecture and so on, are vivid sources of creative design research and practice. With infinite colors, vivid composition and beautiful materials, the traditional art forms should be emphasized for the value displayed on the aesthetic level. And only through systematic and deep study of them, can students create appealing and effective graphic combination.

Since it is the feature of the designs of Zaozhuang University that the poster creation with Chinese characters as visual elements takes up the largest proportion, this advantage should be increased in future courses. Since

Chinese characters can easily trigger the visual association of artistic conception and images, it is suggested that the book series of *On the Beauty of Chinese Literature* by Jiang Xun should be listed as the reference books so as to let students fully understand the sense of comfort, color, weight, etc. behind the words and poetry. To be specific, for example, a special Chinese character training program can be set up to maximize the symbolic and creative expression features of the combination of characters and pictures. All teachers of visual communication major in Zaozhuang University should pay attention to this creative expression method, and when assigning task, require students to use specific cultural symbols well and their idea of graphic expression should be clear and easy to read.

At the same time, the training of color association performance is also essential. Studies show that the attention of color accounts for about 80% of human vision, while that of shape only 20%.<sup>3</sup> Chinese red, which is repeatedly emphasized in folk art works such as Chinese knot, paper-cut, couplets and lanterns, has become one of the dominant colors in Chinese culture, representing festival, happiness, enthusiasm and self-confidence. After finding out the extremely lack of understanding about Chinese colors when guiding students for competition, the author suggests listing the Chinese Quintessence — Color as the reference book. In this way students will be introduced to the color art of architecture, clothing, painting, sculpture, porcelain, lacquer and paper cutting, understand the characteristic Chinese color culture that integrates the concepts of nature, universe and ethics, and feel the beauty of traditional Chinese colors.<sup>4</sup> In addition to Chinese red and the Contrasting primary color design, students also should study deeply the colored glaze yellow, the national locust green and other elegant, comfortable traditional colors and their artistic conception, the dripping change of glaze colors, gorgeous color effect and so on. In this way they can enrich their knowledge of design theory thoroughly, unify and enhance the visual effect and obtain more visual tension in their works.

### C. The College Should Increase Situational Training

First, the College of Fine Arts and Design in Zaozhuang University has increased the number of students' field trip courses from once every four years for a week to at least twice every four years for a week every time, so as to better update students' research and learning of cutting-edge knowledge in a timely manner. It is difficult for students to make breakthrough in design progress in such a simple environment as school. Only when they go out and experience all kinds of cutting-edge and traditional design can they get more inspiration and novel visual experience. In their investigation for a week students can experience different lifestyles, feel different design styles, and get to know the real social market in actual design companies. In this way they can move themselves from campus life and generate ideas of their own and improve the visual sensitivity so as to endow their poster design with more lasting appeal.

<sup>3</sup> Liu Yanquan. *On the artistic trend of contemporary poster design*.

<sup>4</sup> Hongxiang. *Chinese Quintessence — Color*. China Pictorial Publishing House, 2016.

In the at least two times of professional investigation, whether the carrier is large enough to a city's architecture, cultural landscape, or small enough to living utensils, they all contain rich national culture waiting for students to experience. Only through many times of off-campus professional investigation, can students be able to have a real and real-time experience. In addition, teachers majoring in visual communication design in Zaozhuang University also have the responsibility to lead students to appreciate and learn various kinds of arts in class, such as poetry, tea and opera. Students will therefore be in the influence in the rich humanistic spirit of the concept of consciousness imperceptibly.

Second, it's necessary to continue to introduce domestic and foreign competitions into the college. At present, the college has integrated some courses with competitions while fail to combine some other courses with competitions. It is necessary for the College of Fine Arts and Design to strengthen the understanding of these courses, find problems, analyze problems and solve problems in the form of teacher conferences, and actively discuss and spread the convergence of Chinese and foreign cultures from the perspective of the actual content of the courses of the college of fine arts. Students should be required to use the traditional visual language to explain the classroom content and the theme of the exhibition and competition in a multi-angle and multi-aspect way so as to create a strong atmosphere of "nourishing the courses with competitions".

Third, as the aesthetic appreciation of traditional culture is reflected in Chinese paintings, teachers need to accumulate knowledge across disciplines. Even teachers teaching in visual communication design should take part in some teaching and research activities of traditional Chinese painting major in the fine arts of Zaozhuang University, because only when fully understanding the composition elements of Chinese painting and their particular virtual and real elements and management positions, can teachers better guide students to create posters and reflect the internal spirit of the Chinese nation.

Fourth, the College of Fine Arts and Design can take the initiative to organize traditional culture exhibitions and competitions. For example, it can hold "Chinese idiom theme series poster design" exhibition, "Traditional festival series poster design", "Traditional culture propaganda poster design of Zaozhuang University" and other exhibitions that can reflect the core of national culture and spirit. The professional characteristics of the visual communication design major of the College of Fine Arts and Design should be fully demonstrated to "serve the local area", and the students should be actively led to serve the local area and the society through the professional knowledge and skills learned in the university.

## VI. CONCLUSION

It can be seen from the works of students in Zaozhuang University that the current poster design should be based on the traditional national characteristics and focus on the needs of international visual communication design to create a



poster design that integrates national tradition and international characteristics. The design teaching of Zaozhuang University should pay attention to the cultivation of students' humanistic quality, so as to avoid the problem of students' lack of stamina and blindly copying mechanically for lack of humanistic quality. At the same time, traditional cultural design knowledge should be well taught so that students can reserve rich cultural design experience and clear design language to study and inherit good cultural wisdom. To express young designers' cognition and thinking of local culture in the context of global art design is also the active docking and necessary defense of the international phenomenon. On the one hand, national cultural advantages should be given full play to participate in the international competition and infiltrate Chinese culture into the international culture. On the other hand, local cultural advantages should also be used to resist the erosion of foreign cultures.

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