

# Study on the Application and Research of Visual Symbols of Traditional New Year Pictures in Modern Design

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## ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the origin, use, and classification of traditional New Year pictures, and discusses the reference for modern design from the perspective of art design in modeling and techniques, color composition and other aspects of New Year pictures. It also describes the artistic reflection brought by the form characteristics of New Year pictures to modern design. With a long history of traditional culture, China boasts many rich cultural heritages. Many traditional patterns in traditional culture are used for reference and study by designers today. For example, various traditional Chinese cultural elements, such as the shape of the seal and the outline form of the Chinese knot, are recreated to form the emerging aesthetic works in line with the Mass fashion. In China, some of the most striking aesthetic value and significance are shown in traditional New Year paintings. The color, composition and subject matter in New Year paintings can be skillfully used and transformed into abstract artistic visual symbols and applied in life and creation.

**Keywords:** traditional New Year pictures, visual symbol, modern design

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. An overview of New Year pictures

New Year pictures in China boast long history and culture and are a kind of traditional Chinese painting. What's different is that the themes of New Year paintings mainly come from folk life and are representative of the unique folk art forms in China. It is also a mass art form used by the masses to beautify the environment, reflect social life, place their thoughts and feelings, and express their psychological aspirations. The New Year paintings originated from the mysterious religion in ancient times, and were conceived in the Han and Tang dynasties and formed in the Song Dynasty. Folk New Year paintings are the aesthetic embodiment of Chinese folk aesthetics and folk masses, and their cognitive significance is greater than aesthetic significance. The combination of traditional New Year paintings with other forms of painting creates new power. At present, the popular illustration category in modern design has become a mature painting category with the help of the color, composition and subject matter of the New Year pictures, which are used in different fields. For example, the illustration of Kengee product packaging is designed with the national style and elegant

illustration style, which have the characteristics of both refined and popular taste.

The most familiar form of New Year pictures is "the God of Door" (As shown in "Fig. 1"). It is a folk cultural custom for every household to post the "the God of Door" during the Spring Festival. At the same time, this also expresses the earliest worship to the mysterious phenomena of nature and the worship to the gods, so as to achieve the good wishes of protecting the family, eliminating disasters, welcoming fortune and auspiciousness and attracting wealth and making fortune, etc. are also used to set off the festive atmosphere, and pray for happiness and well-being. Under the guidance of long-term folk aesthetic psychology and profound cultural concepts, it has become a popular art form and gradually formed a unique modeling and color system. What New Year pictures strike the general public the bright and dazzling color. New Year pictures often adopt bold colors, with red and green as the main colors, which produce bright, exciting, warm, festive feelings. Of course, the New Year pictures in different regions have both similarities and their own unique features. They can be simple, or colorful and bold, or delicate and elegant. New Year pictures are rich and varied in content, auspicious in implied meanings and bright in color. They are always close to the people, sometimes exquisite, sometimes rough and bold, with thick and festive color collocation.



Fig. 1. Guardian.

The themes of traditional New Year pictures can be generally divided into two categories. One is auspicious patterns, mainly used in traditional festivals and important days. "The God of Door" can be mostly in seen in traditional festivals, especially the "Spring Festival", other subjects can be the God of Wealth, the Stove King, The Eight Immortals, etc. Typical representative works of New Year pictures include "Celebration of a Good Harvest", "Wind and Monkey over a Horse (Ma Shang Feng Hou, which means to get prominent soon)" and "pluck cinnamon flowers in the Palace of the Moon (which means becoming a great man)", reflecting people's vision of a better life. Wedding is the main custom of the big day among others, with a pair of mandarin ducks merrily playing in the water, the double-"xi" pattern and other themes for decoration, implying happiness. The second category is historical figures and stories, most of which are the ancient sages revered and loved by the common people. They are typical scenes in historical stories are drawn with New Year pictures as the carrier. In China's traditional New Year pictures, the typical representatives of this category are "Repay the Country with Supreme Loyalty (which shows patriotism)", "Three Fights Against Lv Bu", "King Wen of Zhou Pay His Visits to Men of Virtue and Talents" and so on.

China has a vast territory, and different places have formed different customs and aesthetic habits in the development of the long history. As a result, local New Year pictures with obvious regional characteristics have been formed in Yangliuqing of Tianjin, Zhuxian Town of Kaifeng, Henan, Taohuawu of Suzhou, Jiangsu, and Yangjiabu of Weifang, Shandong. The creation styles and themes of New Year pictures in different regions are different, so the artistic characteristics of New Year pictures in different regions are closely related to the social forms, political events, life interests and cultural customs of each historical period. The traditional elements of New Year pictures in color selection, theme selection, and composition techniques and other aspects can provide a lot of reflection, inspiration and reference to the artistic creation of modern design.

### B. Composition and color of traditional New Year pictures

In the development of traditional New Year paintings, the requirements of traditional Chinese painting have been selected in the color selection part. At the same time, they are created in combination with folk people's understanding of specific things, and they have formed their unique features by absorbing the characteristics of other traditional folk art products, such as favor for primary color and bright color as well as being lively and representing folk customs, etc. The color requirements of New Year pictures are generally to emphasize the high contrast and coordination between colors. New Year pictures are based on red and yellow, and follow the color collocation principles: "green loves red, yellow likes green, purple hates black and red hates purple" as well as "red plus yellow equals brightness". This makes the New Year pictures not only have full composition of picture, but are also added to a characteristic of bright color.

The colors of traditional New Year paintings are symbolic, contrasting, strong, exaggerated and generalizing. In terms of element color, New Year pictures mostly adopt red, yellow, dark green and other strong, bright and thick primary colors. The New Year pictures in Zhuxian town mainly have five colors: black, red, yellow, green and purple, with high color purity, bright gorgeous and thick colors, mainly warm ones, and many complementary to each other, which are simple matches yet of much interest in decoration. The New Year wood-block prints in Yangjiabu of Weifang, Shandong basically use red, blue, yellow, green, purple and black, its bold use of bright color and pure color being not hackneyed nor trying to winning favor. The New Year wood-block prints of Taohuawu in Suzhou have bright, bright and elegant overall color, mostly with bright red, peach red, yellow, green, purple and light ink as the main tone and the use of a large number of pink is also one of its major characteristics.

The composition of traditional New Year pictures basically pursues completeness, symmetry and fullness in visual image, so as to satisfy the visual stability and good meaning of "good things come in pairs". "Fullness" is the unique composition feature of the pictures, yet the nationalized traditional graphic language with clear priorities, completeness and fullness as well as connected strokes is familiar to people. "In traditional Chinese New Year paintings, be it the God of Wealth, the Giver of Children and the King of Guan, or folk themes such as a pair of mandarin ducks playing in the water and double characters of "Xi ", etc., some motifs related to the symbol of good luck, wealth, happiness and other good intentions are added for decoration. It is not difficult to find that more and more ethnic traditional graphics are widely used in the field of graphic design, for example,

the packaging design of folk snacks, characteristic tea and liquor uses national graphic language more and more widely.

The selection of images in the composition of New Year pictures is closely related to the theme of social life and the flavor of life, but it is not a copy the real things, and requires to make the representation with the methods of adjustment, selection and generalization. The composition style of traditional New Year pictures can be used for reference in modern graphic design. In modern design, technical methods can be used to sort out and extract the contents for creation and expression. For example in the packaging design of "Xi" candies (wedding candies), the picture graphic of the folk Taohuawu New Year pictures are used. Folk New Year pictures are usually posted on festive days to set off the atmosphere and xi candy is usually associated with weddings and the celebration of new born babies and other auspicious days. The geographical environment and folk culture in Suzhou folk New Year pictures, represented by the products of Suzhou Caizhi Zhai coincides. The isomorphism of the content form has reached the same form and meaning in the visual transmission, which makes the figure extend out the new semantics.

## II. THE APPLICATION OF VISUAL SYMBOLS OF TRADITIONAL NEW YEAR PICTURES IN MODERN DESIGN

### A. The graphic expression of traditional New Year pictures

The main feature of the traditional New Year picture modeling is that it follows the creator's perception and subjective intention. Its creation is combination of intended use of the form, the aesthetic needs of the public as well as a strong representation of social customs and habits. The direction of graphics in modern design can draw lessons from these creative characteristics of New Year pictures. The appropriately use of the traditional New Year pictures modeling and techniques in modern design will increase the cultural connotation and information of the works. Chinese traditional New Year picture plastic art has an independent visual symbol system. Chinese traditional New Year pictures developed in the primitive totem worship, and their artistic symbols have the primitive regional characteristics. In the construction of images, they do not pay attention to the similarity of external forms, but pursue the likeness of spirits. The typical symbols of traditional Chinese New Year paintings are mainly geometric symbols, symbolic symbols, decorative symbols, deformation symbols, text symbols, and silhouette symbols, etc. Chen Shaohua's stamp design plays an important role in his design career, especially the zodiac stamp pattern (as shown in

"Fig. 2"), which combines the decorative painting skills with the national complex, and clearly reflects the inheritance of his works. Among them, the monkey stamp issued in Jiashen year has a great influence. In the third year after the monkey stamp was issued, Chen Shaohua looked for a conjunction point between tradition and modernity, and instead of repeating others' works, he made every effort to blaze new paths (as shown in "Fig. 3"). The design of this stamp shows a cute monkey with a smiling face, scratching his head with his left hand and holding a longevity peach in his right hand. It symbolizes harmony, happiness, good luck and longevity in the New Year, with strong traditional meanings. The design of the whole ticket looks bright in color, reflecting the festival of traditional Chinese style, lively style, with the combination of traditional and modern art aesthetic. When designing it, Chen Shaohua hoped that it would become more urban and pet-like, reflecting its delicacy and preciousness in the small image. This is the complementary power of design and traditional elements, which will enable viewers to have a sense of local cultural identity.



Fig. 2. Stamp of "pig".



Fig. 3. Stamp of "monkey".

### *B. The application of visual symbols of traditional New Year Pictures in modern design*

The composition of traditional New Year pictures often pursues symmetry and fullness. Therefore, in modern design, visual symbols in traditional New Year pictures need to be studied and adjusted, and the decorative meaning that emphasizes character images, so as to reflect characters' personalities and festive atmosphere through different decorations. These forms of artistic expression can be used for reference in the reconstruction of the existing graphic design art form.

As for color selection for visual symbols, traditional New Year pictures favors the application of color very much, so they often use primary colors, and the colors tend to be bright, folkloric and approachable. A large number of color combinations with impactful contrast are used to add decorative effect of traditional New Year pictures. For example, the public service advertisement with "Chinese dream" as the theme contributed by Yangliuqing Painting society, consists of five aspects of respecting the old, loving the young, helping each other and loving each other. The illustration still takes the chubby child as the subject, lively and lovely, with a sense of joy, and the text content is "the country is the family", "diligence is the primary character", "thriftiness breeds virtue", "integrity establishes oneself", and "filial piety is the paramount quality" and "harmony is most precious" and so on. It carries forward the Chinese spirit and makes the Chinese image and culture deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. At the same time, by adopting the elements of some traditional New Year pictures, it can easily be accepted by people.

In terms of the attitudes and practices towards the selection of traditional culture of modern graphic design, works are designed in different ways of expression, or with the combination of some symbols, pictures, words, etc. and traditional culture. In the visual graphic design of modern design, lessons can be drawn from the feature of "fullness without chaos" made by the principle of "the content determines the composition" of New Year pictures, so as to make the composition of the design picture diversified. At the same time, the scatter perspective method and the horizontal parallel and non-blocking of the "horizontal object", as well as breaking the space and time limit of New Year pictures, which have a strong decorative meaning, meet the aesthetic needs of the subjective public and the needs of special scenes and can express the design ideas of designers. The inheritance of national traditional graphic language is widely existed in various fields of today's society, such as costume design, environmental design and graphic design. In modern graphic design, logo design, product packaging design and poster advertisement design are mainly represented by graphics. In this field, it is natural to

widely extend and refer to the national graphic language. The nationalized traditional graphic languages are familiar with and understood by people. They are used as information media to communicate, so that the emotions and information of both parties can be easily exchanged.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Traditional culture is the treasure of Chinese culture. The development of traditional New Year pictures has experienced historical inheritance and development, which includes a large number of excellent social folk themes and excellent traditional cultural customs. Embracing all within inches and representing everything on a small patch of wall, New Year pictures carry the national spirit, culture and emotion, and accumulate the wisdom and experience of the people. It is necessary to keep the charm of the original New Year paintings and at the same time infuse them with fresh strength to produce more and more different forms of expression.

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