

Application of the Pattern "Three Companions of Winter — Pine Trees, Bamboo and Plum" in Modern Textiles

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ABSTRACT

The pattern of "Three Companions of Winter" is a unique presence among traditional Chinese patterns. Mainly themed by combinations of pine trees, bamboo and plum, it is in the category of plant pattern. However, the term "three companions of winter" was bred by the thought of ancient Chinese literati, so it has been endowed with more profound cultural connotation. As a symbol of the Chinese literati characters, it is a pattern showing the personality qualities, and also has auspicious meaning in folk culture. This paper analyses the origin, development, artistic connotation, expression form and modern design application of "three companions of winter" and explores the social spiritual connotation of it, so as to reveal the contemporary aesthetic value of traditional plant patterns and enrich the cultural connotation of textile art design.

Keywords: "Three companions of winter", Form of expression, Modern textiles, Application.

1. INTRODUCTION

Integrating the aesthetic tastes of the literati of all dynasties, in line with their pursuit of high character and integrity and showing the elegant ambition of their personality sentiment, the traditional Chinese pattern "three companions of winter" was all the rage and highly sought after. Against the background of the activation of traditional patterns in modern art design, this paper discusses and summarizes the origin of the pattern "three companions of winter", analyses its expression forms on ancient art carriers, and actively explores the modern innovative application design of traditional patterns.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE PATTERN "THREE COMPANIONS OF WINTER"

"Three companions of winter" is a kind of decorative pattern composed of pine, bamboo and plum. It is often used in combination with other patterns such as animals and figures in different artistic carriers, and sometimes it is simplified to

pine needles, bamboo leaves and plum blossoms as symbolic images to form decorative patterns.

2.1 Origin of the Pattern "Three Companions of Winter"

Looking back on history, different from the gorgeous and complicated patterns of other plants such as peony and tangling branches, pine, bamboo and plum have always given people a sense of simplicity and elegance. During the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, "The Analects of Confucius" has a record of pine and cypress, saying "When the year becomes cold, then we know how the pine and the cypress are the last to lose their leaves." ¹ Here "pine and cypress" is a metaphor for a gentleman's strong and unyielding character in difficult and cold environment. In the Song and Yuan Dynasties, many well-known cultural landscape paintings also took pines and cypresses as the subject matter. Their characteristics of standing upright, alone and being evergreen and lush met the spiritual demands of people at that time. Bamboo, which is tall and

1. Isee "The Analects of Confucius · Chapter 9".

straight with its joints rising ahead, rather breaks than bend. The literati of the past dynasties personified it, and expressed their love and appreciation for bamboo with a dignified gentleman with a modest mind. Su Dongpo says in his poem that "I prefer eating without meat rather than living without Bamboo"². It can be seen that the ancient literati had an extraordinary love for bamboo. Even if they were down and out, and their living environment was shabby, they would plant bamboo to keep them company. The similar spiritual characters of pine and bamboo made them connected in the pre-Qin period. It is recorded in the "Book of Rites · Li Qi On the Rule of Propriety" that "For people, rite is like the outer green skin of a bamboo arrow, and the inner solid of pine and cypress. Only bamboo arrow and pine cypress have such great virtue in the world, so they are always green through the year round, and their leaves never fall."³ Pine and bamboo here are used to illustrate that people should be faithful and upright. And the plum blossom then were regarded as a frightful thing as the peach plum, widely divergent with pine and bamboo in position. From the poem "Plums blossom in bright color only for a while, yet bamboo leaves keep green for a thousand years. Wish you a heart as green pine and cypress forever, and it will allow you to enjoy the infinite sunshine"⁴, where the beauty of plum blossoms are used to highlight the clean and high pine bamboo, their difference in position can be seen immediately. It was not until the middle Tang Dynasty when the plum blossom in cold against snow was praised, and the same as the pine and bamboo, the plum blossom was endowed with independent and noble personality, just like pine and bamboo that its status was finally comparable to the pine and bamboo.

It can be seen from the records of literati poems in the Southern Song Dynasty, pine, bamboo and plum were sung in the same poem, which was collectively called "three companions of winter". The poem is "梅花，君自看，丁香已白，桃脸将红，结岁寒三友，久迟筠松"⁵, which means "The plum, just look at it yourself; when lilac already gets white and peach blossom is about to get pink, Yunsong

has not been on the scene for the gathering of good teachers and helpful friends", where 筠松 (Yunsong) is a man's name composed of 筠 (yun) and 松 (song), which literally mean bamboo and pine. Since then, the "three companions of winter" has become one of the themes often praised by scholars in all dynasties. Pine, bamboo and plum have similar natural characteristics. They are personified for their lofty and unyielding characters, symbolizing their unabated vitality after cold and expressing their gentlemanly character of "purity", "faith" and "toughness". Although it is just one of the massive traditional Chinese patterns, the "three companions of winter" has been widely used in various fields of art such as porcelains, sculpture and embroidery, etc., leaving many treasures for posterity. And the literati spirit and gentlemanly character symbolized by "three companions of winter" have been respected up to now.

2.2 The Artistic Connotation of the Pattern "Three Companions of Winter"

The unique artistic connotation of the pattern "three companions of winter" endowed by Zen thought has the characteristics of traditional Chinese aesthetics. In combination of images with form, it has been sought after with its unique charm, and attracted the research of later generations with its value inherited to this day.

2.2.1 The Pattern "Three Companions of Winter" Shows a Kind of Faithful and Elegant Spirit

Ancient Chinese men of letters like to deliver their feelings in things, and express their aspirations through natural things to show their loyal quality and other-worldly sentiments. The pine staying true to its own nature in spite of the deep chill, the upbeat bamboo carrying aspirations in heart and the plum blossoming in the snow with high integrity all grow in and endure the cold days by facing up to wind. They share the honourable quality of defying bitter cold, and have always been respected by the ancient and modern Chinese literati. The pattern "three companions of winter" carries their common character of defying bitter cold, and symbolizes the indomitable fighting spirit of people in the difficult situation. Separately, pine symbolizes firmness and indomitability, bamboo means the way of a gentleman, and plum a metaphor for cleanness and integrity. Literati use them to symbolize their integrity or loyal friendship with others. At the

2. See "Yu Qian Seng Lv Yun Xuan" by Su Shi of the Northern Song Dynasty.

3. See "Book of Rites · Ritual Ware" by Dai Sheng of the Western Han Dynasty.

4. See the tenth poem in "Zhong Xing Ge" by Bao Zhao, a poet of the State Song in the Southern Dynasties.

5. See "Man Ting Fang · He Cui Mei" by Ge Lifang, a poet in the Song Dynasty.

same time, the elegant characteristics of the pattern of "three companions of winter" represent the aesthetic intention and expectations of ancient Chinese for their self-cultivation. In the traditional auspicious pattern "Five Things of Purity", the combination of pine and bamboo, plum with running water and the bright moon is the exact display of the purity and elegance of literati, representing the highest spiritual state that they pursue to be detached from the world and blend into nature.

2.2.2 *The Pattern "Three Companions of Winter" Conveys the Auspicious Implication in Folk Culture*

In folk culture, the pattern "three companions of winter" is often endowed with the expectation of good luck and blessing, which is reflected in many contemporary art treasures. Examples are like the blue and white porcelain "Three Companions of Winter" of the Yuan Dynasty in the Palace Museum, one of the most precious treasures of Hubei Museum, "Blue and White Porcelain Plum Vase with the Pattern of Four Favourite Things of the Yuan Dynasty" and the countless ceramic utensils with the "three companions of winter" pattern, to name a few. However, pattern the "three companions of winter" on these artworks pay more attention to the symbolic meaning of auspicious celebration in folk culture. For example, the pattern "San Yang Kai Tai (三阳开泰)", takes three sheep as the main body with pine and cypress as the background. The word sheep pronounces yang in Chinese, the same as "阳", meaning the sun. Since the pine and cypress have endured the cold winter, at the turn of winter and spring, they can herald an auspicious beginning of a new year, and are regarded as a propitious sign. Pine and cypress also hold the ideal of people's desire for longevity, which is represented in the frequently used birthday congratulation term "live as long as the evergreen pine on the southern mountain". "May your life be as long as the pines and the cranes" is another example showing the image of pine. The crane is seen as a symbol of unworldly quality, cleanness and elegance and the evergreen pine tree signifies longevity, so this term symbolizes the longevity and integrity of the elderly. Bamboo grows by elongating its hollow stem with joints, showing an uprising momentum, which can be used to express blessings to young people who are pursuing official careers. In addition, the 笋 (sun) in "竹笋" (meaning bamboo shoots, pronounced "zhu shun" in Chinese)

is the same as the pronunciation of 孙 (meaning grandchildren). Since ancient times, people have been looking forward to having many children and grandchildren for a prosperous population, so bamboo has been endowed with the vision of "having many sons and grandsons". Plum blossoms in the cold winter, showing the vibrancy of life yet without being namby-pamby or tempting. Besides, the five-petaled flower of plums are used to represent the "five blessings", which are the "blessing, pay, longevity, happiness and fortune" that are mostly prayed for. So it is believed that the blossom of plum brings "five blessings" to people and gives them a contented life. Nowadays, plum blossom is also one of the most popular Lunar New Year flowers. There are also combinations like "双鹊嬉梅", which shows an image of a pair of magpies playing in the plum tree" and "松柏同春", etc., displaying the folk culture in the most simple auspicious meaning.

3. THE EXPRESSION FORMS OF THE PATTERN "THREE COMPANIONS OF WINTER"

As a pattern theme, "three companions of winter" is applied in a wide range in different forms of expression in different artistic carriers. It can either be presented as the combination of the three, or as combination of them with other animals or figures. This paper analyses the expression forms of "three companions of winter" patterns from the aspects of artistic categories such as literati painting and calligraphy, ceramic utensils and clothing fabrics.

3.1 *The Pattern of "Three Companions of Winter" in Literati Painting and Calligraphy*

Literati painting and calligraphy are freehand to express the feelings of the creators. In the literati landscape paintings, pine, bamboo and plum can either be singly painted or combined in pairs, showing its unique artistic connotation with the elegant and beautiful painting style. In addition, it is often combined with cranes, magpies, golden pheasants, chrysanthemums, and four seasons flowers, conveying good moral meaning as an auspicious pattern. The painting "Three Companions of Winter" ("Figure 1") painted by Zhao Mengjian combines pine, bamboo and plum together in the form of branch representation. The pine needles are neat and well-proportioned and the

plum branch is straightforward and beautiful, with the bamboo at the bottom in thick ink, producing a perfect scene. The three plants are interlaced and integrated with each other, showing a sense of formal beauty. "Being clear yet outstanding, beautiful and quietly elegant", expresses the aesthetic conception of traditional literati paintings. Zhao Ji's "Two Titmice with Wintersweet Plum" ("Figure 2") shows the combination of plum and pine. The picture only frames the space around one branch, with a branch of wintersweet, protruding from the lush pines and cypresses, two titmice tweeting to each other on a plum branch and several flowers in bud. The plum blossom with green pine leaves in contrast, forms a simple and elegant image. It can be seen that the literati paintings are realistic and show attention to artistic conception in depicting the pattern of "three companions of winter".



Figure 1 The "Three Companions of Winter" by Zhao Mengjian.



Figure 2 Zhao Ji's painting of "Two Titmice with Wintersweet Plum".

3.2 The Pattern of "Three Companions of Winter" on Ceramic Utensils

Porcelains serves as a kind of utensil of daily use or interior decoration, and the adornment pattern on it usually pays attention to auspicious and beautiful implications. Since the Song Dynasty, the pattern of "three companions of winter" symbolizing the quality of gentlemen has been used in the decoration of porcelain. The vigorous and straight pine, bamboo and plum branches, in combination with other complicated decorative patterns, make the porcelain more elegant connotation.

The Underglaze Red Plum Bottle with the Pattern of "Three Companions of Winter" has many complex patterns with clear priorities ("Figure 3"). The theme pattern of the bottle body is pine, bamboo and plum, decorated with rocks and plantains. The pine, bamboo and plum on the bottle all have complete branches and leaves as three individual bodies. They are reasonably placed and well-proportioned, depicting a narrative sense of the story. In "Figure 4", pine and plum branches are decorated on the main body of the bottle to establish a stable framework, and bamboo leaves are decorated in a flexible and scattered state. As a whole, the pine branch is located on the left, the plum branch is located on the right, and the pine, bamboo and plum three form a triangular structure, which is the most common form of decoration layout. In addition, in the decorative pattern of "three companions of winter" with the purple sand teapot as the carrier, the overall shape of the teapot is mostly expressed in a realistic way: the tortuous pine branch is taken as the handle, bamboo trunk as the pot flow and the plum branches as decoration in the belly. The spirit is expressed through the form made by craftsmanship, showing unique artistic modeling and rich cultural connotation.



Figure 3 Underglaze red plum bottle with the pattern of "Three Companions of Winter" (pine, bamboo and plum from left to right).



Figure 4 Pattern on the porcelain.

3.3 The Pattern of "Three Companions of Winter" in Clothing Fabrics

Dyeing and weaving technology has a long history of development in China, enjoying a great variety and colourful achievements have been made in dyeing and weaving art in China. In the blue dyed cloth used as clothing material, the theme of the pattern is mostly flowers and plants. In addition to the form of broken flowers, the most common form is the free extension of the folded branches of flowers. "Figure 5" shows combinations of peony, plum blossom and bamboo leaf. Large peonies are embellished with dots and groups of plum flowers and bamboo leaves in a well-proportioned way, rich in beauty of rhythm. The "Plum and Bamboo" in "Figure 6" shows a simple and quiet sense of elegance against the background of fully decorated blue cloth with the connection and concealment

between plum branches and pine branches, and the contrast between thickly dotted flowers and leaves. In addition, the magpie is also used in combination with plum blossom, indicating a kind of auspicious meaning. Magpies have long been regarded as a kind of auspicious thing as they often stand twittering on the tip of the plum tree to announce good news. Since the Chinese character 梅 (meaning plum, pronounces mei) pronounces the same as "眉" (meaning people's eyebrow, also pronounces mei), "喜上眉梢" (literarily means Happiness appears on the eyebrows) is often used to show the state of happiness. "Figure 7" shows a pattern combining magpie and plum blossom. In the picture, the branches and leaves are connected, and the magpies stand among the flowers and leaves. It shows a view that is full yet in order, complex yet not in a mess, which is a display of Jiangnan characteristics. It can be seen that in the hand-printed cloth printing and dyeing, due to the influence of technology and simple folk customs, the expression form of "Sui Han Three Friends" pattern is more concise and simple.



Figure 5 Peony, plum and bamboo.



Figure 7 Plum, bamboo and magpie.



Figure 6 Plum and bamboo.

As the head of the four most famous types of brocade, yun brocade is bright in colour and exquisite in weaving, and is the most outstanding representative of Chinese silk weaving technology. The Pattern of "three companions of winter" in yun brocade has changed from the delicacy and simplicity to a bold form in full and bright colour. For example, in the left part of "Figure 8", plum blossoms, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum, rocks and birds are combined. The composition is square and the style is realistic, the upper part of the picture is loose and sparse, while the lower part is compact, reflecting the formal beauty of contrast and unity. In the right part of "Figure 8", there is a simplified symbol pattern. The elements of plum blossom are arranged in groups of single, pair or trio, and the gaps are decorated with cracked ice pattern. The style is no longer realistic, but rather modern.



Figure 8 The pattern of "Three Companions of Winter" in yun brocade (The four gentlemen of flowers on the left and icy plum brocade on the right).

3.4 The Pattern of "Three Companions of Winter" in Woodcarving

The wood carving process is meticulous and exquisite, and the pattern of its carving is of high ornamental value. The nature of the wood carving material is consistent with the properties of the plants in pattern of "three companions of winter", so the pine, bamboo and plum in the wood carving form is more simple and unadorned with and the strong sense of texture. In the engraved image on the chair back in "Figure 9", the pine reside at the center of vision, with its leaves simplified into a round shape, showing a vigorous and forceful momentum. The bamboo on the right side has its leaves arranged in groups of three, which are well-proportioned. The plum tree on the left has entwined branches, with the main ones well arranged, dotted with plums of different sizes. The overall picture is continuous, somewhat refined in the rough touch, shows the characteristics of pine, bamboo and plum and their vivid charm. In addition, the pattern of "three companions of winter" is often used in the decoration of window lattice and lintel.



Figure 9 The pattern of "Three Companions of Winter" in woodcarving.

4. DESIGN APPLICATIONS OF THE PATTERN "THREE COMPANIONS OF WINTER" IN MODERN TEXTILES

The pattern of "three companions of winter" is a plant decoration pattern among the traditional Chinese patterns, which is an important chapter in the history of Chinese pattern and runs through the history of Chinese decorative art. Traditional patterns are innovated through inheritance to meet the needs of modern design. Textiles as the necessities of life, also plays a major role in the display of home environment. In the development process of inheriting and innovating traditional

Chinese culture, the "new Chinese style" has gradually become popular. New ideas, new materials and new designs are rooted in profound cultural deposits and conform to people's aesthetic taste at present. The simple and unadorned form and the cultural connotations of the pattern "three companions of winter" contribute to a kind of simple and elegant atmosphere, which is in line with people's current needs. The design of the pattern of "three companions of winter" should not only show the new style that pays attention to form, but also express the beautiful implication of traditional culture. In order to apply "three companions of winter" to modern textile design, it is necessary to make reasonable use of the artistic connotation of the pattern and the rules of formal beauty of textile design, pay attention to the unity and aesthetics of design, and form a unique design style [5]. The pine, bamboo and plum in this pattern are all natural plant models formed in a realistic way and shows simplicity. The branches and tendrils of these plants are in harmonious contrast with their shapes, producing a reasonable sense of rhythm and making it more artistic. At the same time, the pattern of "three companions of winter" also has the implication of wishing for health and longevity and having many children. Its application to modern textiles also reflects people's expectation of happiness and perfection.

4.1 Application of the Pattern "Three Companions of Winter" in Clothing Textiles

The primitive simplicity of pine, verdancy of bamboo and cleanness and purity of plum give the pattern "three companions of winter" a sense of freshness and elegance. It is often printed on the thin silk materials as motif in clothing in a modern-style in the form of ink painting. The overall pattern is covered on the simple and elegant dressing material, or a certain element is retrieved as the edge, so that the clothing style is simple and elegant, showing more classical oriental style charm ("Figure 10").



Figure 10 Modern style dress with a pattern of pine, bamboo and plum as the design pattern.

In traditional Chinese clothing, embroidery is often used to show the classical beauty of the "three companions of winter". For example, in Hanfu, the pattern is decorated on the shoulder, sleeve, skirt and other parts, and is extended and decorated on the broad and elegant clothing fabric in accordance with the characteristics of the form of pine, bamboo and plum in branches. It is also combined with cranes, strange rocks, water clouds and other patterns to make them more vivid and narrative ("Figure 11").



Figure 11 A traditional Chinese dress with pine, bamboo and plum as the pattern design.

4.2 Application of the Pattern "Three Companions of Winter" in Interior Textiles

The "new Chinese style" of primitive simplicity and elegance plus the artistic expression of the pattern "three companions of winter", build a kind of indifferent simple but elegant household atmosphere. The pattern can be presented in a realistic style (the left part of "Figure 12"), or be used independently as the specific patterns transformed from the elements extracted (the middle part of "Figure 12"); or be used locally in form of branches (the right part of "Figure 12"), showing a unique style, endless lasting appeal in bedclothes, curtains, wallpaper and murals.



Figure 12 Applications of the pattern "Three Companions of Winter" in interior textiles.

5. CONCLUSION

The combination of modern textile design and Chinese traditional patterns embodies the design form with lasting Chinese charm. As the most characteristic example among the Chinese traditional patterns, the "three companions of winter" shows a gentleman's character, which has always been praised and looked forward to. Today's fast-paced lifestyle also makes people more eager for a plain space, and they no longer keep their aesthetic pursuit in the superficial level and pay more

attention to internal culture. The pattern "three companions of winter" is applied to the design of modern textiles with varied decorative forms and rich cultural connotation, which not only meets the aesthetic pursuit of people tending to simplicity, but also highlights the charm of traditional Chinese culture.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Xinbei Li.

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