

Research on the Application of Regional Cultural Symbols in the Creative Design of Characters

Taking Suzhou Numerals as an Example

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ABSTRACT

In the process of text creative design, it is not only necessary to pay attention to the final visual form and expression of the text, but also to create the inner meaning and differentiation of the text. Based on the monotonicity and homogeneity of the current Chinese character creative design, this article puts forward the idea and method of how regional cultural symbols can be integrated into the creative character design of form and meaning. And it also takes "Suzhou numerals" as an example to sort out how to extract, translate, recreate, and integrate regional cultural symbols to verify the rationality of the design ideas, trying to explore the method and path of text creative design that blends regional cultural symbols, form and meaning in the contemporary context, in order to provide a reference for the current Chinese text creative design.

Keywords: *Regional cultural symbols, Fusion of form and meaning, Suzhou numerals, Creative text design.*

1. INTRODUCTION

As the most typical symbol and communication tool of Chinese culture, Chinese characters must not only meet the demand for more diversified characters in current social life, but also show the vitality and charm of contemporary character design. At the same time, more attention should be paid to the beautiful reading experience and cultural construction of the textual interest and characteristics for people. Chinese contemporary designers have carried out a lot of practice and exploration, and related text creative design has shown a vigorous development trend, but there are also problems such as monotony and homogeneity caused by the phenomenon of following the trend, which will affect the innovative design of Chinese characters. How to solve the above problems? How to make Chinese text creative design glow with contemporary vitality? These also the key questions to be explored in this article.

2. THOUGHTS ON THE STATUS QUO OF CHINESE CHARACTER CREATIVE DESIGN

As a visual symbol of information media, Chinese characters contain specific modeling concepts.¹ In the long course of development of Chinese characters, two major directions have been roughly formed. One is the character design that meets the functional requirements, such as the font design in the computer font library, which focuses on standardization and applicability; The other is art-oriented text design, such as the artistic works of wild scribble in Chinese calligraphy, which focus on artistic expression and aesthetic characteristics. The creative design of text pursues both the functional and artistic characteristics of text. It is worthy of people's discussion and attention on the things such as thinking about the inner meaning while paying attention to the external form and form, how to make the inner

1. Chen Yuanchuan, Blending of Typeface and Meaning for Modern Chinese Character Logo Design [J]. Packaging Engineering, 2011, 32(24): 25-28+48.

meaning and interest of the text creative design bear on the form and form of the text, and how to accurately convey its meaning through the form to radiate the form and meaning compatible text creative design contemporary vitality.

2.1 Monotonic Phenomenon Inhibits the Possibility of Design

In order to meet the society's more diverse needs for text in terms of use needs, aesthetic needs, and cultural identity creation, designers have carried out more dimensional practice and experimentation on the creative design of text, and designed many excellent works of font creative design focusing on the blending of form and meaning, which greatly enriched the contemporary text design language. However, in the long-term design practice, the design works of some designers have presented the problem of monotony and homogeneity, which inhibits the diversity and uniqueness of the design.

The monotonicity is mainly manifested in: monotonous design concept, monotonous visual form, and monotonous expression ("Figure 1"). Part of the design only pays attention to the design results without establishing a more reasonable design logic, and lacks the excavation and exploration of innovative points, which leads to the production of formalist works and the loss of the interest of the font. In addition, from the perspective of the tonality of the text, some text designs did not think deeply in the early stage and excessively used reference in the later design, which led to the problem of the single visual expression of the text works. In addition, after the rapid development of information, computer expression techniques being widely used, the temperature and texture of hand-made sculptures, calligraphy, etc. have been forgotten by most people, and the expression methods of text design have also lost their richness. Based on people's inherent impression of static expression and communication of text, design results often fail to take into account issues such as dynamic effect evolution and text adaptation, making it difficult for text creativity to have more innovative and ingenious forms of communication in the information age. However, these lacks of "meaning" or "shape" are not conducive to the development of creative text design.



Figure 1 Part of the current creative design of text (Image source: Baidu).

2.2 The Restriction of Homogeneity to Design Creativity

Text creative design has rich cultural connotations and contains unlimited creative possibilities. Analysis and design from different perspectives, positioning, needs, etc., can have wonderful creative presentations. However, the homogeneity of some text creative designs restricts the creativity of designers and blocks the source of inspiration for text creativity. The phenomenon of homogeneity also appears in the three aspects of design concept, visual form and manifestation. Some of the text design failed to find a new and ingenious design entry point and copied existing design concepts, resulting in the "intention" of the text creative design tending to be homogenized, failing to present unique creative highlights. The visual styles of some text designs are very similar, and their "shapes" lack differences, failing to show the external charm of the text and convey the internal meaning. In addition, most texts present static expressions and traditional communication methods. In the information age, according to text design needs, attempts to add new technologies such as sound and light, dynamic effects, and interactive forms may be able to give more possibility to creative text design.

Taking the calligraphy style creative text with Chinese characteristics as an example, this visual style is all the rage due to its classical beauty, and some designers blindly use calligraphy style, which makes the design works tend to be similar, lacking in connotation and charm. However, even the expression technique of calligraphy can design text from the aspects of font, font structure, writing texture, color use, etc., and convey different design

connotations ("Figure 2"), such as the majestic "Grand Canal", "Hometown of the South of the City" endowed with southern architectural characteristics, and "Hanshan Temple" which is stable and interesting. Homogeneous design works

constrain the creative text design that blends form and meaning. Designers should break free from the constraints of homogeneity on design creativity and strive to design unique text creative designs.



Figure 2 Part of the current creative design of calligraphy style text (Image source: ZKoo.com).

2.3 Challenges and Opportunities of Creative Text Design That Integrates Form and Meaning

The monotonicity of text creative design will accelerate the homogeneity problem, and whether it is monotonicity or homogeneity, it all points to the problem of lack of form or meaning. The "meaning" of the text design is carried by the "form", and users can appreciate the "meaning" through the "form". Text creative design with shape without meaning loses the connotation beauty of the text design concept, and it is difficult to arouse the inner cultural resonance of people; text creative design with meaning without shape is difficult to accurately and quickly convey clever design concepts through appropriate visual performance, and there are obstacles to the transmission of text concepts. In this way, the creative design of text that integrates form and meaning becomes particularly important.

Facing the design crisis of lack of form and meaning in text creative design, this is both a challenge and an opportunity. When a designer is faced with a text creative design project, it is bound to conduct a multi-dimensional exploration and analysis of its project source, cultural background, text connotation, use environment, audience population, etc. In this process, regional culture, as a relatively high-frequency association area, gives designers a clearer and clearer thinking direction, including the origin and development of text, the relevance of text content and region, local folk culture and local specialties, local buildings, etc. Regional cultural symbols are not only frequently mentioned in associations before design, but when they intervene in text creative design, they can provide solutions and directions for the and

homogeneity of the current visual form, expression form and design implication in the current text creative design. ("Figure 3")

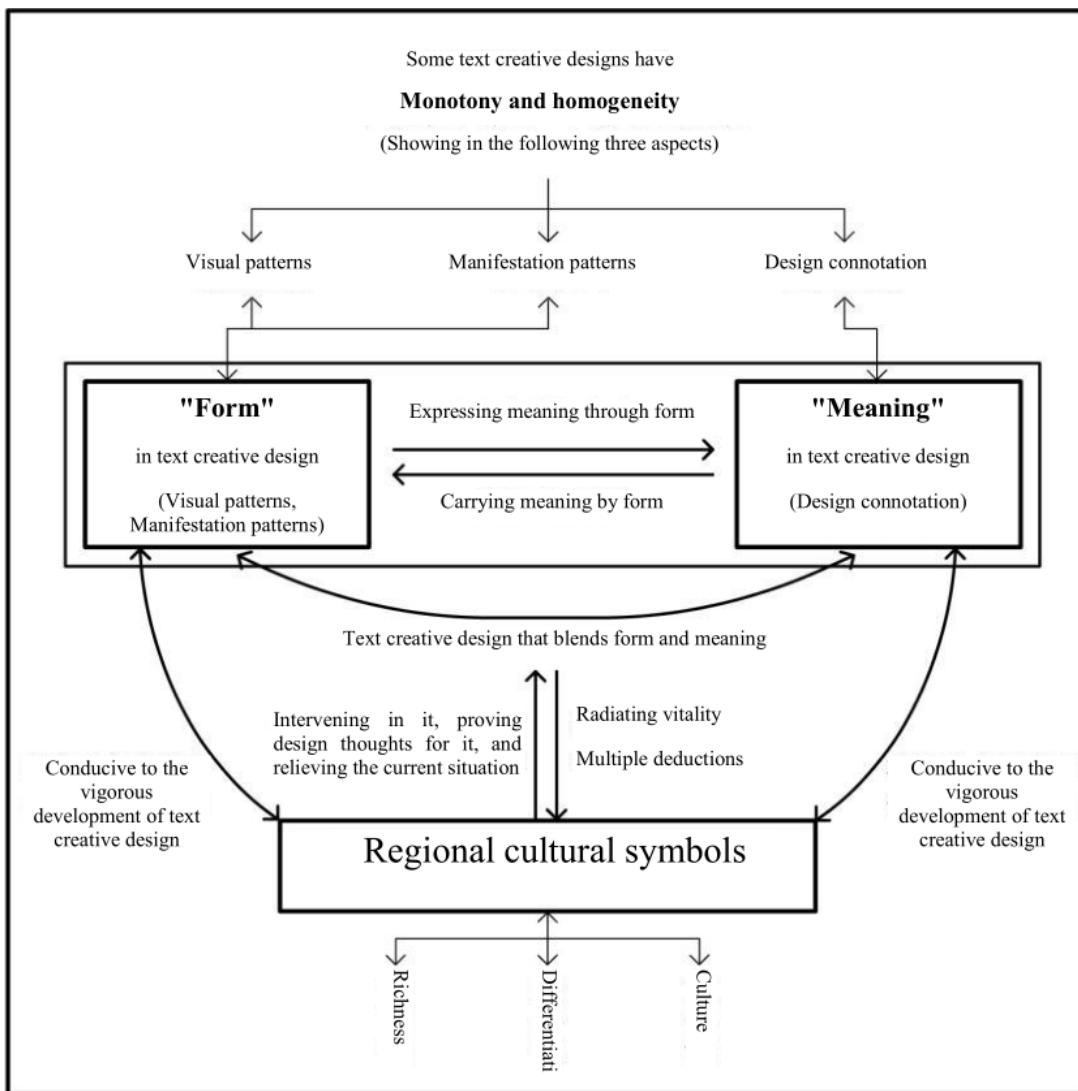


Figure 3 The logical relationship between the form and meaning of text creative design and regional cultural symbols (image source: self-painted by the author).

3. ADVANTAGES OF INTEGRATING REGIONAL CULTURAL SYMBOLS INTO TEXT CREATIVE DESIGN

3.1 *The Richness of Regional Cultural Symbols Creates More Possibilities for Design*

Regionality refers to unique culture or characteristics such as geographical conditions, historical folk culture, customs, and customs in a specific area, which has strong recognizable

characteristics.² Regional cultural symbols specifically refer to phenomena, language, patterns, actions, etc. that can represent specific meanings in a specific area. It has the characteristics of expression, transmission, and perception.³ There are many types of regional cultural symbols and various types of classification. From the perspective of visual art, it can be roughly divided into three categories: concrete regional cultural symbols, abstract regional cultural symbols, and image

2. Zhong Lei, Fan Xiaolin, Redesign of Beijing-Tianjin Tourism Experience Based on Regional Cultural Symbols [J]. Packaging Engineering, 2020, 41(14): 240-245.

3. Wang Ming, Chen Feihu, Regeneration of the Regional Tradition Cultural Symbol and Logo Design of Meishan Ecological Culture Park [J]. Packaging Engineering, 2016, 37(22): 61-64.

regional cultural symbols. Different regional cultural symbols have different characteristics and contain different connotations. Concrete regional cultural symbols exist objectively in social life. They are things that people can perceive and see. They are presented in very specific shapes, colors, patterns, etc., such as the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, the white walls and black tiles of Huizhou architecture, etc. The content of abstract regional cultural symbols is wide, and sometimes they cannot be displayed in concrete graphic symbols, but they can be transformed into perceptible elements through the refinement of the designers, turning abstract techniques into concrete expressions. For example, the refined style and texture of embroidery of Su embroidery are combined with the related theme text design, which reflects the charm of Su embroidery techniques. Imagery regional cultural symbols incorporate human emotions and thoughts. This imagery often resonates most with culture and is unforgettable, such as the slow lifestyle of small bridges in Suzhou, the beautiful scenery of Guilin's mountains and rivers, and the strange caves and beauteous rocks in Guilin. Whether it is concrete, abstract or image-based regional cultural symbols, cultural symbols have different cultures, rich connotations, and unique shapes and meanings, which can help

designers expand their thinking, relieve the limitations and monotony of thinking and insight in design concepts, visual forms, and expressions, and provide designers with more exploration directions and design possibilities, being helpful for the fusion of form and meaning in the later text creative design.

The creative design of text that better combines regional cultural symbols presents a different flavor, such as the city name design of Anhui and Guilin ("Figure 4"). Different cities have different design thinking logic. Extracting the characteristics of Huizhou architecture from the rich Anhui regional cultural symbols, this concrete cultural symbol incorporates the word "徽 (hui)" to convey the quiet and comfortable lifestyle of people living in Huizhou architecture, showing the beauty of imagery. The design of the Guilin city name text icon extracts Guilin's landscape, a representative regional cultural symbol, and uses ink brush strokes to create a reflection and landscape atmosphere. The blending of form and meaning is refreshing and makes viewers have a deeper impression of the text design and Guilin culture. It is precisely because of such rich regional cultural symbols that different design contents have more colorful design possibilities.



Figure 4 Hui style architectural text design (left), Guilin city name text design (right) (Image source: Baidu).

3.2 The Differentiation of Regional Cultural Symbols Meets the Unique Needs of Design Creativity

Different regional cultural symbols are representative and typical due to the influence of the local humanistic environment and social background. Different types of regional cultural symbols point to differences in cultural appearance, state, and connotation. After objective analysis, the designer refines the regional cultural symbols required for the design, and recreates them subjectively in the text creative design, which promotes the formation of the differentiation of the text creative design in form, type and inner meaning, and satisfies the needs of uniqueness of text design creativity.

Taking urban architecture as an example, urban architecture is the content that must be mentioned in the exploration of regional cultural symbols. How to extract more appropriate cultural symbols to make different buildings highlight their own characteristics is the content the researchers need to focus on. The text design of Nanjing South Railway Station ("Figure 5" left) retains the outline shape of the front view of Nanjing South Railway Station, and combines the common attributes of symmetrical architecture and site names, making the extraction of regional cultural symbols and the integration of design creative points unique, which not only embodies the literal taste of "南京南 (Nanjing South, the words are symmetrical in Chinese characters)", but also conveys the modern design charm of the symmetrical beauty and simple

atmosphere of the site's architectural appearance. Different from Nanjing South's extraction of the appearance of the site, the text design of Lanzhou Station ("Figure 5" right) focuses on extracting the representative symbols that constitute the appearance of the building and integrates it into the font design, which is also a creative design work. It is not difficult to find that the content that can be

extracted and the angle of entry in the design process are rich and different. Only by accurately extracting symbols that can generate cultural identity with the audience and translating them into text creative design can the design content be more unique, making the text creative design that blends form and meaning have more difference and recognition.

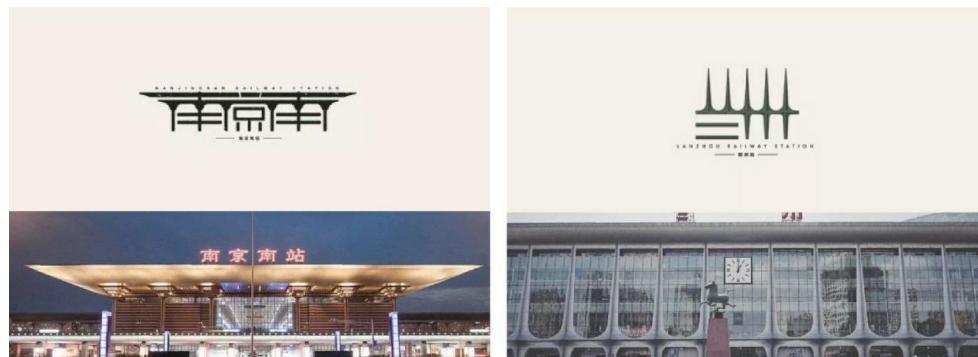


Figure 5 The text design of Nanjing South Railway Station (left) and the text design of Lanzhou Railway Station (right) (Image source: Baidu).

3.3 The Cultural Nature of Regional Cultural Symbols Is Conducive to the Blending of Form and Meaning in Text Creative Design

Regional cultural symbols are the artistic mapping of local typical culture, and their cultural attributes are also an important factor for the better development of creative design of text that blends form and meaning. From the creation of the characters to the development and evolution of the characters, the elements such as the shape and meaning of the characters are comprehensively considered. It has a precious and profound cultural context and connotation. The cultural nature of the regional cultural symbols exactly meets the cultural needs of the creative design of the characters. When interesting words and cultural attributes collide with the cultural attributes of cultural symbols, and the creative design of words that blend form and meaning has a more vivid and interesting fusion, regional cultural symbols will also have a richer contemporary interpretation.

The local cultural symbols are refined and translated into the text innovative design. The text creative design shows a new attitude, and the culture and beauty of the font design come into being. As shown in "Figure 6", the Mongolian script is one of the typical regional cultures of Mongolia. The font features of Mongolian script

are rich in culture, which not only reflects the unique Mongolian writing culture but also reflects their aesthetic style. "Prairie style" extracts the Mongolian form and meaning and translates it into the design of Chinese characters, so that the Chinese characters and Mongolian are seamlessly connected, full of meaning and memorable. This design idea and method helps to create text design works that blend form and meaning, and also allows users to feel the unique charm of regional culture.

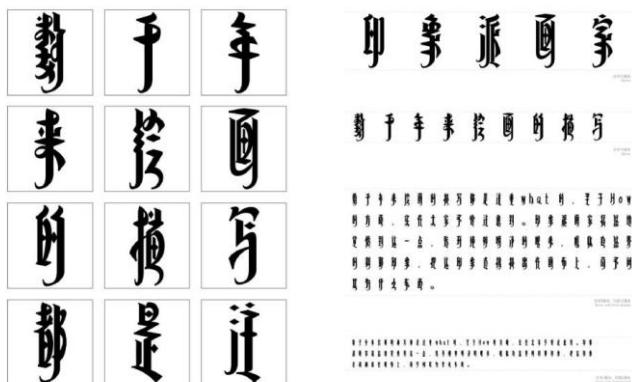


Figure 6 The 10th "Fangzheng Award" Font Design Competition — Second Prize of the Chinese Professional Category: "Prairie Style" by Yu Zhenqiang (Image source: "Fangzheng Font Library" public account).

4. REGIONAL CULTURAL SYMBOLS INTERVENE IN TEXT CREATIVE DESIGN

4.1 *Sorting out Cultural Symbols and Highlighting Regional Characteristics*

Regional cultural symbols intervene in the creative design of text that blends form and meaning as an effective design path, providing designers with a broader design direction. In view of the close connection between Suzhou numerals and the birthplace of Suzhou, and Suzhou numerals occupy an important position in the computing system and have profound cultural connotations and modern inheritance needs, this exploration takes Suzhou numerals as an example, and strives to make the creative design of Suzhou numerals radiate the charm of contemporary characters through the intervention of regional cultural symbols.

Suzhou numerals are a set of "commercial numbers" popular in the private sector since the Ming and Qing Dynasties ("Figure 7"). It is widely used in Chinese medicine stores, tailor shops, daily grocery stores, hardware stores, slaughterhouses, money houses, silver accounts, etc. Occasionally, it is also called "grass numerals" or "numeral text". It was originally produced in Suzhou, the most developed city in China in the Ming Dynasty, hence its name.⁴ The purpose of this design is to let people feel the past and present of Suzhou numerals through the birthplace of Suzhou numerals, and

attract more people to pay attention to Suzhou numerals culture. Therefore, the exploration and sorting out of Suzhou's regional cultural symbols is helpful to the formation of design concepts. From the perspective of concrete regional cultural symbols, the old buildings with black tiles and white walls, Suzhou Museum, Eastern Gate, Suzhou Qipao, etc. all have great regional characteristics. The concrete appearance can highlight the temperament and cultural heritage of Suzhou. In addition, abstract cultural symbols such as Su embroidery skills and Suzhou dialect that can reflect the local aesthetic taste and life interest, also have a unique style. Imagery cultural symbols are also very rich. For example, although Suzhou gardens are made by people, the idea of building a garden, the impression of Suzhou's small bridges and flowing water, and the elegant slow lifestyle are all representative symbols that can resonate with people's culture. From the perspectives of Suzhou's architectural features, city impressions, life aesthetics, language features, historical culture, etc., researchers can sort out the corresponding cultural symbols, analyze the connections between them and Suzhou numerals, which can lay a solid foundation for the later Suzhou numerals font design that blends form and meaning.

4. Qiu Jianli, Li Xuechang, The Little Mysterious Folk Shorthand Writing — "Hua Shu" [J]. Journal of East China Normal University(Philosophy and Social Sciences), 2011, 43(02): 56-64+154.

Suzhou numerals	○	一	二	三	四	五	六	七	八	九	十	二十	三十	四十
Arabic numerals	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	20	30	40

Figure 7 Diagram of the corresponding writing of Suzhou numerals and Arabic numerals (Image source: Baidu).

4.2 Refined and Translated Cultural Symbols, Highlighting the Vitality of Contemporary Culture

In the process of refining regional cultural symbols, designers should not ignore the regional, humanistic and historical context and make a rigid copy. Only by sincerely facing the tradition and drawing nourishment from it, can the designers create new value while continuing the historical context.⁵ Therefore, refining typical, different, and cultural cultural symbols that can trigger a sense of cultural identity, and then translating and re-creating them in text design, will help to blend the form and meaning of text creative design and demonstrate the design charm of contemporary creative text. Going to the waterside of Suzhou, the impression left by people is that it is misty and rainy, with small bridges and flowing water. Water is changeable and passionate, and it can represent the impression of Suzhou waterside. Water nourishes all things, is the source of life, and has a rich appearance. From an objective physical point of view, the physical state of water is changeable, such as solid, liquid, and gaseous, and it can produce different changes such as refraction and reflection when exposed to light, which is very variable and interesting. From an emotional point of view, water is passionate, from the gentle and elegant microwave ripples to the surging passionate passion, from the lazy and comfortable drizzle to the pure white snow, all reflecting the difference emotions carried by water in different states.

As water is a common element, how to make the design more in line with the temperament of Suzhou is a question that needs to be explored. Different from the ice and snow in the north and the rolling waves of seaside cities, the water in Suzhou is more gentle and passionate, quiet and elegant. Therefore, this time the water drop element is used as a refined regional cultural symbol, and the shape of the water drop, refraction and reflection, and dynamic changes after being subjected to external

forces are analyzed, giving font design more creative ideas in terms of visual form and expression form, and striving to radiate cultural vitality and contemporary charm with regional cultural symbols in Suzhou numerals font design.

4.3 Text Innovation Blends Form and Meaning, and Design Reveals a New Attitude

The designer is the creator of design products, the editor of symbols, and the transmitter of information.⁶ How to integrate the extracted regional cultural symbols into the design, how to achieve the innovation of the text design concept, visual form, and expression form, and how to accurately convey the design concept are all important. The permeable dyeing of Su front ("Figure 8") intends to integrate the form and meaning of the font design of Suzhou numerals with the form and meaning of the regional cultural symbol of Suzhou waterside, making the text design more culturally appealing in addition to its basic practical functions. From the perspective of the visual form of text, the writing tools of the ancient counting system, Suzhou numerals, are mainly brushes, so Suzhou numerals have the elegant temperament and charm of the pen, like calligraphy. Therefore, in the font design, it is considered to retain the part of the continuous strokes and strokes in the Suzhou numerals writing method, and to strengthen the characteristics of some strokes, so that the font design has more charm of cultural heritage, and the visual effect of the font has more impact and memory. In addition, the design and expression technique of the font is different from the usual computer software technique, and the drawing method is adopted to make the font of the Suzhou numerals and the three-dimensional feeling of the water drop more natural and simple, with a more hand-crafted atmosphere and temperature, and more vitality ("Figure 8", "Figure 9"). From the perspective of the fusion of design implication, this set of fonts is "permeable dyeing Su front". As the name implies,

5. Feng Xingbao, Research on the Regional Cultural Symbols in the Design of Urban Public Facilities [J]. Art Panorama, 2018(11): 102-103.

6. He Liwen, Research on Extraction and Translation of Symbols in Regional Culture [J]. Design, 2021, 34(04): 76-79.

the water droplets present a clear, bright, full and agile appearance. Irregular water droplets are fused with the Suzhou numerals sub-character, and there is a seemingly inadvertent but more sophisticated fusion collision. The whole set of Suzhou numerals is unified with changes in the background of water droplets. Each Suzhou numeral character seems to convey the quiet and elegant temperament of Suzhou, and also hide the potential vitality of Suzhou's quiet and dynamic. In terms of expression technique and form, in addition to the static effect, the font derives a dynamic wave effect, just like a Suzhou breeze blowing gently, crystal water

droplets rippling slightly, striving to evoke people's impressions and memories of Suzhou more vividly, inspire people's desire to understand, learn and spread about Suzhou numerals, so that people can more intuitively feel the beauty of the affection for Suzhou. "Permeable dyeing Su front" explores and designs from the perspectives of text form, design meaning, expression form, etc., trying to make regional cultural symbols more novel and interesting into the text creative design that blends form and meaning, to make text creative design present a new contemporary design attitude.

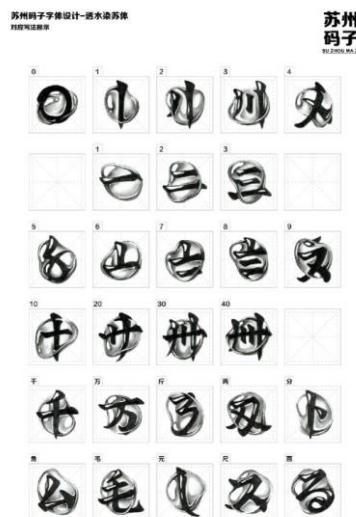


Figure 8 Design of permeable dyeing Su front (Image source: Painted by the author).



Figure 9 Design combination effect of permeable dyeing Su front (Image source: Painted by the author).

5. CONCLUSION

The creative design of text that blends form and meaning is conducive to the wonderful presentation

of text visual form, expression form, and design concept, showing the vitality of contemporary text design. The intervention of regional cultural symbols makes text creative design have broader

design ideas, and the richness of regional cultural symbols provides more design possibilities for text creative design. The differences of regional culture can condense different cultural symbols, which can be translated and recreated in the text design, which helps to form the uniqueness of text design creativity. Its cultural nature makes the text creative design concept more connotation and depth, allowing the "meaning" to be carried in the "shape", and accurately conveying the "meaning" through the "shape", which is helpful to the contemporary development of the text creative design that blends form and meaning.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Huiying Lu wrote the manuscript, and Zhixiong Huang contributed to revising and editing.

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