



Fully Understand the Cultural Context of Traditional Auspicious Patterns Commonly Used in China

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Abstract. This paper focuses on how to fully understand the cultural context of common Chinese auspicious patterns for the reason that a comprehensive understanding of them is the basis for designers and other persons to apply them accurately and appropriately. This paper develops in sequences of discovering the problem — analyzing the problem — solving the problem — verifying the problem-solving methods — obtaining the result. The first step is to raise the following questions: How to comprehensively understand commonly used auspicious patterns? What are the contents of cultural contexts of auspicious patterns? And then having an adequate understanding of their cultural contexts by summarizing the analysis of the following six aspects of auspicious patterns: Pattern contents, major elements, create methods, connotations applications and expression forms. Thirdly, a questionnaire is used to verify whether it is feasible to understand the cultural context through the analysis of these aspects above. And the data of the questionnaire show it's available. This paper sampled and analyzed about 30 commonly used auspicious patterns from three categories of Chinese auspicious patterns, and uses mixed analysis method combining qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis. It adopts quantitative analysis method to analyze each auspicious pattern, and adopts quantitative analysis method to verify the conclusion of the questionnaire survey.

Keywords: Chinese traditions · auspicious patterns · Cultural contexts · Suitable designs

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The art of traditional Chinese auspicious patterns is the fruit of over five thousand years' cultural accumulation of the Chinese nation, and is an important embodiment of traditional Chinese culture and art. Auspicious patterns are those patterns containing good wishes or blessings. Animals, flowers, trees, and words with auspicious meanings are often taken as subjects, such as the auspicious pattern of Yuan Yang Xi Shui (mandarin ducks tumbling merrily in the water) Fig. 1, as shown in the picture, two mandarin ducks are tumbling merrily about in a lotus pond. In Chinese traditional culture, mandarin



Fig. 1. Yuan Yang Xi Shui



Fig. 2. Song He Yan Nian

ducks are regarded as affectionate couples because they are often in pairs. Therefore, this auspicious pattern was created to bless the husband and wife deep and harmonious affection. Figure 2 is the auspicious pattern of Song He Yan Nian (Longevity Crane). In the picture, several cranes are flying in the sky, surrounded by pine branches. In China, cranes are thought to be immortal or have a longlife span; the pine tree is also a long-lived tree. Therefore, the combination of the two implies longevity.

Since ancient times, auspicious patterns have the cultural connotation of “painting must be intentional, meanings must be auspicious”. They are used to meet the spiritual needs of the people as auspicious patterns convey people’s wishes of exorcising evil spirits, avoiding misfortunes. In the past, auspicious patterns are often used in daily life, such as decorations on festivals, celebrations, clothing and furniture.


In the book “Chinese Traditional Auspicious Patterns and Modern Visual Communication Design”, edited by Wang Li zhi, said that “traditional Chinese auspicious patterns have a long history and are closely related to the spirit and culture of the Chinese nation. However, its development and application are declining. This is not what we want to see.” As he mentioned, traditional Chinese auspicious patterns are facing their “cold winters.” Chinese traditional patterns with perfect combinations of auspicious words and patterns, representing its traditional folk customs and symbolizing auspiciousness, are made to convey people’s good wishes. About fifty years ago, almost every family would put up posters with auspicious New Year pictures, such as Nian Nian You Yu (meaning abundance throughout the year). (a child holding a large carp and a lotus flower). These posters are rarely used nowadays. In the past, people would think of using some auspicious patterns during festivals and celebrations to convey their blessings and good wishes. For example, paper-cuts are pasted during the Spring Festival. Traditional Chinese window decorations are closely related to the art of paper cutting in which

various patterns are cut out from colored paper. Generally red coloured paper is in the majority. Appropriate auspicious patterns are also used to express good wishes on special celebrations such as marriage, birthday and childbirth. But nowadays persons seldom think of and use auspicious patterns during these festivals and celebrations. Traditional auspicious patterns have been ignored by the public. But, why do people nowadays not pay more attention to traditional auspicious patterns? This is something worth thinking about. This book also informed that “new designs for traditional auspicious patterns should be flexible and relevant to their subjects or a negative result would be caused.” This sentence pointed out that the “irrelevancy” is a misunderstanding of the meaning of the corresponding auspicious pattern, thus resulting in “mechanical applications”. It is pointed out here that the understanding of the culture of auspicious patterns only stays in the literal sense, without an accurate and in-depth understanding of its cultural context, resulting in the use of incongruity. All these show people’s lack of understanding of the cultural context of auspicious patterns.

1.2 What is the Cultural Context of Auspicious Patterns?

The cultural context of auspicious patterns is mainly the culture related to auspicious patterns. Including the creation concept of auspicious patterns, their own meaning, extended meaning, application occasions, specific application ways and methods, etc. If these factors are not clearly understood and managed, it is difficult to accurately judge their application occasions, thus causing cultural context confusion through the inaccurate use of auspicious patterns. We can analyse auspicious patterns from six aspects: contents, main elements, creation methods, pattern connotations, application occasions and application forms of the pattern. These factors can help to better understand them. 1. Pattern contents: Mainly to tell the basic form of a pattern; 2. Main elements: Mainly to know main elements of a pattern; 3. Creation methods: help to understand how patterns are created and explain why they are created in that way; 4. Design connotation: mainly explains the basic meaning of the pattern, containing blessings; 5. Application of patterns: mainly explain the correct situation of pattern use; 6. Pattern application form: it is to let people know the commonly used form of a pattern. As shown in picture 1, the main elements of this pattern are mandarin ducks, lotus and water. Pattern content: Two mandarin ducks tumbling in the water, implied meaning: Husband and wife are harmonious and affectionate. Pattern creation method: symbolic approach, Mandarin ducks are water birds that often come in pairs, one male and one female, much like an inseparable loving couple. Pattern’s connotations: implying harmony, love between husband and wife, which is a good wish for husband and wife. Application: It can be used for wedding celebrations or as gifts for newlyweds. Methods of application, Such as: invitations, candy packaging, wedding tableware, scene layouts, wedding gifts, etc. It is usually applied to some related products for a newlywed couple. If you’re in someone’s birthday party, it’s not appropriate to give them something with a painting of a couple of mandarin duck tumbling in the water. If everyone can have an appropriate and comprehensive understanding of the cultural context of commonly used auspicious patterns, there would be no “irrelevancy” and “mechanical applications.” A correct and reasonable use of auspicious patterns is the basis of receiving recognition (Table 1).

Table 1. It is analyzed from 6 aspects of the table

NOI-Yuan Yang Xi Shui	Pattern content	Two mandarin ducks tumbling merrily in the water
 <p data-bbox="185 437 432 490">Wang L.Z.(2010) Chinese traditional auspicious pattern and modern visual communication design. P76</p>	major elements	Mandarin ducks, lotus and water
	create method	symbolic approach: Mandarin ducks are water birds that often stay in pairs, one male and one female, much like an inseparable loving couple. Therefore, it is used to imply couple's harmony, conjugation. Mandarin ducks represent a loving couple.
	connotations	Husband and wife are harmonious and loving. It is a good wish for the harmony and love of husband and wife.
	applications	It can be used as gifts for the newlyweds or in wedding ceremonies
	performance form	It can be used for invitations, candy packaging, wedding tableware, scene layout, wedding gifts and so on. Applied to some related products of a newlywed couple.

1.3 Research Methods

This paper adopts qualitative analysis as the main research method, quantitative analysis as the auxiliary research method. The first is the analysis of commonly used auspicious patterns, and then combined with a questionnaire survey. Qualitative analysis: specific analysis is carried out from six aspects of pattern content, main elements, create methods, pattern connotations, application occasions and application forms, so that people can fully understand the cultural context of commonly used auspicious patterns. Quantitative analysis: mainly through the questionnaire, to verify whether through the analysis of six aspects can make people fully understand them.

2 The Cultural Context of Auspicious Patterns

From the perspective of auspicious patterns commonly used nowadays, auspicious patterns are divided into three categories in this paper according to different occasions: festivals, celebrations and patterns for daily use. The commonly used auspicious patterns 24 are summarized from these three occasions, getting an analysis of their cultural context, that is, from the content of patterns, main elements, create methods, connotations, application occasions and forms, so that we can fully understand the cultural context of commonly used auspicious patterns.

2.1 Festivals

They're mainly refer to some Chinese traditional festivals, Such as Spring Festival or New Year's day (the beginning of a New Year, on January 1 of the lunar calendar), the Mid-Autumn festival (in the lunar calendar on August 15, a family reunion day, families having moon cakes and enjoying the moon together), National Day (the Gregorian calendar on October 1st, to celebrate the birth of China), tomb-sweeping day (generally in early April, it basically is to commemorate ancestors), Dragon Boat Festival (the 5th day of the 5th lunar month, mainly to commemorate the ancient patriotic poet Qu Yuan, and food for that day is Zongzi (Chinese rice-pudding), etc.. Auspicious patterns are actually mainly used in the New Year festival. According to the tradition, on the eve of

the Spring Festival, people usually decorate their homes with auspicious patterns. Every family is busy pasting “Fu” (good luck) characters, couplets, door gods and New Year pictures, as well as window decorations. Character “Fu” implying good luck, peace and happiness would come in the coming year. Firstly, let’s talk about the character “fu”. On New Year’s Eve, every family sticks the word “fu”, which means good luck, peace and health, everything going well, etc. The word “fu” is generally stuck on the upper part or the middle-upper of the door. It can also be stuck on Windows and other articles, people also used to put the good fortune character “fu” upside down, indicating the arrival of happiness. Secondly, the God of Door. In ancient times, Chinese ancestors lived in double door houses, so they used to stick a door god on each door to expel evil spirits, guarding their houses, bring them peace, and auspiciousness. Shen Tu and Yu Lei are two gods with ugly appearance who can tame devil spirits; and then ancient Chinese people treated them as the door gods. But Chinese door gods were replaced by two generals Qin Qiong and Yuchi Jingde in the Tang dynasty. Legend has it that once the Emperor Li Shiming of the Tang Dynasty was troubled by horrible nightmares hearing ghosts call him at the midnight. After the emperor’s trouble was known by the ministers, Qin Qiong and Yuchi Jingde, the founding fathers of the Tang Dynasty, were recommended to guard outside the emperor’s room all night. Only several nights passed, the Tang emperor recovered. Then he ordered his loyal painters to draw pictures of Qin Qiong and Yuchi Jingde to put them on the door to ward off evil spirits. This practice spread quickly among the people. Later, more immortals were pasted on the door, which generally meant to bring good fortune.

Next, New Year’s paintings. Like posters, they are put up on walls or doors of a house. These are auspicious patterns with good meanings and sometimes they are combined with words. To express the wish of Nian Nian You Yu (meaning abundance), the expression of health and peace of Sui Sui Ping An (meaning good luck) means that the New Year would be full of gold and jade to express the hope for abundance and auspiciousness. Finally, the theme of auspicious patterns is decorated with paper-cut Windows. It is also said that the beginning of the New Year, the good wishes for this year, the general auspicious patterns can be converted into paper-cut patterns, such as Nian Nian You Yu, Sui Sui Ping An.

In the day of the Tianzhong festival or the Dragon Boat Festival Chinese people post the pattern “Tian Zhong Bi Xie” to pray for safety. It shows Zhong Kui, a god in Chinese folklore brandishing a sword in his hand who can beat down ghosts and exorcise evil spirits.

Auspicious patterns commonly used in festivals are: “Fu”, Qin Qiong Jing De, Nian Nian You Yu, Sui Sui Ping An, Tian Zhong Bi Xie.

2.2 Celebration

The celebration category is mainly the auspicious patterns used in some special celebrations, There are wedding ceremony, birthday ceremony, birth ceremony. Auspicious patterns used in the wedding ceremony to express the good wishes for the newlyweds. Such as YuanYang Xi Shui Fig. 1, Long Feng Cheng Xiang, Bing Di Tong Xin, Zao Sheng Gui Zi, etc. Among them YuanYang XiShui Fig. 1, Long Feng Cheng Xiang.

These two auspicious patterns are similar, and they can be applied in the wedding ceremony and send the gift of the newlywed occasions. The specific application form is in the design of the wedding of newlyweds and some related products that express happiness of marriage. Such as: invitations, wedding candies packaging, wedding tableware, scene layouts, household products and wedding gifts and other aspects. Bing Di Tong Xin, Zao Sheng Gui Zi, These two are mainly greetings, Bing Di Tong Xin Is a blessing for a couple, either a newlywed couple or a married couple. It is mainly used on wedding ceremonies or anniversaries of couples. Specific application forms can be used in the design of wedding gifts and household products, Such as craft gifts, home textile products, furniture supplies, etc. Zao Sheng Gui Zi is a blessing for the children of a husband and wife, It means that may they have a child soon. The application can be for a newly married couple or a married couple without children. The specific application form is concentric with Bing Di Tong Xin in the design of wedding gifts and household products, such as craft gifts, home textile products, furniture, etc.

The auspicious patterns, used in the birthday ceremony means longevity and health, are used to pray for longevity and health. They are represented by the character Shou (longevity), peach (referring to the longevity, eating peach can prolong life), crane (since ancient times, the legendary immortal bird, is often regarded as the representative of longevity among birds), turtle (a symbol of longevity), pine (trees that are evergreen and grow more slowly. Since ancient times, pine has been considered as the longest living tree and a symbol of longevity. They are mainly used to express wishes for a long and healthy life for the elderly. The main products are: Song He Yan Lian, Fu Shou Shuang Quan, and so on.

The auspicious pattern used in the birth celebration takes “birth” as the theme, and is the wish of healthy and clever children. Commonly used auspicious patterns are: Long (Dragons), Feng (Phoenix), Qi Lin Song Zi, Long, Feng, Kylin or unicorns are auspicious beasts created by ancient Chinese people, Long generally represent boys, Feng (Phoenix) usually represents girls. Kylin, the male called “Ky”, female called “Lin”. According to Chinese tradition, where there is a kylin, there is auspiciousness. There is an ancient legend that the child of a couple is blessed and bestowed by kylin, so in the painting kylin and children and other figures are combined to express such benedictions.

2.3 Patterns for Daily Use

This kind of patterns are daily used, that is, no special occasion requirements. The forms of application are also diverse: crafts, posters, jewelry, etc. The main types of it include wealth, happiness, luck, fortune, lu (fame or salary) and virtue.

The themes of the wealth are “money” and “wealth”, representing the desire for richness and honor. Ingots, the god of wealth, peony, toads, goldfishes and other auspicious graphics are applied to express abundance, happiness and safety. Such as: Fu Gui You Yu and Zhao Cai Jin Bao and so on.

The jubilant events category is themed with “happiness”. Besides the happy event of marriage, there are many other jubilant events in daily life. So they are used to express happy, cheerful meanings. Magpies, spiders are traditionally considered signs of good fortune. Such as Xi Cong Tian Jiang (a heaven-sent fortune), Xi Shang Mei Shao (happiness appears on the eyebrows), etc.

The class of Peace and health takes “fortune” as the theme, representing the performance of people to drive away evil, disaster, a desire for good luck. Ruyi (it is an ancient folk tickling tool, itching back but hands cannot touch, use it to scratch the back). It is also a symbol of good luck, generally made of jade, head in the shape of Ganoderma or cloud, slightly curved handle, for appreciation and play. such as “Wan Shi Ru Yi” (everything goes well), Ping An Ru Yi (peace).

With “fu” as the main topic, it means blessing and fortune. This kind of pattern expresses people’s yearning for happiness, wealth and stable life.

Bat and “Fu” (happiness and blessing) are a homonym. Bats usually appear in paintings associated with happiness and good fortune. They can be composed of patterns alone and often combined with children, the elderly and other figures for the pattern, expressed a good luck wish such as Shuang Fu.

The category of merit and reputation takes “Lu” as its theme. Lu means “salary”, which is the salary of officials in ancient China. Such patterns generally express people’s prayers for being an official and being promoted, and are usually represented by deer (deer has the same pronunciation with salary), Tian guan (people wearing official hats and official clothes), rooster and cockscomb flowers (They all have crowns, “crown” is homophonic with “officer”), monkey (it is homophonic with the “Hou” for marquis), etc. graph. such as: Jia Guan Jin Jue (be promoted to a higher rank), Yu Yao Long Meng (a fish leaping over the dragon gate).

Morality types take “morality” as the theme, about people’s integrity, noble conduct, and incorruptibility. They describe some of the “gentlemen” or “hero”. “Mei” (winter plum blossom), Orchid (orchids are known for their elegant fragrance are used to describe them. Since ancient times, they have been loved by people for their elegant and distant fragrance of evergreen night and become synonymous with nobility. Bamboo (bamboo stands characters of straight, dignified, self-disciplined). Chrysanthemum, Pine (It has upright posture, and evergreen tenacious youth). Such as: Sui Han San You (three durable plants of winter- pine, bamboo, and plum blossom).

Detailed analysis of the 24 auspicious patterns mentioned above can be found in the following links.

link: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1idaMLfK2Fz6BTIZoVAWBTV_GnPJOiTW_/edit?usp=sharing&oid=105802459372019988159&rtpof=true&sd=true.

3 Through the Questionnaire Analysis and Verification

3.1 Basic Scheme

Here, six common auspicious patterns are selected as the objects of investigation. Around 10 questions related to them, 100 design major students are asked to complete them. According to the answers, they analyse and verify whether they have a comprehensive understanding of these auspicious patterns. The setting of the survey paper is also purposeful (Table 2).

Questionnaire link: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/16iilPZUq1nX60xeia3ZWa4plGp3XYhXt/edit?usp=sharing&oid=105802459372019988159&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Table 2. Specific analysis is shown in the following table:

auspicious pattern	Define questions	object of investigation	number	purpose	analytical method
Yuan Yang Xi Shui	Questions 1-2 test your understanding of the main elements of a pattern	Design class students	100	It can have a comprehensive and clear understanding of auspicious patterns through six aspects of analysis.	Quantitative analysis of Questionnaire survey
Nian Nian You Yu	Questions 3 to 4 test the understanding of the content and connotation of the pattern				
Qi Lin Song Zi	Questions 5-6 test your understanding of patterns and patterns				
Zhao Cai Jin Bao	Questions 7 and 8 test your understanding of design forms				
Song He Yan Lian	Questions 9 to 10 test your mastery of the situation				
Yu Yue Long Men					

Table 3. Specific analysis is shown in the following table:

Subject	The number of correct	The number of errors	Accuracy (%)	Average accuracy (%)	conclusion
question1	95	5	95	92.6	The accuracy of 10 questions in the questionnaire was more than 86%, and the average correct rate was 92.6%. According to the data analysis of the questionnaire survey, 92.6% of the people can fully understand these auspicious patterns. Thus, the cultural context of this auspicious pattern can be fully understood from six aspects of pattern. To achieve the purpose of designers to use them accurately and appropriately.
question2	91	9	91		
question3	89	1	89		
question4	96	4	96		
question5	88	12	88		
question6	86	14	86		
question7	98	2	98		
question8	97	3	97		
question9	94	6	94		
question10	92	8	92		

3.2 Analyze and Summarize the Results

A total of 100 copies of the questionnaire, a total of 10 questions, the number of correct and wrong statistics for each question, the correct rate of each question, respectively obtained 10 questions of different correct rate, and then the average correct rate, so as to summarize the conclusion (Table 3).

4 Conclusions

This paper summarizes about 30 commonly used Chinese traditional auspicious patterns from the three aspects of festivals, celebrations and daily life, and analyses them from six aspects: Pattern contents, major elements, create methods, connotations applications and expression forms. Hope that through the analysis of these 6 aspects, designers can fully understand these commonly used auspicious patterns. To solve the problem of the use of auspicious patterns such as “mechanical application” and “irrelevance to the subject”, and to master and apply them appropriately. As for whether this goal can be achieved through the analysis of the six aspects, this paper is verified in the form of questionnaire, and finally confirmed by the average accuracy rate of 92.6%.

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