



Application of China Chic Elements in Design from the Perspective of Design Criticism

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Abstract. The purpose is to explore the current application of China Chic elements in design and re-examine them from the perspective of design criticism. It aims to promote the development of "China Chic" elements in design. Methods: The case analysis method and literature review method are employed to analyze the characteristics, existing problems, and future development trends of China Chic elements from the perspective of design criticism. It points out that the application of China Chic elements in design should be based on national culture, promoting traditional cultural spirit and developing traditional culture to empower China design and enhance cultural confidence.

Keywords: design criticism, design style, China Chic style, traditional culture

1 Introduction

In recent years, "China Chic culture" has increasingly entered the public eye. Whether it is cultural and creative products combining traditional culture with modern technology, or cultural creativity integrating Chinese culture with film and television IPs, or product packaging and brand design featuring traditional Chinese cultural symbols, more and more "China Chic culture" is stepping out of museums and into people's lives. [1] The frequent breakout of cultural and creative products such as the "Corner Tower Coffee" at the Palace Museum and the "China Chic co-branded clothing" at the Suzhou Museum has become a tangible example of the successful "transformation" of traditional culture.

1.1 China Chic Concept

The term "China Chic" primarily consists of two parts: "China" and "Chic". First, symbolizing the use of China's indigenous cultural symbols to establish a foothold in national culture and incorporate the excellent traditional Chinese culture into the research perspective. The understanding of "Chao" mainly focuses on two aspects: on one hand, it refers to trends, i.e., changes in the supply side, where Chinese domestic products adapt to market and the demands of the times, establish value positioning, and thus spark consumption trends in the Chinese market through product repackaging. On

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the other hand, the interpretation of design criticism should be understood from the perspectives of judgment and evaluation: "Design criticism refers to the analysis, judgment, evaluation, and discussion of specific design works, design behaviors, design phenomena, as well as related ideas and meanings, under certain cultural backgrounds and value concepts, using certain theories, methods, and approaches" [2]. With the transformation of the international environment, the enhancement of cultural confidence, and other factors, the mindset of a wide range of consumers has shifted. The domestic market's attitude toward products with national characteristics has evolved from initial indifference and resistance to a pursuit and enthusiasm. Conducting design criticism on China Chic undoubtedly promotes the sustainable development of design.

This force has both gradual and transformative potential. It advances design theory and practice correctly when applied to critical design theories or creative practices. Scholars view criticism as a means of organization and progress.

Narrowly, "China Chic" denotes locally-specific brands independently designed by Chinese designers, whose products represent Chinese cultural phenomena with niche appeal.

Broadly, "China Chic" is a consumption concept with ethnic and cultural traits. It represents the modernization of traditional culture and innovatively conveys Generation Z's personality and fashion interests. The youth trend embodies cultural confidence, highlighting traditional culture's contemporary value. Social trends rooted in Chinese culture throughout history, reflecting cultural identity, are all "China Chic". For instance, the ancient "style of national scholars" is a broad example. Currently, it refers to trends sparked by local culture, brands, and products. Despite varied interpretations, all center on Chinese culture, supported by youth's emotional needs, values, and community identities. "Guochao fever" externally manifests their cultural value identification.

1.2 The Development of "China Chic" and Its Application in Design

During the Republican era, economic development entered a certain buffer stage, with a large middle class stimulating the prosperity of the commodity economy and giving rise to numerous emerging phenomena, which required new design approaches to support them. The initial form of "China Chic" was thus formed. During this period, design combined traditional elements with contemporary aesthetic characteristics. China's design, no longer closed and self-contained, absorbed the essence of a wide range of foreign cultures, forming its own "China Chic" style. Nourished by the continuous flow of history, "China Chic" integrated with the characteristics of the times, demonstrating its ability to assimilate and evolve, and was enriched and developed in different periods through its strong inclusiveness.^[3] The development of "China Chic" initially focused on the fashion industry. Previously, the first reaction to the term "trend" was often a foreign brand, but today's China Z-generation consumers have more choices from domestic brands. Brands like Feiyue, Li-Ning, Huili, and Peacebird have been revitalized, along with many new "China Chic" brands and designer labels such as Uma Wang and Yaojiu 97. Half a year later, the phrase "China Li-Ning" reappeared at Paris Fashion Week SS 2019, while domestic brand Peacebird debuted at

New York Fashion Week with the theme “Wireless JNOBOUNDARY.” Meanwhile, the “China Chic” aesthetic has matured across design disciplines—including graphic design, IP image design, street environmental design, and cultural product design.

2 The Rise of China Chic from the Perspective of Design Criticism

As a rising star in the design field, China urgently needs to establish a strong global brand, bridge the gap, and gain industrial advantages in specific sectors. However, compared to international counterparts, China started later in design and has a weaker foundation. It also lacks influence in shaping design practices and theories. Simply increasing design output won't solve these issues. Therefore, design criticism must be leveraged to identify problems in design and develop effective solutions.

2.1 The Connotation of Design Criticism

The core concept of design criticism is “criticism”. The Modern Chinese Dictionary defines “criticism” in three ways: first, as commentary or evaluation; second, as annotations for books or articles; and third, as feedback on flaws or errors. The concept of “criticism” originated from the Enlightenment, rooted in the rational spirit of philosophical critique^[4]. Design criticism encompasses all design phenomena, issues, and the rational analysis, evaluation, and summarization conducted by designers. It serves as a vital catalyst for design development, guided by established design theories. Through rational assessment of designs, it identifies new challenges, compiles fresh insights, and provides new materials and resources for design advancement, thereby achieving further progress based on existing theoretical foundations.

Design criticism, also known as design review, is an important part of design science and design aesthetics. From the history, it can be said that there is design criticism wherever there is design. As for individual design activities, there is always design criticism in the whole activity from creative to production and consumption.

2.2 Problems Arising from the rise of China Chic

With the rapid development of China Chic, problems have emerged. Calligraphic fonts with bold red and green colors, combined with cultural elements like facial makeup, cranes, auspicious clouds, and Peking Opera, create generic advertisements. Such haphazard combinations are common. Brands replicate Chinese cultural elements without deep understanding, neglecting to articulate and reconstruct traditional culture's contemporary value. leading to the stereotypical impression that “traditional Chinese culture equals traditional patterns.” This lack of resonance with avant-garde fashion trends also dilutes or even distorts the original meaning of traditional culture.

With the rise of China Chic, brands increasingly treat it as a traffic code, stuffing various products into the trend. Fields like clothing, cosmetics, and food now bear the “Guochao” label, reflecting commercial trends and absurdities. This overgeneralization

changes both brands and consumers. As the slogan grows with China's economic boom, public emotions merge, gaining attention but sparking cultural backlash, such as excessive traditionalism and foreign culture rejection, potentially polarizing brand trust. Currently overhyped, China Chic's trendy attributes are misread, necessitating a return to its original meaning. Lefebvre noted that in a "bureaucratic society with controlled consumption," production ideology becomes consumption ideology, resulting in blind conformity. Modern daily life is alienated and dominated by symbols, where symbolic value surpasses use value.^[5]

The rise of China Chic is a positive trend. While trend hype can indeed attract attention, over-reliance on "trend" hype may make people overlook the true essence of China Chic. As Chanel famously said, "Trends fade, but classics endure." What we need to focus on is the quality and design of the products, rather than merely relying on hype to gain attention.

3 Application of Guochao in Specific Design Field from the Perspective of Design Criticism

China Chic elements are widely used in the current design field, whether in graphic design, fashion design, or environmental design, each has its unique forms of expression and styles. Therefore, when facing the issue of China Chic elements being abused, different products will be affected differently.

3.1 Application of China's Trend in Graphic Design

In Chinese graphic design, China Chic illustrations adopt the composition of traditional landscape paintings, integrating elements like mountains, trees, flowers, birds, and figures with modern architecture and products. They use highly saturated, contrasting colors and begin with outlines. In terms of color application, China Chic illustrations often employ highly saturated and vividly contrasting colors. Technically, China Chic illustrations start with outlining, then apply a base color and layer it with darker, lighter, complementary, and analogous colors to create the effect of color washes in Chinese painting. Finally, some textured brushstrokes are added to enhance the visual texture, resulting in rich and delicate color presentations.^[6] followed by base colors layered with shades, highlights, and complementary tones to mimic ink wash effects. Textured brushstrokes add depth, resulting in rich visual texture. This style is influential in packaging, branding, and cultural products, with strong marketing impact. Catering brands also incorporate Republican-era and Hong Kong-style elements to build distinct identities.

However, from the perspective of design criticism, the excessive use of China Chic elements has led to a monotonous and superficial design style. Graphic design is an artistic form of expression that conveys information through elements such as images, graphics, and text. In the wave of China Chic style, designers overly rely on specific symbols, colors, and typography, neglecting the overall coherence and deeper expression of the design. They often treat China Chic elements as mere decorations, over-

looking the core objectives of the design. This overreliance has plunged China Chic design into the predicament of formal uniformity and shallow content.

3.2 Application of China Trend in Environmental Design

The global immersive industry is growing explosively, creating a market frenzy. This trend is intensifying, resembling a nationwide immersive "scenic show." Overseas, Disney and Universal Studios exemplify immersive themed commerce. Domestically, fueled by China Chic and cultural confidence, immersive commerce has evolved into a national-style theme favored by young consumers. China Chic culture, through consumer products and cultural works, integrates traditional elements and has gained widespread popularity, evolving from a subculture to a mass consumer phenomenon. The immersive national-style commercial environment connects past and present, enhancing interaction and offering an immersive aesthetic experience. However, rapid development has drawbacks.

From the perspective of environmental design, the abuse of China Chic elements mainly manifests in design application errors and repetitive phenomena. Environmental design combines space and function to create places with a humanistic atmosphere through design. However, in the trend of China Chic, some environmental designs often focus solely on adding national fashion elements while neglecting spatial layout and human experience. They blindly apply China Chic elements to interior decoration, facades, and background walls during the design process, resulting in monotonous and rigid environmental designs. Moreover, due to the popularity and prevalence of China Chic elements, some designers tend to prioritize quick results and market trends, leading them into formal repetition and imitation.

3.3 Application of China Fashion Trends in Clothing Design

The application of China Chic in clothing design enhances garments' artistic, aesthetic, and collectible value by incorporating traditional elements like buttons, fans, patterns, and Tang-style clothing, which showcase traditional culture's charm and cultural significance. This enriches garments with deeper cultural meaning, strengthens cultural identity, and integrates tradition into modern life and fashion, achieving genuine "China-fashion cultural confidence" and innovative national design^[7].

However, abuse of China Chic in fashion design leads to extravagant and monotonous styles. Some designers prioritize uniqueness over subtlety, overusing symbols and labels, resulting in shallow designs. For instance, simply adding Chinese characters to patterns ignores aesthetic and semantic expression, making designs stiff and mediocre. Design, as the 'art of daily life,' manifests in two dimensions. Firstly, it embodies the inherent beauty of its creations—design elements in everyday contexts that, through their aesthetic presence, amplify and reveal the aesthetic demands of daily existence. Secondly, the beauty of design is fundamentally embedded within the beauty of daily life, seamlessly integrating into human existence and becoming an integral part of the art of daily living. Through its material and aesthetic power, design highlights the ideal qualities and trends inherent in daily life, possessing the

transformative potential to redefine its meaning. This dual nature reflects the overarching and foundational value of design culture ^[8].

4 Conclusions

In summary, misuse of China Chic occurs in graphic, fashion, and environmental design, characterized by overreliance on form, lack of coherence and creativity, and repetitive errors. Designers should emphasize balance, innovation, and purpose to avoid abuse.

When applying traditional cultural symbols to design, it is not only necessary to focus on simple stacking, combination, and reconstruction, but also to delve into their core meanings to achieve a natural fusion of tradition and modernity. While emphasizing market benefits, social benefits should also be considered. The rich connotations and high artistic value of traditional culture are conducive to deepening brand connotations, gaining high consumer recognition, and better inheriting and promoting excellent traditional Chinese culture.

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