

## The Application Of Auspicious Patterns In Decoration Of Traditional Ancient Houses In Sichuan

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**Abstract:** This paper takes field research on decoration of traditional folk residence with different stage and style in Sichuan as point of penetration, attempts to make a induction and summarization on the formation and development vein of auspicious patterns in Bashu area, and deduces symbols embodying the development course and cultural connotation of auspicious patterns culture in Sichuan area. This way, it can obtain the design thought and apply auspicious patterns to the innovative design of modern furniture.

**Key words:** Chinese tradition; auspicious patterns; Sichuan; decoration; traditional ancient houses

Auspicious patterns in traditional houses of Sichuan is an important part of Sichuan folk residence art, assembles the soul of traditional culture and is an epitome of Bashu history and culture. Those auspicious patterns not only show the characteristics of folk resident in every era in Sichuan, but reflect the effect of the humanity, religion, folk custom and the external culture on the Sichuan houses as well. The study on the decoration of traditional auspicious patterns in Sichuan houses can enable us to better understand the decorative pattern itself as well as its characteristic, inherit and innovate it.

### 一、 The origin and development of traditional auspicious patterns

During the long historical process of Chinese cultural development, because of the respectfulness and fear people have when they face dangerous situations and gods, they have the desire to pray for auspiciousness. This way, the auspicious idea emerge at the right moment, is represented in patterns and applied to decoration in the future. Folk residence is the carrier people will attach to from birth to death. Along with the deeper understanding of the auspicious concept and the proficiency in decorative patterns, the surface decoration of the houses could better present people's wishes. Gradually, the auspicious patterns are used in the content of the decoration in houses and endowed with profound spiritual connotation of the houses.<sup>[1]</sup>

The function of door is not only for in and out, but also serves as a partition wall that separates the internal and external space. Door is also called "facade" or "shop front", which shows the importance of door in the whole house. The building of the palace and message is called gatehouse, simply door.<sup>[2]</sup>The doors of the traditional houses in Sichuan area can not be known or have no much decoration, so the door mentioned in this paper are all partition door used to separate the inner room from the external passage. The partition door is usually installed in the eaves or hypostyle column. As the most common type of door leaf in the traditional houses, the partition door usually has four, six or eight leaves. And the upper part is call the heart of the partition, formed by all kinds of arris lattice and being light transmission. The lower part is lacquer panel, usually engraved decorative patterns and being light-proof.<sup>[3]</sup> In the arris lattice and decorative patterns engraved in the lacquer panel, whether they are fragrant plants and flowers, attractive animals and birds, the vivid immortal and god , fortune, dragon or phoenix, all of those imply the auspicious meaning and

the yearning as well as pursuit towards wonderful things. This kind of auspicious decorative patterns not only satisfies people's desire to pray for safeness, but brings about aesthetic pleasure as well, uniting material life and the spirit of the soul.<sup>[4]</sup>

## 二、 The meaning of Chinese traditional auspicious patterns

Chinese traditional concept pays attention to artistic conception, and aesthetic concept stresses harmony and unity. So the traditional auspicious patterns make emotion objectified and form to express ideas in theme and manifestation.<sup>[5]</sup> People use patterns to implicitly show their pursuit of well-being as well as future sustenance, and endow those patterns with infinite meaning beyond the surface. The connotation of those auspiciousness usually is people's expect for happiness, affluence, longevity and joy.

### (一) Happiness

Every spring festival, it is a long-standing custom of our Han nationality to paste the word "fu". According to the account of *Meng Liang Lu*, "people will be busy at cleaning houses and paste spring festival scrolls." "paste" in the article means to paste "fu" in the red paper.

"Fu" bears people's yearning for happy life and wishes for bright future. "Happiness" is in the first position among "happiness, affluence, longevity, joy". And "seeking happiness, bringing about happiness, cherishing happiness, blessing" are the generalization and representation of all kinds of cultural phenomenon. In the traditional culture of China, the meaning of happiness is not material satisfaction, but the spiritual satisfaction. Seeking happiness shows people's positive attitude and pursuit towards life.

Patterns signifying "happiness" consist of bat, auspicious clouds, coin, longevity peach, osmanthus flowers and so on. "The happiness is right before my eyes" is presented by a bat on the coin with eyelet; as in *Shangshu Hong Fan*, "five blessings: the first is longevity, the second is wealth, the third is health and tranquility, the fourth is being praised for moral integrity, the fifth is die in his bed"; The pattern of "five blessings and longevity" consist of five bats circling longevity peach or the word "shou"; the pattern of "happiness adds child" consist of a bottle of sweet osmanthus and bat, signifying the addition of kids and happiness.

### (二) Affluence

*The records of the historian Tian Guan shu* says the sixth of *wen chang gong* is "si lu". There is a saying of high official positions and riches. "Lu" means official position with salary. Deity of fortune is in charge of study and career prospect. In ancient, if man of letters want to stand out among people and gain power and wealth, the only way is through the imperial examination. This way, they regard deity of fortune with reverence and piously worship him. So people show their wish for affluence in auspicious patterns.

Patterns related to "Lu" consist of deer, rooster, lion, oamanthus fragrans, pedipalp, peony, litchi, longan, nut, lotus and so on. Deer is a homophone for lu; rooster is for fame; peony means good fortune. So patterns consisting of deer, rooster and peony means fame and wealth. Lion is a homophone for "Shi", meaning the high rank of the Shi position; "chan gong zhe gui", "du zhan ao tou", "yi lu lian ke" etc contain the auspicious meaning for obtaining a official position, indicating people's diligent pursuit of "gong ming li lu".

### (三) Longevity

The culture of longevity is an important part in Chinese traditional culture. The god of longevity,

one of three gods(Fu, Lu, Shou), is kind of a belief for Taoism to pursue eternal life, and later it is used to refer to people with long life. *Hua Yang Guo Zhi* had such a record that there was a man, called peng zu zhang, living a eternal life in Peng shan town, mei shan city, Sichuan province. Later generations thought of Peng as the god of longevity. This story shows people's yearning and wish for longevity. People always say shou bi nan shan at one's birthday, signifying that one's life is as long as nan shan and it is also the blessing for a long life. Fang Hui, an eminent writer in Yuan dynasty, said "neighbors send me the wish of longevity at my birthday" in *Wu Xu birthday, the twentieth chapter of Tong Jiang sequel*. It can be seen that sending the wish of longevity at birthday has been a common custom.

#### (四) Joy and safeness

Joy is the comprehensive expression of joy, happiness, auspiciousness and safeness. For people always hope to pursue good fortune and avoid disaster, and be safe and joyful, so they fabricate a god of joy. The god of joy is also called auspicious god. There is a story that the god of joy is a devout woman under the charge of VisionCat, who does not show signs or establish temples after being god. So the characteristic of the god of joy is no concrete images. But the worship for the god of joy can be seen normally in all kinds of activities, showing people's pursuit and wishes for joy and safeness.

Patterns signifying joy consist of magpie, long-jawed spider, plane trees, lotus and so on. There is a saying that the magpie's call is considered to be the coming of joy. Magpie is considered as a lucky bird, symbolizing auspiciousness. It is said that magpie is the embodiment of goddess. It not only help the cowherd and weaver girl meet in the annual Chinese valentine's day. It is also regarded as love bird that brings about the signal of happy event. And many men of letters write poems about magpie and chant. As for "xi shang mei shao" and "tong xi", they use the xi in "xi que", the mei in "mei hua" and the tong in "wu tong" as a homophone to express the joy. *Jing Chu Sui Shi Ji* states that a woman put fruit in the courtyard for begging the skill of weaving. A spider net drops at the fruits, so the woman believes she achieves her aspiration. Here, the spider is the long-jawed spider. In ancient, long-jawed spider is also called "xi zi", "xi mu". The fall of the long-jawed spider symbolizes "xi cong tian jiang", meaning the fall of happy event.

### 三、 The application of traditional auspicious patterns in Sichuan

#### (一) the comparison of application in different period

During the warring states period, the light of Sanxingdui in Sichuan basin has already faded. While the Qin state in the north gets stronger after Shang yang's political reform. After the Qin state unities the bashu area, the early bashu culture gradually merges into the ancient culture, and as a regional culture, it develops as synchronous as the whole culture. Till the end of the warring state period and the Han dynasty, chengdu has already been among the top of the country, named "tian fu", "han jia shi huo, yi wei chen shou", "wen zhang guan tian xia" by Zhu Geliang. At this time, its culture has already topped, and its modeling art in painting is also the world class. Bao Guang temple, located in the northern suburbs of chengdu, is said to be built in the eastern Han dynasty. With grand scale, deep palace and verdant trees, the temple has five palaces and sixteen yards, making it the only temple that preserves the early buddhist temple's classical layout-"the temple and the tower are one and the tower locates in the center". Most of its decorative arris lattices are formed by the swastika. Among lattices various shapes of bats spreading their wings adorn lattices

in R cluster. And lotus, peony and chrysanthemum are ornament, which make it solemn without stiffness and lifelike.

After the western Han dynasty, the war has taken place in the bashu area. Culture and economy has not got recovered and developed until the Tang and Song dynasty. During this period, its economy is as prosperous as that in Jingshi. Most houses preserved in Sichuan are built in Tang and Song dynasty. It is during this period that the first paper money appears, the highest LeShan giant buddha is established and a large number of men of letters spring up. Wu Daozi described the jialing river landscape here, Huang Quan created court art style, and Chen Ziang, Xue Tao and San Su etc were both born here. At this time, the culture of Bashu reaches the peak. Plenty of poems and literary masterpiece spring up. People pay attention to culture as ever before, which enables people's sense of beauty and depiction towards auspicious patterns reach perfection. The elements used in patterns have increased and the grasp of the patterns' composition as well as skills has been better. Due to the prosperity of Xi Shu school, the paint of plants and birds get success. As for the decoration of houses preserved from Tang and Song dynasty, the application of plants and birds painting to decorative patterns has reached a certain level. The fairy figure first appears on the decoration, which features exquisite composition and romantic style. And the whole window lattice is occupied with all kinds of patterns. As Fei Zhu says, "craftsmen spring up during this period." It can be seen that aesthetics in Shu area is popular during Tang and Song dynasty and auspicious patterns prosper during this period.

During the war of Song and Yuan, the fire of war reaches bashu area again. Culture of bashu area in the whole Yuan dynasty is in decline. Cultural treasures are destroyed, Shu Xue disappears. People in Yuan dynasty remarks that the terribleness of the disaster in Shu area is beyond words. It is in the recent three hundred years since Ming dynasty that culture and economy have recovered a little. But later it suffers wars and natural disasters for eighty years in a row. Until now, according to the survey in recent years, houses of Ming dynasty in Sichuan is only a few and only one or two houses could be investigated. During this period, the style and type of auspicious patterns are single and boring. Even the patterns of plants and birds have no the grand characteristic of Tang and Song dynasty. And among window lattices only symbols exist.

During the war of Ming and Qing dynasty, Sichuan suffers another strike, and it does not get recovery until Qing dynasty. During the recovery process, "Hu guang tian sichuan" brings about cultural integration, which enables auspicious patterns compatible. The decoration of this period has the tendency to reach the peak of Tang and Song dynasty. Craftsmen of Qing dynasty in Sichuan area summarize the former's experience, and then their design idea becomes flexible and the style are various, showing abundant art styles.

Since the emerge of bashu culture, it reaches the peak three times during the several thousand years. It suffers a lot through a few disasters, but every recovery is related to the infusion of immigrants, which brings about the integration of external culture from all directions. Bashu culture gains more abundant connotation during the process of compatibility, which makes auspicious patterns various in different stages.

## (二) Style features in different areas

The ethnic composition in bashu is pretty complex. And there are many different accounts about it. What's more, it is rare to find the situation that all nationalities separate Sichuan. Under the background of muti-culture nationality, different areas in Sichuan present their own style features in

auspicious patterns.

The surrounding of basin is higher and the middle is lower. The Chengdu plain is the center of the whole basin. Because of its terrain, the development of its culture shows the strong tendency of centrality. Therefore, Chengdu becomes the economic and cultural center of the basin for several thousand years, which is considered as “yi fang zhi hui” in *Zhou Shu-Xin Qing Zhi Zhuan*. Compared with auspicious patterns in surrounding areas, auspicious patterns of Chengdu is more severe and steady. It applies much more plants figures. Lotus, peony and plum blossom are normal elements used in plants patterns while bats, swastika and fret are normally used in animal patterns.

Located in Nancong city, the south east of Sichuan, the Langzhong ancient city is named “lang yuan”. It has a history of 2300 years. And its long history creates wonderful culture and leaves many precious cultural relics. The protection of the traditional houses and temple in Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing dynasty forms its abundant cultural connotation. The decoration of Langzhong ancient city uses many plants patterns, such as lotus, peony and plum blossom etc. And most auspicious themes express wishes, such as “fu lu shou xi”, “ji xiang duo fu”, “yan nian chang shou” etc. Apart from plants patterns, there are many other types of patterns, such as fairy figures, historical figures, views and plants and birds etc. They also express people’s pursuit and wishes for better life.

The west south of Sichuan area is Yi autonomous prefecture, where it has beautiful scenery and relatively backward economy. It is regarded as wild places, whose capital, Xichang, is named “qiong du”. Due to its remote location, it is only a county in Qin dynasty. Therefore, its cultural development is relatively weak. The hardship Xichang ancient city has experienced can not be investigated any more, only a few ancient houses prove the history. Compared with the middle and eastern Sichuan, auspicious patterns of Sichuan are single style and boring. The decoration of ancient houses left over by Ming dynasty consist of only symbols, most of which are fret and swastika, seldom patterns. This characteristic is similar to the cultural development of the western Sichuan.

Because of the influence of geography and historical factors, traditional auspicious patterns in sichuan present different characteristics in different stages and areas. However, bashu culture shows identity in the whole area. Traditional auspicious patterns draws experience from the totem worship of Sanxingdui period, cultural prosperity of Tang and Song dynasty, and the decadence and recovery. Through the innovation of craftsmen from generation to generation, it becomes what it is now. What’s more, its plants and birds culture, fairy figure and stories etc presented in auspicious patterns reflect bashu people’s religious belief, custom, cultural level and pursuit of life and son on. It also shows bashu people’s scenery, ingenuity and plausibility, leaving us traditional culture relics featuring Sichuan territory.

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