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## DESIGN OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE CHARACTER GRAPHICS WITH ROUNDED OUTLINES

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*In Chinese conception, the circle is a graphic embodiment of perfection and goodness, and circular patterns are widely popular in life. Designs of Chinese character graphics with circular outlines are a typical style of traditional Chinese motifs, which are rich in expressiveness with diverse internal organizational structures and modes of meaning expression. These unique design languages carry the emotions and thoughts of the nation, and have become part of the cultural genes after the accumulation of history, laying the foundation for the current design theory and practice research, and providing inspiration for innovation.*

**Key words:** circular outline, traditional form, Chinese character graphics, Chinese thinking, meaning expression.

### INTRODUCTION

Chinese character graphics, a type of graphic design based on the stroke structure of Chinese characters, are often adorned on the surfaces of objects such as furniture, clothing, and utensils. These graphics "use the basic strokes of the Chinese characters in a combination of various decorative techniques such as adding, combining, distorting and taking away, bringing together the formality of calligraphy and the vividness of painting, with an emphasis on decorative and symbolic meanings" [1]. Chinese characters with rounded outlines have been regarded as a typical representative of traditional Chinese visual culture because of their special stylistic features and connotative meanings. Much of the academic attention to the subject has focused on the analysis of generic styling techniques, such as Professor Lu Hua's article outlining the basic artistic characteristic of circular eaves tile Chinese character graphics [2], and Professor Lv Shengzhong's summary of thirteen common design forms of Chinese character graphics in *Idea of Characters* [3], which provide the necessary preliminary theoretical references for further in-depth exploration.

### PURPOSE

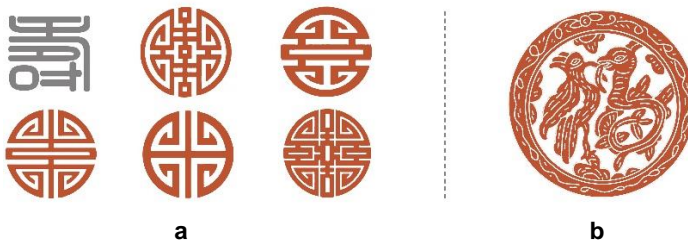
The purpose of this paper is to analyse the structural specificity of Chinese character graphics with rounded outlines, to list the common types of composition, and to try to explore the influence of different internal organisations on the expression of meaning, in order to reveal the implicit traditional Chinese design thinking and its artistic characteristics.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In terms of shape, the circle has no angles, directions, starting and ending points. From the perspective of classical Chinese aesthetics, the completeness of the circle emphasises the characteristics of wholeness, harmony and symbiosis, which then extends to the philosophical concept of the endlessness of all living things. In the traditional concept of Chinese people, the public prefers the image of completeness and fullness, which is regarded as a symbol of harmony, beauty and abundance. Therefore, Chinese traditional graphics present the dominant features of completeness and closure in the treatment of circular contour, i.e. the layout inside the circular contour is full, and at the same time it is rare to see any elements partially breaking the Outline. This design style has existed in Chinese folklore as a convention and has been passed down until the early twentieth century, when Western culture and art came to China and the old style changed, but the traditional style is still regarded as one of the typical representatives of Chinese features.

The rounded outlines of many traditional Chinese characters enhance their meaning, identifying visual form with content. The corresponding compositional unity is generally observed with such characters as "福" (blessing), "富" (wealth), "壽" (longevity) and "喜" (happiness) (Fig.1).



**Fig. 1.** a - Seal character "壽(longevity)" and its folk circular patterns;  
b - Qing Dynasty "福 (blessing)" character pattern

The components range from pure text to a combination of text and graphics. In the spatial layout, the graphic outlines are strictly regulated, showing a neat and restrained character. However, internally, the elements of the shape of the treatment is relatively free, they are fused, alternating or entangled with each other, ever-changing, form language is very rich. Common styling techniques are as follows:

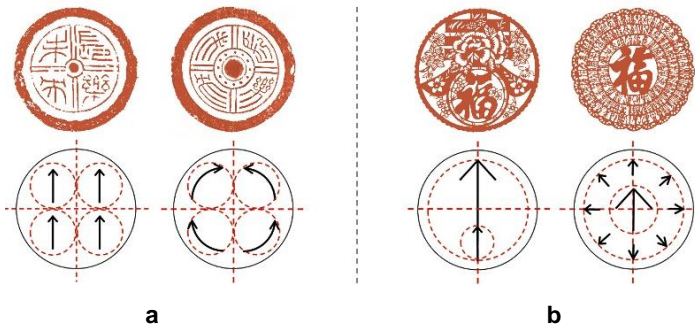
1. On the basis of maintaining recognisability, character strokes are deformed and processed to shape the form according to the situation, including lengthening and shortening, bending and straightening, rotating and tilting, and so on.
2. Within the glyph structure, thematically related graphics are added to decorate and enrich the picture, and also to fill in the gaps within the outline more effectively.
3. In the combination design of multiple Chinese characters, the spatial



proportion is adjusted to alleviate the compositional problems caused by uneven strokes and achieve visual balance.

It is essential to emphasize that any form of technique application is inseparable from consideration of conveying meaning. The dual-axis theory of semiotics tells us that the synthesis of meaning depends on the choice of constituent elements and the organisation adopted for them. Chinese character graphic design combines the advantages of both text and graphics, which can greatly enrich the hierarchy and expressiveness of the picture. In traditional works, some seemingly simple treatment of form can reflect subtle differences in the expression of meaning. For example, the two figures in Fig.2a are both rubbings of eaves tile excavated from Han Dynasty palace sites. Here, the circular outline alludes to the state, and the inner characters, "长乐未央 (boundless joy)" are a wish for peace and prosperity under imperial authority. However, due to the different arrangement of the characters, the meanings of the two diagrams are not exactly the same. The four characters on the left are arranged upright in a full and stable composition, and the image emphasises the firmness of the regime, while the characters on the right rotate around the central dot, indicating that everything runs in an orderly fashion around the core (imperial power). There are many other similar design cases that reflect the uniqueness of Chinese graphic language, which is one of the focuses of this research.

The reflection of traditional Chinese thought in the graphic design of Chinese characters with rounded outlines is obvious, and the basis of this thought is the concept of "unity of heaven and mankind". Classical Chinese philosophy holds that everything in the world is a whole, and it is a law of nature that all things that do not appear to be intertwined externally have an internal correlation. In the Tang Dynasty, Hui Neng further defined the idea that "everything can be related" from the perspective of subjective creation, thus developing the early Chinese theory of "isomorphic" design (Fig.2b) [4].



**Fig.2.** a - Eaves tile rubbings with character "长乐未央 (boundless joy)" and their Layout diagrams; b - Folk paper-cuttings with character " (blessing)" and their Layout diagrams

Under the guidance of its ideas, different objects are integrated in the same organism, and thus the holistic and systematic mode of thinking is established, and the traditional design approach unfolds along this line. As an organic whole in



design, the circle's internal components necessarily abide by unified rules, and they coordinate and hold each other in check, thus achieving a symbiotic situation. On the other hand, the circle has the visual tendency of movement, which is a symbol of the operation of life in Chinese thinking. Therefore, for the design of Chinese character graphics with rounded outlines, the requirement is undoubtedly to seek development and innovation in balance through a holistic and systematic creative process, which is precisely a supreme aesthetic ideal pursued by the Chinese people in the ultimate sense.

### CONCLUSIONS

Traditional Chinese character graphics with rounded outlines are the product of design thinking with Chinese features, which, under the requirement of spatial adaptation, realise the enhancement of meaning through various form processing techniques, thus expressing the simple aesthetics and values of the Chinese people. These ideas have the attribute of being closely connected with real life, and can transcend the limitations of time and space, and are equally instructive whether from ancient times to modern times, or overriding different design fields. We can see that the excellent national design concepts and formal methods are still maintaining a strong vitality at present, providing a large amount of ideological material for practical design and stimulating new creative inspiration, so that a large number of excellent works with traditional characteristics without losing the style of the times came into being, which is exactly where the charm and value of traditional culture is embodied.

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**ЛІ С., КОЛОСНІЧЕНКО О.**

### **ТРАДИЦІЙНИЙ ГРАФІЧНИЙ ДИЗАЙН КИТАЙСЬКИХ ІЄРОГЛІФІВ З КРУГЛИМ КОНТУРОМ**

*У традиційних уявленнях китаїців коло є графічним втіленням завершеності та краси, а в побуті широко використовуються кругові декоративні мотиви. Китайська ієрогліфічна графіка – один із типових видів, який у традиційних стилях дизайну часто вписаний у замкнений круговий контур і має різноманітну внутрішню організаційну структуру та способи вираження сенсу. Ці унікальні мови дизайну були вписані в гени національних культур через накопичення історії, забезпечуючи основу для сучасної теорії і практики дизайну та надихаючи на інновації.*

**Ключові слова:** *Кругові обриси, традиційні форми, китайська ієрогліфічна графіка, китайське мислення, вираження сенсу.*