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ANCIENT CHINESE FIGURAL ANTHROPOMORPHIC PATTERNS IN MODERN FASHION DESIGN

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This paper explores the cultural connotations of figural anthropomorphic patterns in ancient Chinese textiles and their potential value in modern fashion design. These patterns are classified into two categories: realistic secular figures and fictional figures. Secular patterns depict ideal families, love, and longevity, reflecting the desire for a better life. Fictional patterns portray aspirations for the immortal realm and often carry religious and educational significance. By analyzing these patterns, this paper aims to reveal their relevance for contemporary fashion design.

Key words: *fashion design, textile, figural patterns, Chinese culture, modern design, cultural heritage.*

INTRODUCTION

Patterns on ancient Chinese textiles are not merely decorations; they are vehicles of culture and history. Among the diverse range of decorative elements, figural anthropomorphic motifs - representations of human figures - stand out for their ability to convey social narratives, cultural values, and aesthetic sensibilities. This paper focuses on two main categories of figural patterns: realistic secular figures and fictional figures, exploring their cultural connotations and implications for modern design.

PURPOSE

The objective of this paper is to analyze the cultural meanings embedded in ancient Chinese figural patterns and to explore their application potential in modern design.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Secular figural anthropomorphic patterns depicted on ancient Chinese textiles vividly showcase the people's aspirations for family, love, and longevity. These patterns are generally categorized by age: children, adult men and women, and the elderly.

Realistic Secular Figural Patterns. *Children's patterns:* These patterns often feature innocent children and are combined with lotuses, to indicate continuity, implying the continuation of descendants. They appear with carp, borrowing the homophones of "fish (鱼)" and "yu (余)" to indicate surplus year after year, indicating the accumulation of wealth that will never run out (Figure 1). In these



patterns, the image of children is not only cute, but also carries people's beautiful expectations for the future and the importance of bloodline inheritance.

Patterns of adult men and women: Adult men and women are often depicted as talented men and beautiful women. The story of the combination of talented men and beautiful women reflects the ancient people's yearning and pursuit for perfect lovers and ideal love [1]. Some of them show farming life, depicting the labor scenes of farmers working in the fields, sowing and harvesting, expressing people's yearning and love for a good harvest and a stable life. For example, the four figures embroidered on this lace, some are fishing, some are chopping wood, and some are farming. Some are reading, showing different aspects of life. The ancients believed that these people were law-abiding and self-reliant, which was a commendable state of life. This pattern is collectively called the pattern of fishing, woodcutting, farming and reading (Figure 2).



Fig.1. Yellow satin embroidered scarf with a boy playing with lotus from The Palace Museum



Fig.2. Blue satin with gold-woven pattern of fishermen, woodcutters, farmers and scholars from The Palace Museum

Elderly patterns usually depict themes of longevity and well-being. These patterns not only express the wish for longevity, but also reflect the traditional culture's respect for the elderly and the desire for the continuation of life.

Fictional figural patterns in ancient Chinese textiles are often drawn from myths, religious legends, and literary works. These patterns are not merely artistic decorations; they are also important carriers of spiritual sustenance and cultural heritage.

Immortal patterns depict people's longing for the world of immortals and their desire to escape from the hardships of this world. For example, patterns such as the Eight Immortals, "Liu Hai Playing with the Golden Toad", and the Two Immortals of Harmony and Unity show people's yearning for an extraordinary lifestyle, and also express their wishes for health and longevity. These patterns often have religious overtones, reflecting people's belief in supernatural powers.

Historical allusion character patterns: In folk culture, historical allusions with educational significance or normative social life will be adapted into drama scripts by folk artists to make them more widely circulated. For example, many short stories recorded in the "Twenty-Four Filial Piety Classics", such as wearing reed clothes to obey the mother and feeding parents with deer milk, were transformed into clothing patterns in the Qing Dynasty and applied to clothing. This reflects that the idea of respecting the elders and the younger ones in the Qing Dynasty was deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. On the surface, this was a propaganda of



filial piety culture, but in fact it was a cultural measure taken by the rulers to consolidate the monarch's centralized power and maintain social stability [2]. For example, this Qing Dynasty garment has 32 figures embroidered on both sides, telling the story of Guo Ziyi celebrating his birthday (Figure 3). Guo Ziyi and his wife sit in the middle, and his seven sons and eight sons-in-law come to pay their respects. This pattern has the auspicious meaning of making contributions to the country, being loved by the people, filial sons and honored fathers, and a happy family. This pattern has a strong narrative nature.

Literary Figures Patterns: These patterns are often connected to the storyline, telling an important plot in a visual way. For example, Daiyu buries flowers, Cui Yingying and Zhang Sheng have a secret meeting. These patterns can reflect the popular culture of a period and people's literary preferences.



Fig.3. Women's jacket with Guo Ziyi's birthday celebration pattern embroidered on black satin from the China National Silk Museum



Fig.4. Dress from Vivienne Tam S/S 2021



Fig.5. Dresses from Simone Rocha S/S 2019



Fig.6. Dress from SHANG XIA S/S 2024

Application of Figural Patterns in Modern Design. Ancient Chinese figural patterns, whether secular or fictional, contain rich design inspiration and cultural value, holding broad application prospects in modern design. In modern clothing design, the innovative application of patterns can focus on three aspects: shape, color, and craftsmanship [3].

Extraction and Re-creation of Pattern Elements: Extracting typical elements from figural patterns, such as the shapes of children, the clothing of immortals, the beards of the elderly, and simplifying and abstracting them for use in modern clothing, household goods, and decorations can imbue products with a unique



cultural flavor. Many clothing choices combine traditional patterns with modern styles. For example, the pattern on the clothing in Figure 4 comes from a Chinese-style painting of a woman boating on a lake. Some designers also incorporate Chinese female portraits into European-style clothing, creating a strong sense of collision (Figure 5). The form of simple drawings adds more interest.

Cultural Reproduction of Thematic Elements: Extracting the cultural stories and symbolic meanings behind the patterns for use in modern product design. For example, the designer used the images of boys and carp in women's clothing to convey the blessing of having many children and plenty every year (Figure 6).

CONCLUSIONS

Through an analysis of figural anthropomorphic patterns on ancient Chinese textiles, this paper has revealed their profound cultural connotations and social significance. Secular figural patterns reflect people's aspirations for family, love, and longevity, while fictional figural patterns express the pursuit of the spiritual world and the importance of cultural transmission. These patterns are not just works of art but also testaments to history and cultural symbols. In modern design, these patterns hold rich inspiration and innovative potential. By refining and re-creating traditional patterns, modern design can become more culturally rich and contemporary, while also promoting the inheritance and development of traditional culture.

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СТАРОДАВНІ КИТАЙСЬКІ ФІГУРАЛЬНІ АНТРОПОМОРФНІ ВІЗЕРУНКИ В СУЧАСНОМУ ДИЗАЙНІ ОДЯГУ

У роботі досліджуються культурні конотації фігуральних антропоморфних візерунків у стародавньому китайському текстилі та їхня потенційна цінність у сучасному дизайні одягу. Ці візерунки поділяються на дві категорії: реалістичні світські фігури та фантастичні фігури. Світські візерунки зображують ідеальні сім'ї, любов і довголіття, відображають прагнення до кращого життя. Фантастичні візерунки зображують прагнення до безсмертного царства і часто мають релігійне та освітнє значення. В результаті аналізу цих зображень підтверджено їх актуальність для сучасного дизайну одягу.

Ключові слова: дизайн одягу, текстиль, антропоморфні візерунки, китайська культура, сучасний дизайн, культурна спадщина.