

An Exploration of the Application of Auspicious Elements in the Teaching of Commercial Illustration Design

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Abstract. Since the 18th National Congress of the Party, promoting national culture and building self-confidence in national culture has been the main direction of cultural development today. In particular, the 20th National Congress once again proposed “promoting people's self-confidence and self-improvement, and creating a new glory in socialist culture-inheriting outstanding traditional Chinese culture.” The curriculum ideology and political direction given to university teachers is that the excellent traditional Chinese culture must be carefully and subtly incorporated into the curriculum. As for the course of commercial illustration design, how to incorporate excellent traditional Chinese culture, and how to incorporate auspicious elements rich in regional characteristics and fun folk life into this course is something worth exploring widely by university teachers.

Keywords: Commercial Illustration Design; Auspicious Elements; Application Exploration.

1. Introduction

Commercial illustration design is a compulsory course for visual communication design majors at our school. Commercial illustration design and Photoshop are offered in the form of supplementary courses in project package courses focusing on print advertising design. This course requires students to master the theoretical knowledge of commercial illustration design, and gain the ability of hand-drawn illustrations. In senior years, whether in packaging design, web design, UI design, or brand image design courses, the course of commercial illustration will play an important role. As a basic design course, which even affects other courses to be learned later, Positioning and characteristic defining of the course are issues worth discussing. As a member of the Chinese nation, university teachers have no greater responsibility than to popularize and draw students' attention and passion for the outstanding culture of the nation. China has a vast territory and abundant resources, and auspicious elements from various regions are colourful. Applying auspicious culture well in the curriculum can not only add new colors to the curriculum, but also allow students to learn about China's excellent auspicious culture.

2. An Introduction to the Course: The Ins and Outs of Commercial Illustration Design

Commercial illustration design refers to a type of design in which illustrations are integrated into business. In the traditional sense, illustrations served the text - they were used to explain and illustrate the text, and later they were gradually applied to commercial publicity, beautifying product packaging, and even bringing more economic benefits. In the construction of the course of commercial illustration design, students need to master the history of Chinese and Western commercial illustrations, commercial illustration theory and techniques and other knowledge, and at the same time they need to master the practical ability of hand drawing and digital drawing.

(1) The development of commercial illustration design and the painting techniques involved

In the western world in the 20th century, with the development of the commodity economy and the advancement of printing, commercial illustration gradually emerged. With the development of the Art Nouveau movement and the advent of the graphic age, the development of western commercial illustration ushered in a golden age. During this period, due to the emergence and popularization of photography, the development of commercial illustration was impacted. In the 21st century, the advent of the digital network era makes commercial illustration glow with vitality. In China, examples of illustration being applied to commerce can be traced back to the Northern Song Dynasty. On the shop

sign of the Liu's Kung Fu Needle Shop, a picture of a white rabbit pounding medicines is one of the earliest examples of commercial illustration in China. The popularity of novels in Ming and Qing dynasties and the emergence of prints allowed commercial illustrations to be seen by the public with an increasing frequency. In particular, the calendar posters of the Republic of China (also known as pastel painting) helped commercial illustrations to be applied in public life. With the promotion of the utility of calendar posters, commercial illustrations entered the life of ordinary people. Today's consumption channels are being innovated, and the design of commercial illustrations has diversified along with the needs of product sales. For example, product packaging design, poster design for corporate promotion, and brand image design all require illustrations for increased commercial value. There are many drawing techniques for commercial illustrations. The traditional hand-drawing techniques for commercial illustrations include carbon lead, printmaking, oil painting, watercolor, etc.; modern commercial illustrations mostly use digital boards and tablets for drawing, which is convenient and simple, and saves a lot of cost; students often choose the latter in commercial illustration training.

(2) Ideology of the course of commercial illustration design

This major closely follows the talent training plans in course construction, combines the cultural trends of the times, and vigorously finds connections to local red culture and intangible heritage culture. In the previous curriculum development, the practice part of commercial illustration training combined content such as the characteristic culture of Liaoning and the stories of intangible heritages of Liaoning for creative training. It aims to train illustration skills and keep up with the trends of the times. Auspicious elements can often be seen in public life. They are popular in various fields such as home decoration, apparel design, and brand design, so incorporating auspicious elements into commercial illustration design courses is urgent.

3. An Initial Exploration of Auspicious Elements: Auspicious Elements and Their Meanings in People's Lives

“Good fortune” is an immutable pursuit of the Chinese nation. From primitive society to the feudal period and modern life, the pursuit of good fortune has been seen everywhere in people's lives. For example, primitive pottery, classical art, home displays, clothing, etc. are all covered with auspicious motifs. A variety of patterns reflect people's yearning for the beauty of life. Auspicious elements come in a variety of styles, depending on regional characteristics.

(1) The auspicious symbol of fish

Fish is a symbol of good fortune. People often use the fish pattern and the fish's homonym “Yu” as a metaphor for the meaning of good fortune. “abundance in one year after another” represents the good expectations of farmers for food and wealth of their families. In Tianjin's Yangliuqing New Year Painting, the theme of “abundance in one year after another (Lian Nian You Yu)” is well known --New Year paintings use lotus, catfish, and fuwa as the main themes to express auspicious meanings: “lotus” sounds the same as “lian”; catfish sounds the same as “year,” and “fish” and “yu” are also different words with the same pronunciation. Fish have strong reproductive capacity, have a lot of fish roe, and lotus flowers produce a lot of lotus seeds, so this New Year painting has the meaning of many children and good fortune. Also, works on the theme of fish leaping over the dragon gate also express good wishes for the future. Generally, a “dragon gate” symbolizes a golden future, while fish represents many students on their way to the future.

(2) Bat as an auspicious symbol

The bat is a symbol of good fortune. On court uniforms in the Qing Dynasty, patterns modeled after bats were often embroidered on parts such as collars and shoulders. Just because “bat” sounds the same as “fortune.” Fighting colors and pastel porcelain from the Ming and Qing dynasties are often with bat-themed patterns, which are sometimes combined with other auspicious elements. For example, the auspicious pattern of copper money and bats means “fortune is in sight” (“bat” sounds the same as “fortune,” “money” has the same pronunciation as “in front”); the combination of five

bats flying around a peach has the beautiful meaning of “longevity with five good fortunes”; there are also more beautiful meanings with the theme of “five blessings descending upon the house” that have been passed down from generation to generation.

(3) The auspicious symbol of a vase

Vases also have a special meaning as an auspicious element. In folk New Year paintings, or paper-cut works, you can often see motifs with bottled flowers. Vase items can often be seen even on the display in the living room. Flowers that go with the vase covers the four seasons of the year. Spring is represented by peony, summer is represented by lotus, autumn is represented by chrysanthemum, and winter is represented by plum blossom... Together with the vase, they imply the meaning of "four seasons of peace", and the vase here takes the homophonic meaning of "peace".

(4) Auspicious symbols in marriage customs

In folk marriage customs, there is often a custom of covering the quilt, which means throwing red dates, peanuts, longan, and lotus seeds on the wedding quilt. It means “having a baby soon”, which is the homonym of the four foods mentioned above. A wedding room needs to be lavishly furnished, and happiness patterns are also a must-have element of decoration. Generally, the theme of happiness patterns is double happiness, with mandarin ducks or dragon and phoenix on the top and bottom, which means the love between the husband and the wife is complete. Pomegranate is also used as a decoration element, which embodies the auspicious meaning of having babies soon because it has a lot of seeds.

The auspicious elements in Chinese folk culture are rich and diverse. It would be a pity if they were not included in university curricula and subtly influence students. Therefore, for design courses, it is necessary to combine them with the excellent national culture in order to make the classes colorful and unique.

4. Practical Exploration: Commercial Illustration Design Incorporating Auspicious Elements into Classroom Training

The course construction of the visual communication major at our school closely follows the spirit of the 20th National Congress. In order to inherit the excellent traditional Chinese culture, the course of commercial illustration design has been taught in conjunction with the intangible heritage culture of Liaoning over the past two years, teaching illustration knowledge in theory and drawing in practice with intangible heritage themes. Based on the auspicious themes in the folk intangible heritages of Liaoning, students are taught to combined what they have learned to create and design. From some of the students' works, we can see the achievements of illustration training with auspicious elements.

(1) Illustration training with the theme of an intangible heritage tale in Liaoning: “Ancient Fishing Geese”

The illustration design for “Ancient Fishing Geese” is a typical example of combining intangible heritage folk tales of Liaoning with auspicious elements (Figure 1). The theme comes from the traditional folk story of ancient fishing geese -- with unique geological conditions and rich fishery resources, the Liaodong Bay fishing ground has attracted people from other places to fish for shrimp in the tidal plain and shallow sea of the estuary since ancient times. At the mouth of the Liaohe River in Erjiegou, Panjin, Liaoning, every time when the spring comes back and the sea ice melts, a huge and special crowd gathers at the mouth of the Liaohe River. When it's late autumn, they return to their hometowns. They come in spring and leave in autumn like wild geese, migrate to the mouth of the river by land, and thrive. The fish swimming back and forth in the illustration symbolizes the scene of a good harvest, the scene of splashing waves expresses the liveliness of the fish, and the house architecture interprets the local cultural characteristics of the tale that restrain the fish in sacrifices and celebrations. The illustration uses “fish” as an auspicious element interspersed throughout the picture, showing the “good harvest” and the “rich” vision of life to the fullest.

(2) Illustration training with the theme of an intangible heritage tale in Liaoning: shadow play

Shadow art is a unique intangible heritage in China. Shadow play began in the Warring States, rose in the Han Dynasty, and flourished in the Song Dynasty. Also known as “shadow drama,” it has a strong local feature and was listed as an intangible cultural heritage in 2011. Liaoning's intangible heritage of shadow play has a long history and deep cultural undertones. Legend has it that “this art tells the story of thousands of years, with music and drums under the lights. Telling all the things of the ages with one mouth, dancing with one million soldiers through the movements of hands.” The illustration design for “shadow play” (Figure 2), an intangible cultural heritage of Liaoning, uses a New Year painting kids as the main image, with the theme being a shadow play. New Year painting kids are often auspicious elements in wood-block New Year paintings. New Year paintings are often dominated by gold and red, symbolizing wealth, glory, joy and auspiciousness. It conveys people's wishes and blessings for happiness, prosperity, and well-being. The butterfly in this illustration is regarded as free, beautiful, pure and symbolizes eternal love. The double butterfly pattern is regarded as a symbol of free love. The butterfly has many children, expressing people's yearning for free love and the meaning of having more children and more blessings. Fish is synonymous with “Yu”, which means happiness and good fortune, and symbolizes wealth and abundance. The picture is decorated with mountains, stones, and vines. The stones indicate steadfastness and true nature without any disguise. Vines indicate that the roots are long and enduring. It means that our traditional Chinese intangible heritage culture will continue brilliantly.

(3) Illustration training with the theme of an intangible heritage tale in Liaoning: longevity

“Longevity” is the highest level of life that people seek. Auspicious works with the theme of longevity are common in everyday life, and there are quite a few examples in intangible heritage folk tales in Liaoning. The design theme of this illustration “Longevity” (Figure 3) is to wish longevity and good luck. The illustration conveys the beautiful meaning of auspicious blessings through elements such as birthday stars, peaches, and cranes, and conveys an atmosphere of celebration, congratulations, and peace throughout the work. Among them, the God of Longevity symbolizes longevity and happiness. In Chinese culture, the God of Longevity is a symbol of longevity and health. Peaches are held in the hands of the God of Longevity, symbolizing the sweetness and abundance of life, and peaches are also symbols of good fortune and prosperity, which means success and harvest. Fairy cranes represent longevity and good fortune, and are regarded as messengers of happiness. In this picture, a fairy crane spreads its wings and flies in the sky, symbolizing the imminent arrival of good fortune and bringing good luck and good fortune to people. The meaning of these elements are all wishes for good fortune, conveying good wishes for longevity, happiness, and good fortune. The application of these themes not only reflects the unique style of traditional Chinese culture, but also represents people's yearning for happiness and good luck.

5. Epilogue

The application of auspicious elements in illustration design not only conveys the excellent traditional Chinese culture, but also brings commercial value. As a compulsory course for visual communication design, the course of commercial illustration design can only evolve with the times and form unique characteristics by incorporating current social and cultural trends; only by firmly grasping the promotion and creation of good works closely related to traditional culture can students truly understand the value and charm of the traditional culture; only by continuously thinking and exploring new works that can convey the outstanding auspicious culture of traditional Chinese tradition can we realize innovation in a true sense. The mission of “inheriting the excellent traditional Chinese culture” requires more strength. Excellent traditional culture is popular among the people, and there are many kinds of auspicious elements. Just a few works with the elements “Longevity, Fish, and Butterflies” cannot truly summarize this. University teachers should always construct their courses and incorporate more auspicious cultural themes into the course of commercial illustration design. This study appeals and encourage more teachers to instill the excellent traditional Chinese culture in the classroom and practice it in teaching.

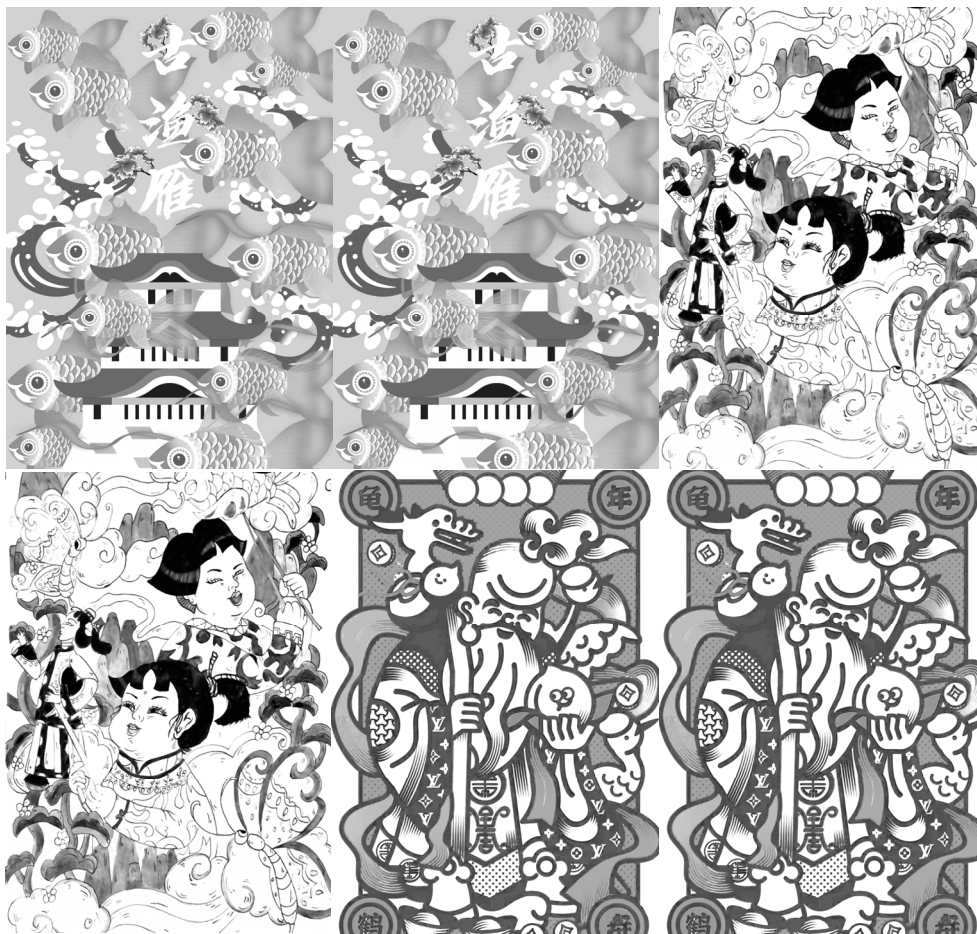


Figure 1. "Ancient fishing geese" Figure 2. "Shadow play" Figure 3. " Longevity "
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