

# Application and Innovation of Traditional Chinese Patterns in Modern Illustrations

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**Abstract.** Based on the historical connotation and stylistic features of traditional Chinese patterns, it discusses the deeper connotation, colors and patterns of traditional patterns in modern illustrations, and the design methods of traditional Chinese patterns in modern illustration design, so as to find the innovation of traditional Chinese patterns. This paper aims to seek a better way to spread traditional Chinese patterns, a cultural symbol with unique national characteristics, by analyzing the methodology of combining “traditional” with “modern”.

**Keywords:** Traditional Chinese Pattern; Modern Illustration; Innovation; Fashion Trend.

## 1. Research Purpose and Significance

With the high integration of science and technology and art, illustration art has become the main method of spreading knowledge and communicating with each other because of its unique artistry and narrative. Treated with modern design concept, illustration art is not only a way to express visual effects, but also a medium of information, which uses patterns to aesthetically interpret the theme information expressed. In terms of the overall development trend of illustration, the rise in China is later than that in Western European countries. Modern illustration design in China already has the visual language influenced by Westerners. However, the creation of modern illustrations in China does not have the characteristics of national literature, because the unique artistic forms and techniques in Chinese national literature cannot be more effectively utilized to enrich modern illustration. Moreover, the diversified trend of art development in the world today has also influenced the Chinese people's vision and understanding. Therefore, on the basis of integrating traditional Chinese decorative patterns and modern illustration, this paper establishes a Chinese modern illustration design with a new sense of visual image, so as to better present traditional Chinese illustration art and find out a new point of combination and inheritance, which is the main research purpose.

Traditional decoration can be divided into animal patterns, figure patterns, flowers and plants patterns, daily patterns and so on, according to its decoration content, among which plant patterns are numerous and varied, presenting the context of historical development and evolution. It is the most widely used decoration with the richest forms and the most diverse styles. The long-standing cultural history has nurtured the rich cultural content of costume. Traditional costumes carry out unique humanistic ideal and has high historical humanistic value.

Based on this discovery, the author proposes to combine the profound meaning and exquisite form of Chinese decorative patterns with modern illustration art, and add Chinese decorative patterns as an artistic element to illustration art, so as to develop national art, which requires the integrity and independence of illustration style. On the basis of absorbing and continuing fine traditions, modern illustrations in China must continue to explore and innovate to find better ways that are conducive to the national style and can lead the development of unique modern illustrations, so as to adapt to the trend of historical development and meet more demands of global illustrations for the modern illustrations in China.

## **2. Overview of Chinese Traditional Patterns**

### **2.1 The Development of Traditional Chinese Patterns**

As one of the main representative elements of Chinese culture, the emergence of traditional Chinese patterns has a long historical background. Each pattern has different cultural connotation, including animals, flowers, utensils and so on. Chinese tradition contains many design rules at the very beginning, such as proportion, rhythm, symmetry, balance, echo and so on, which have a profound influence on many contemporary illustration designs.

Traditional patterns can include primitive social patterns, folk patterns, classic patterns, and ethnic minority patterns. The traditional patterns inherited from the primitive society are called primitive social patterns, which are mainly divided into animals, flowers, weaving patterns, water ripples, geometric patterns, and so on. Classical patterns mainly refer to traditional patterns with classical features that have been inherited from ancient times to the present, including bronze patterns in the Shang and Zhou dynasties, watermark patterns in the Tang Dynasty, embroidery patterns in the Song Dynasty, and carving patterns in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, showing different artistic characteristics. Folk patterns refer to traditional patterns with local and folk characteristics widely circulated in the folk, mainly including embroidery, paper-cut and other patterns. Ethnic patterns refer to patterns with ethnic characteristics, such as batik patterns of Miao nationality, carpet patterns of the Mongolian nationality, and textile patterns of the Dai nationality, which have been inherited and innovated by the ethnic group from generation to generation in their daily life.

### **2.2 Characteristics of Traditional Chinese Patterns**

#### **2.2.1 Model**

The main features of Chinese patterns are plump, neat and graceful. The early patterns were simple and compact, but later evolved into exquisite and full. It emphasizes vigor and change due to the traditional ideas, Buddhism and fine arts. Patterns of different stages present different modeling characteristics: In the Qin Dynasty, the patterns were simple and profound; In the Tang Dynasty, it was plump and mellow; in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, it changed from wild and heroic to dignified, elaborated, and even complicated.

#### **2.2.2 Paying Attention to the Composition**

Traditional Chinese patterns pay attention to complex structure, most of which are symmetrical. Patterns with the same shape, the same color, the same or similar positions with different shapes or colors are arranged before and after, left and right the patterns, which is called symmetric and balanced structure. Symmetry or asymmetry is based on the spatial orientation of the pattern, which represents the distribution of pattern units. While, balance or unbalance refer to the distribution of energy in all aspects of the pattern, which determine the balanced beauty of the pattern. With symmetric and balanced composition, an organized visual effect can be shown.

#### **2.2.3 Expression**

In the Neolithic Age, individual patterns, suitable patterns, and continuous patterns all appeared. Suitable patterns were mostly rhombus or round, especially those with continuous patterns on both sides. The overlord department in Zhou Dynasty showed the rhythmic beauty, sense of rhythm and order of the interior decoration, and at the same time it showed the strictness of art, with a strong sense of movement and compact structure. The scroll grass pattern in the Southern and Northern Dynasties evolved on the basis of the cloud pattern in the Han Dynasty. In Dunhuang art, vivid shapes such as algae creatures, triangular flowers and striped flowers, Flying Apsaras and cloud patterns are cleverly combined, which are simple and beautiful, subtle and gentle, and are used to decorate a large number of wool fabrics, linen sheets and silk. The traditional Chinese patterns are varied and flexible, especially the animal patterns headed by the dragon and phoenix, which are very vivid.

## **2.3 The Application of Traditional Chinese Patterns**

### **2.3.1 The Application of Traditional Chinese Patterns in Logo Design**

The tradition of dragon and phoenix as descendant of the Yellow Emperor has a long history. The dragon plays a major role in the traditional Chinese model, such as the "descendants of the dragon". At first, it was the representative of national authority, and later, it was also the symbol of the royal family's noble status. These ancient patterns still carry the ancient blood and noble temperament. According to the characteristics, Huaxia Bank designed the logo based on the jade dragon, a classic artifact of the Neolithic Age, which was the first dragon in Niuheliang archaeological of Hongshan civilization in Jianping, Liaoning Province. It embodies the spirit of the Chinese nation, which is not afraid of the world and strives to make progress. In addition, Air China chose a soaring phoenix for its logo. The corporate logo of China Unicom is designed with the elements of "panchang knot", inspired by the culture of "Fu", which is used to express the meaning of cycle, persistence and enduring. The logos designed with Chinese patterns not only have their own characteristics, but also give people a feeling of tracing back to the source of traditional culture, which is the great value of traditional cultural marks in the modern logo design.

### **2.3.2 The Application of Traditional Chinese Patterns in Illustration**

In recent years, with the emergence of film and television works and many excellent design works at home and abroad, ethnic style has become popular. Traditional Chinese elements are used extensively in many illustrated novels, as well as in traditional illustration art and poster product design. For example, the traditional ancient Chinese illustration has been transformed into a "cloud pattern" that means cheerfulness and elevation, or a "Fu pattern" representing auspiciousness. Chinese traditions also play a role in creating an antique atmosphere while enriching the main characters in the picture.

### **2.3.3 The Application of Traditional Chinese Patterns in Product Packaging Design**

In product packaging design, the traditions used mainly represent commodities with specific historical connotations. For example, in terms of the traditional Chinese tea bag, the special medicinal properties of tea trees was discovered in Shennong Period, but it was not eaten until the Qin Dynasty, and then it is turned into a soup by cooking. Today, tea still plays an indispensable role in our lives. Therefore, it is also a perfect choice to use Chinese tradition to design the packaging of these commodities with complex emotions and historical origins. For example, during the traditional Mid-Autumn Festival, the packaging of tea products combines cultural elements such as the moon and koi fish, which is the best time for family members to enjoy the moon and drink tea together. The Chinese tradition is used in product packaging to express a specific national emotion. Similar to tea products, Chinese tradition is also used in traditional Chinese medicine package. Traditional Chinese medicine has survived for thousands of years since Shennong tasted the herbs. In addition to accurate diagnosis, traditional Chinese medicine also focuses on daily maintenance to strengthen people's health, and many traditional Chinese medicine products may also be regarded as daily health care products. Therefore, the outer packaging design should be different from the rigorous and concise design style of traditional western medicine. Chinese tradition can create a sense of intimacy of homology of medicine and food, and enhance the sense of identity for the packaging of daily health care medicines.

## **3. Overview of Modern Illustration**

### **3.1 The Concept of Illustration**

The definition of illustration has been interpreted differently through the ages. Generally speaking, illustrations refer to the various pictures attached to books, which play a filling effect on the content of the article and the function of art appreciation. As a form of art expression, modern illustration has already extended from two-dimensional to three-dimensional. However, no matter what painting form is used as the carrier, illustration is a graphic design tool in the form of visual expression. Because of

its vivid, intuitive and realistic artistic appeal, it is widely used in many fields of modern design, including cultural activities, commercial activities, social public services and other aspects.

### **3.2 Present Situation of Illustration Development in China**

Modern illustrations in China are usually in the form of a single picture, and the picture is often a colorful picture of an environment, a character or a combination of the two. However, with the development of society, the forms and types of modern illustrations are becoming more and more diverse, such as movies, animation, radio and so on. At present, the overall design is dominated by soft and clear Asian style, while the domestic modern illustration design contains few national historical connotations, without obvious Chinese cultural characteristics, and is not well known in the world. Although some Chinese historical factors are used in the current illustration creation in China, the works are often not innovative and cannot express the historical connotation.

### **3.3 Present Situation of Illustration Development in Foreign Countries**

With the development of computer technology, modern illustration art has gained a major place in Europe, America, Japan and other countries. Among them, the modern illustration art ideas of European and American countries are more advanced, emphasizing more on the way of space combination and means of expression in graphic design, and at the same time not lacking the means of free expression. It includes various types of artistic expression, such as romantic decorative symbolism style, abstract modern minimalist style, realistic style, surreal artistic expression style, and exaggerated and vivid cartoon or comic style. The production process of modern illustrations usually integrates computer technology, the application of technology is more perfect and reasonable, and the artistic expression is more diverse.

### **3.4 Application Form of Modern Illustration**

#### **3.4.1 In Reading Materials**

##### **(1) Book illustration**

Modern books are meticulously divided into many categories. All kinds of books can be illustrated to increase charm, including literary and artistic book illustrations, scientific book illustrations, educational book illustrations, and so on.

##### **(2) Newspaper and magazine illustration**

Illustrations in newspapers and periodicals are used to move the layout to add interest and readability, and they often appear in newspapers and periodicals at the same time as advertisements. In magazines, illustrations usually appear between the translation page and the cover.

#### **3.4.2 In Fashion Products**

Illustration has always been closely related to the fashion industry and is often used in clothing. It usually appears on the chest, shoulders, back, neckline and other obvious areas to highlight the brand image and the design style it hopes to convey. In addition, illustration is widely used as jewelry, fashion accessories, cosmetics, shopping bags and other goods related to fashion.

## **4. Analysis of the Application of Tradition in Illustration Design**

Many ancient cultural elements are often used in modern illustration creation. Although there are a lot of excellent works, they are somewhat unsatisfactory from the perspective of public opinions and the author's own historical significance. Many excellent works lack novelty, and are often imitated, and the historical and cultural significance displayed by the works is not profound enough. Furthermore, some designers only pay attention to the surface aesthetic, but ignore the original artistic significance and cultural value. For example, some illustrators have used the drawing of sea pomegranates on sleeves to express people's life in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. It is very complicated and beautiful from the outside, but in fact, the sea pomegranates

were first used on the three-color pottery of the Tang Dynasty. The time doesn't match, and it was easy to mislead everyone because of the lack of historical basis. In addition, it only pays attention to the beauty of the pictures, but ignores the characteristic of Chinese auspiciousness that the picture must have a theme, and the meaning must be auspicious.

China also has its own history of art illustration. Chinese paintings originate from the painted pottery and rock paintings of the Neolithic period or the earliest society. In China, the invention of botanical illustration is relatively late, firstly appearing in the botanical line diagram in *Compendium of Materia Medica* and the illustrations in one of the four great classics, *Journey to the West*. With the rapid development of Chinese science and technology and the influence of foreign civilization, the illustration art in China has undergone fundamental changes. For example, Xu Beihong, a great and famous Chinese painter and art educator, integrated Western painting techniques into traditional Chinese art, and paid attention to the cultural content of the works, which greatly promoted the development of Chinese art and had an important influence on Chinese painting art at that time.

## **5. Application and Innovation of Chinese Tradition in Modern Illustration Creation**

### **5.1 Research on the Application of Traditional Chinese Pattern Art in Modern Illustration Production**

First of all, the theme of modern illustration creation should be clarified. The elements of patterns in China are summarized, and according to the style and content of each traditional pattern, the traditional pattern forms suitable for the theme of modern illustration creation are selected. To embody folk customs, we should choose folk patterns, paper-cut patterns and embroidery patterns; To display national culture, we must choose pictures with national characteristics, and we must select pictures that can reflect the characteristics of ethnic minorities. Only by systematic and profound analysis can excellent modern illustration works be created.

Secondly, it is necessary to take into account the content of modern illustration creation. Composition plays a key role in illustration creation and is the key to success. Various forms of traditional patterns also have a profound impact on the content of illustrations, so it is necessary to integrate the two to create content suitable for human aesthetics.

Thirdly, draw a draft. As the conceptual design stage of traditional illustrations, drafts play a key role in the entire creative process of illustrations, and are also a direct reflection of design concepts. In addition to this, drafts should also be creative.

Fourthly, draw the original manuscript for illustration creation. On the basis of the draft, change the whole background of the illustration to be in harmony with it. The application of thick or thin lines and the combination of colors can express different styles of the illustration.

### **5.2 The Value of Tradition Chinese in Modern Illustration**

Personal evaluation. Personal value as emotional catharsis is the most basic requirement of illustration artists. In the long-term community life and personal experience, the constantly changing creative style of modern illustrators is actually a way of conveying different expressions and catharsis of their feelings. Therefore, for the subject of art, the truly outstanding modern illustration creation must be able to convey personal feelings, and gradually explore its own cultural significance.

Social value. It means that, in addition to personal value, modern illustration design has broader social value, which is a unique manifestation of modern social consciousness. It is especially obvious that modern illustration design contains social ethics and moral value, which is a profound expression of human beings to the living existence around them. Similar to other forms of art, modern illustration design expresses various emotions and conflicts in the world with its colorful artistic expressions.

## 6. Conclusion

While Chinese illustration is gradually going global, adding strong national characteristics is the symbol that Chinese illustrations have a foothold in the world. With a novel aesthetic point of view, this paper introduces the problem of adopting national traditional patterns in illustrated works and its possible reference ways, and makes a full research on it. It also discusses the significance of adopting national traditional elements, and expounds the main research purpose of this problem. On this basis, it further studies the design principle and influence of combining illustrated works with national traditional patterns, and discusses the main ways of this design. After practicing and writing, the author further illustrates the importance of continuing the tradition and innovating creative methods. The reasonable combination of Chinese patterns in the art of illustration can not only increase the cultural content of the nation, but also endow the art of illustration with a unique interest. Different from Western European and Japanese and Korean illustrations, only the illustration art with its own characteristics can stand at the forefront of the world.

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