

An Initial Exploration of Auspicious Patterns in Traditional Chinese Sculpture

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Abstract: Nowadays, the forms of auspicious patterns in traditional sculpture vary widely, rich in connotation and profound in significance, embodying the thought-provoking traditional cultural connotations. The emergence of auspicious patterns is an important outcome of the millennia-long accumulation of historical and folk culture of the Chinese nation. As a unique cultural and artistic phenomenon, it not only encapsulates the wisdom of the ancient Chinese but also contains deep philosophical thoughts of humanity, further enriching humanistic ideas and carrying profound cultural significance. Based on this, the article first overviews the development history of traditional Chinese auspicious patterns, then summarizes their meanings, characteristics, and types, and finally analyzes the appearance design of traditional Chinese auspicious patterns, providing a reference for relevant scholars to explore and discuss.

Keywords: Traditional Sculpture, Auspicious Motifs, Cultural Art.

1. The Development History of Auspicious Patterns in Traditional Chinese Art

In ancient times, during the era of totem worship, early humans were filled with wonder and speculation about the mysterious phenomena around them, as well as the forms and life characteristics of various animals and plants such as birds, beasts, flowers, insects, and fish. This led to the creation of symbols and patterns that expressed their prayers for happiness and safety. During this period, animal images and fish drawings on painted pottery art were imbued with meanings of reverence and worship. Although these national totems were not explicitly termed as decorative auspicious patterns created through human subjective initiative in socialist culture, they objectively provided a material foundation for the development of traditional Chinese auspicious patterns. Their origins are thus defined within the realm of Chinese humanistic art[1].

Different forms of animals, such as the phoenix, dragon, turtle, and bird, primarily appeared in the painted pottery, stone carvings, and jade sculptures of the Neolithic era. Patterns like cloud motifs, water wave patterns, and geometric patterns first emerged during the Shang, Western Zhou, and Spring and Autumn periods, forming the true meanings of auspicious patterns within stratified communities. It was within these communities that human ideological concepts underwent significant transformations. The rapid advancement of technology during this stage allowed for the rich ideological connotations of humanity to be expressed through more objective ideological forms[2].

Text patterns were initially discovered on utensils without precise definitions. Approximately 8,000 years ago, these text patterns were recognized in the Yellow River domain, representing the original prototypes of written patterns. In the late Yangshao culture, at the Banpo site, similar sculptures featuring extensive poetic inscriptions appeared, breaking the old decorative paradigm. During the Eastern Jin period,

numerous pictorial symbols were found on excavated pottery from Feiligang, which were used by our ancestors for documentation and embellishment on sculptures or ceramics, further enhancing the artistic aesthetic realm. It can be said that the development of sculptural art reached its zenith during the Song dynasty[3].

Patterns like taotie motifs, dragon motifs (see Figure 1), meander patterns (see Figure 2), and pearl strings on bronze and lacquerware are not only representative of the solemnity, elegance, and mystery of those special periods but also carry ancient spiritual meanings. During the Qin and Han periods, the introduction of Buddhist thought into China, combined with the concepts of karma in Buddhism, the elixir of immortality in Taoism, and the Taiji and Five Elements theories in Confucianism, enriched and expanded the themes of auspicious patterns. These patterns, along with mythological legends, found extensive use in architecture, sculpture, and folk art. For instance, many auspicious patterns appeared on Han dynasty brocades, such as brocades with the patterns "all wishes come true" and "longevity and prosperity for ten thousand generations." During this time, patterns representing happiness, auspiciousness, longevity, and good fortune in traditional Chinese auspicious designs began to take shape. In the Sui, Song, and Yuan periods, these patterns gradually became refined and popularized. By the Song and Yuan periods, auspicious patterns were widely used in architectural paintings, embroidery, ceramics, textiles, and lacquerware. This era marked a highly popular development stage for auspicious patterns, achieving a state where "every painting must have auspicious elements." During the Ming and Qing periods, these patterns matured further, with their expressions becoming more diverse and intricate. Through the use of graphic techniques, auspicious patterns became more sophisticated and complete. The proliferation of auspicious patterns, customs, and text left a profound impression on civilization[4].

Throughout the vigorous development history of traditional auspicious patterns in China, these patterns have

had their respective limitations in different eras, but their development has never ceased. Even today, traditional auspicious patterns still possess strong vitality.

2. The Application Methods of Traditional Chinese Auspicious Patterns

2.1. Metaphors of Animal Ecological Characteristics

All animals and plants in nature develop various ecological characteristics due to ecological, climatic conditions, natural environments, and genetic factors. People use objects metaphorically to indirectly express emotions. For instance, Guan Yu symbolizes loyalty and bravery, elephants and deer represent kindness due to their gentle nature, and horses signify loyalty due to their obedience to their owners. Abstract concepts advocated by Confucianism, such as loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, and righteousness, also have concrete symbols[5].

2.2. Symbolic Meanings of Representative Objects

Using symbolic events to represent auspiciousness and happiness is the most direct way to express materials in auspicious patterns, conveying blessings most intuitively. For example, coins, jade, and ingots represent wealth and can be directly used in artworks to express the desire for wealth. Lantern painting, a traditional artistic inclination, signifies abundant harvests when depicted with grains. Stationery items like brushes, ink, paper, and inkstones, and artistic elements like musical instruments, chess, calligraphy, and painting imply a refined scholarly ambiance. Auspicious patterns with Buddhist origins represent various auspicious things, becoming classic examples of conveying auspiciousness. Taoist "Eight Immortals" and Buddhist "Eight Treasures" and "Eight Auspicious Signs" are common symbols[6].

2.3. Direct Application of Auspicious Characters

Chinese characters inherently possess strong expressiveness, and various forms of deformation or calligraphy styles offer robust expressive power. Therefore, directly decorating objects with auspicious characters is an excellent method. Common auspicious characters include "fu" (fortune), "lu" (prosperity), "shou" (longevity), and "xi" (happiness). These constitute a significant branch of traditional Chinese auspicious patterns. Using various forms of regular script or variants to form "bai fu" (hundred fortunes), "bai shou" (hundred longevity), "bai lu" (hundred prosperity), and "bai xi" (hundred happiness), combined with interior crafts or screen sculptures, significantly enhance the representation of calligraphy art, folk art, and traditional Chinese folk culture[7].

2.4. Comprehensive Use of Multiple Symbolic Methods

Many auspicious patterns are artistic works using a combination of these expressive methods. The most prominent advantage of comprehensive techniques is enriching the connotations of traditional Chinese auspicious patterns, making the overall sculpture works more mature and

complete. For instance, the "San Duo Tu" (Three Abundances Picture) consists of pomegranate, peach, and Buddha's hand, symbolizing multiple blessings (Buddha), longevity (peach), and sons (pomegranate seeds). Combined, they represent future happiness and beauty.

3. The Significance and Characteristics of Traditional Chinese Auspicious Patterns

3.1. The Significance of Traditional Chinese Auspicious Patterns

Currently, auspicious patterns in traditional Chinese sculpture creations are the essence of Chinese national culture, closely related to the traditional lifestyles of ancient ancestors and the social and historical cultural backgrounds of specific eras. Rich in connotation and profound meaning, they embody the passion and pursuit of life by ancient people, significantly contributing to the expression of human aesthetic values. These self-formed aesthetic views play an indispensable role in studying the aesthetics of traditional Chinese sculpture .

3.2. The Characteristics of Traditional Chinese Auspicious Patterns

In traditional Chinese sculptures, the focus has shifted from recognizability to independently showcasing traditional national culture, reinterpreting and reorganizing auspicious patterns to create numerous imaginative and creative artistic spaces. Auspicious patterns serve as symbols of aesthetic expression and auspicious representation. For example, the dragon is seen as a spirit that can ward off disasters, and the phoenix, symbolizing the king of birds, conveys "eternal peace." Chinese people enjoy seeking auspicious meanings in daily life through "punctuation." This modern linguistic feature—homophones with different meanings—allows for expressing auspicious meanings through Chinese homophonic puns, widely used in Chinese auspicious patterns. For instance, a quail with nine leaves represents "peaceful and prosperous," while the homophones "yu" (fish) means surplus, "qing" (fragrance) means celebration, "mei" (plum) means eyebrows, and "xi que" (magpie) means joy, forming patterns like "abundant surplus and celebration," "joy on the eyebrows" (see Figure 3), and "early birth of noble sons" (jujube, peanut, longan, lotus seed)[8].

4. The Application of Traditional Chinese Auspicious Patterns in Modern Sculpture

In the new era, outstanding traditional Chinese auspicious patterns require sculptors to have a deep understanding of the core values of Chinese socialism, enhancing confidence in traditional cultural art. Sculptors should emphasize the creative integration and beautiful meanings expressed by auspicious patterns in their creations. They should also actively participate in promoting traditional sculpture culture through modern media, increasing public aesthetic appreciation. Educating the public about traditional sculpture and auspicious patterns expands the market for sculpture art. Sculptural forms must adapt to social development, understanding and advancing with the times. Traditional aesthetic preferences have fundamentally changed, requiring

contemporary representations of traditional auspicious patterns to meet public expectations. Sculptors should flexibly and skillfully incorporate auspicious patterns into traditional sculpture artworks, enhancing the creative blend of these patterns.

4.1. Specific Themes, Abstract Applications

Auspicious pattern designs need to incorporate significant aesthetic characteristics and decorative representative patterns, serving as symbolic emotional communication. Many traditional patterns in Chinese sculpture originate from traditional Chinese philosophical culture, giving these patterns distinct regional and national traits. In addition to single patterns, innovative combination patterns like plum blossoms and magpies or lotuses and carp are also common. With increasing artistic requirements for traditional cultural expressions, pattern design has become an essential medium for cultural expression. These designs do not merely reflect the daily lives of ordinary people but aim to integrate traditional auspicious patterns into the overall visual aesthetic of sculpture works, fulfilling sculptors' aspirations for a beautiful life while showcasing unique Chinese aesthetic values.

4.2. Symmetry and Balance in Composition

Auspicious patterns often have a central axis, around which similar shapes, colors, and quantities are arranged symmetrically or in balanced asymmetry. This structure, called symmetrical balance, underpins the decorative attributes of auspicious patterns.

4.3. Complex Variations, Order in Chaos

Traditional sculptures possess unique forms, not only categorizing and arranging realistic life materials but also integrating the social values, artistic ideologies, and aesthetic interests of the creators. Traditional auspicious patterns, while complex, do not merely list or copy motifs; they emphasize rhythm and harmony within complexity, balancing density, height, prominence, and motion to achieve overall unity and diverse local changes, contributing to a unique artistic expression.

4.4. Integrating Ethnic Elements to Enhance Cultural Value

Chinese traditional national culture holds historical, ideological, and cultural educational values, as well as modern dissemination techniques and traditional cultural

depths. When designing and creating sculptures, elements such as color, form, craft, and texture should be considered comprehensively. Traditional auspicious pattern designs usually combine points, lines, and planes in a flat composition, allowing the most authentic emotions to naturally emerge. Sculptors should respect traditional culture, deeply integrating auspicious patterns with their works to meet public aesthetic and symbolic aspirations, advancing further in the legacy and innovative development of sculpture art.

5. Conclusion

In summary, traditional Chinese auspicious patterns encapsulate the thoughts and culture of the entire Chinese nation. For thousands of years, these patterns have thrived due to their deep connection with Chinese historical and cultural heritage, humanistic mentality, and emotional expression. They reflect the Chinese people's pursuit and hope for a better life through their vivid, enduring vitality.

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