

# A Study on Application of Chinese Auspicious Pattern in Modern Design

Chi Han<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Academy of Fine Arts, Minjiang University, Fuzhou, China

Correspondence: Chi Han, Academy of Fine Arts, Minjiang University, Fuzhou, China. Tel: 1-917-355-6832.  
E-mail: hanchi5060@gmail.com

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## Abstract

Chinese traditional auspicious pattern is a rich cultural heritage, which provided a wealth of visual elements for modern design. This article conveys to the readers the idea of the author on how to apply Chinese auspicious pattern in modern design and proposes the “auspiciousness” design concept from three aspects: “form”, “meaning”, “verve”. Also, the author makes an analysis on the value of this application.

**Keywords:** auspicious pattern, traditional culture, modern design, humanistic spirit

To Chinese traditional culture, auspicious culture is an important tributary. It condensed and recorded people's moral feelings, life awareness, aesthetic and religious sentiments. Its core is to help and inspire people to create a better life.

Auspicious culture is constituted of the internal moral, external pattern, and beautiful imagery. It still exists in every corner in China, and even in many other countries nowadays. Application of traditional auspicious patterns in modern design is the extension and recreation of traditional pattern art. By various kinds of effective ways, this ancient visual culture can burst out new bright brilliance, modern design also got the deeper connotation and significance.

## 1. Introduction for Chinese Traditional Auspicious Patterns

There is a Chinese saying, “Each pattern must have a meaning, and this has to have something to do with luck and harmony.” Auspicious pattern always occupies a predominant position of Chinese traditional visual art. There are generally three kinds of classification methods: The first is according to the different carriers, traditional auspicious patterns can be divided into printing and dyeing pattern, embroidery patterns, painted pottery pattern, bronze ware pattern, porcelain pattern, furniture decorative pattern etc. The second is divided from the moral subject, can put Chinese traditional auspicious patterns into blessing for safety, promotion, longevity, happiness, wealth, etc. The third is based on the content of expressions, auspicious patterns can be divided into Geometric patterns (Panchang pattern, Hui pattern, etc.), Flowers and plants (peony, pine tree, Twisted branch stripe, etc.), Lucky Animal (Dragon, Phoenix, Qi Lin, etc.) Figures in myths (3, 6, 8, etc.) or historical events and Utensils (Ruyi, Taiji, etc.). This classification method is commonly used.

As mentioned above, Chinese traditional auspicious pattern is a so rich cultural heritage, which provided a wealth of visual elements for modern design. But if just only blindly indulging in the tradition and simply copy it to today's works while no new nutrition, it will doom to die, and we will eventually face a large number of antique copies in our times.



Figure 1. Double happiness



Figure 2. Ruyi



Figure 3. Qi Lin

## 2. Application Methods of Auspicious Patterns in Modern Design

In the book "Pattern Basic Training" (1963), Lei Guiyuan said that: "learning from those ancient cultures is a good way to improve your design level, but it depends on how you use them". After all, traditional auspicious pattern has its unique history background, while modern people's aesthetic ideas tend to those simple and straightforward graphics. If we hope to put tradition forward other than just copy, we need to and find some new methods of application based on new features of nowadays' society. "Digging from the deep consciousness, make every attempt to unfold its beautiful shape to performance" "to enter the traditional with the greatest courage, but also with the greatest courage to play the traditional". The modern design should be derived from tradition and beyond tradition under this spirit. In the author's opinions, the traditional auspicious patterns in modern design can be analyzed from three aspects: "form", "meaning", "verve".

### 2.1 Innovating Form

"Form" generally refers to shape and structure of patterns. The innovation of form means looking into the basic characteristics of traditional auspicious patterns, then using of abstraction, interception, variation and some other methods to recombine and recreate its core form elements based on current requirements. The key of this kind of application is creative thinking and familiarity on original pattern. The innovation methods on form of traditional auspicious patterns in modern design can be concluded into three kinds as follows.

#### 2.1.1 Direct Reference

Some auspicious patterns have already been very popular and distinguishing today. Such as dragon, cloud patterns, Ruyi pattern and some Chinese characters, they have become symbols which can be recognized by people who are even from other cultural backgrounds and shared with the same or similar interpretation with Chinese. Surely we can use those patterns by direct reference without worry about misunderstanding and identification. We also can find many other auspicious patterns which aren't so popular but simple, beautiful and just in line with the modern aesthetic. In some cases, we can directly apply them to current design works too. They are and can be accepted and appreciated by folk. Sometimes new value will come up with naturally in new background.

Take the design of the Beijing Olympic Games auspicious clouds torch for example. Its creative inspiration is from "auspicious clouds" pattern, which means "symbiosis and harmoniousness". Auspicious clouds pattern has existed even in many Asian countries for thousands of years. Most people are familiar with it. On the other hand, it's very easy to be recognized and full of decorative. As for the torch, auspicious clouds are just directly applied in as main figure as well as background. With the contrast between red and silver colors, unique and elegant auspicious clouds pattern producing a striking visual effect, making the whole torch gorgeous, and rich connotation.



Figure 4. Auspicious clouds torch

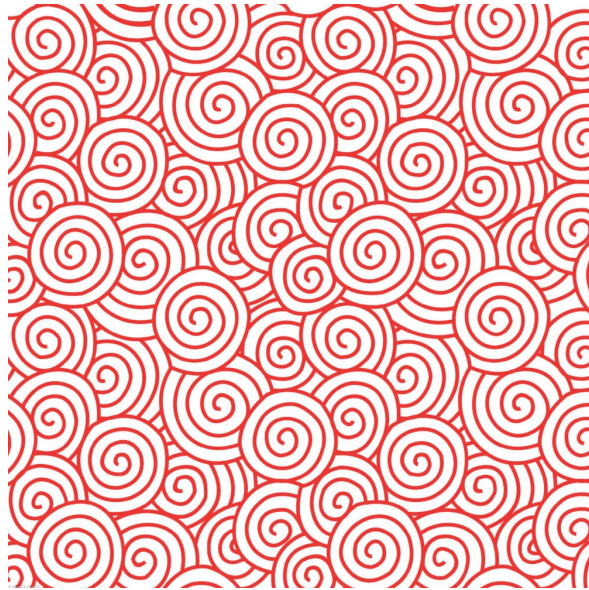


Figure 5. Auspicious clouds pattern

### 2.1.2 Simplification and Abstraction

Due to the constraints of humane and technical conditions during various historical periods, the image of most auspicious patterns has a decorative form which comes from the natural objects. In general, traditional auspicious patterns are too complicate so that it cannot meet the requirement of simple and practicality in the decoration of modern design. Therefore, auspicious patterns usually should be deformed into more concise and vivid in some way. The main method of deformation of auspicious patterns is simplification. Those detailed methods are inducing deformation, abstract deformation and exaggerated deformation, etc.

Abstraction is another main method we can use to simplify. Through this method, Traditional complicated pattern arrangement will be deformed by geometric abstract shapes such as linear or curvilinear pattern, and rearrange into some geometric shapes with concise beauty.

### 2.1.3 Decomposition and Reconstruction

In the process of design, continuous decomposition transformation and reconstruction is a helpful way for designer, namely "old elements, new combination". The defining of decomposition and reconstruction is according to some intention of designer, to split or to shift patterns, and then reconstruct them by certain rules. The purpose is extracting useful elements from the original patters and applying them into current works. Reconstruction is a kind of organic integration of elements from different spaces and times. Decomposition and reconstruction often rely on computer technology and some specific ways, such as overlapping, duplication, layering etc., making pattern image more rich, fresh and original.

### 2.2 Extending Meaning

In a sense, art is the content of the concept and meaning. Auspicious patterns is a way that Chinese handle and understand the world, and it reflect some ideas in a certain form. Auspicious patterns theme implies many concepts and meanings and humanistic spirit in the traditional culture. It is a mirror of traditional culture and spirit is the main content of traditional folk culture, including a variety of needs and aspects in social life. That's one of where its charm from is. However, by shifting to different backgrounds, designer can extend out the meanings from some traditional auspicious patterns, which have already rooted in people's minds. The extension of moral and meaning requires designer to shift their ideas from pattern's original characteristic and meaning to broader and deeper places. To the concept of "auspiciousness". It's another form of loyalty and return.

For an example, Chinese Unicom's logo is the typical case of simplification and abstraction. This logo is marked and evolved by one of the ancient auspicious pattern-"Panchang", which is one of classic Buddhist auspicious patterns. "Panchang" is also known as auspicious knot. Because of the shape of knots is coherent without stop, there is no beginning and end, people are used to imply Dharma's loop and implementation forever. Even so, its

original shape is complicated and detailed and not so striking in a long visual distance. After simplification, the logo is got rid of many extra details and strengthened by some of its original meanings. Those circuitous and reciprocating lines symbolize modern communication network, meaning China Unicom's order and information flow in the information society, but also a symbol of endless business for many years to come. Four square shapes in logo are in all directions, which mean everything is going well. Six round shapes imply roads connected with each other smoothly, while the ten hole in the logo means perfection in every respect. Whether from the symmetry, or from number, the logo is filled with the ancient Oriental auspicious color, which make the modern design less commercial sense, more cultural atmosphere and affinity. So the extension of traditional auspicious patterns in modern design can create a lasting positive aesthetic value and social significance.

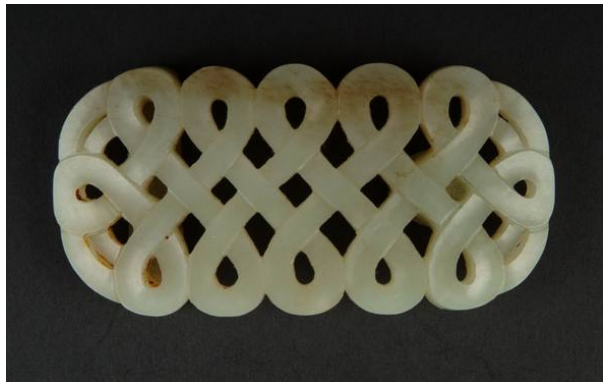


Figure 6. Panchang pattern in Jade buckle, Qing Dynasty



Figure 7. Logo of China Unicom

### 2.3 Conveying Verve

In Chinese art concept, verve is a higher state than form or meaning. Verve is intrinsic nature of things. As for pattern, it refers to status and atmosphere of things, and conveys the entire spirit of pattern. Grasping and inheriting the verve of traditional auspicious patterns, and finally integrating it into the current design, is a difficulty of the process of application of traditional graphic art and modern design. Just as what Li Zehou said that "beauty can't exist without form, but only form can't achieve beauty as well". Using and innovating "form" and "meaning" of traditional pattern is a relatively low level of artwork. To better combine modern design techniques with spiritual elements of auspicious patterns, we should find a point to connect tradition and modern.

Let's look at "Phoenix TV" logo. Since ancient times, Chinese like to view Phoenix as one symbol of good luck, peace and authority! Hong Kong's Phoenix TV station successfully use modern design modeling means to extract and innovate Chinese traditional Phoenix auspicious patterns, and the unique "tai chi" structure. In this logo, two phoenixes share one crown, hovering and singing forever. This design blends the media's features and spirit into one pattern, expressing the concept of mingling and communication. This logo has the national characteristic, but also embodies the spirit of modern time.

There're many other designers used this method to apply and renovate auspicious pattern as well. Let's take the logo of Hong Kong "SEIKU" department stores Company for example, which was designed by Hong Kong's famous designer Alan Chan. This logo integrates the traditional pattern "double fishes" with the letter "S", representing the concept of the company's running way. The form strongly implies the "Yin yang" philosophy theory on the natural cycle. It contains one kind of specific oriental connotation, and it's full of strong auspicious meaning.

Those successful cases are often coexistent and multiple. They absorb traditional auspicious concept and integrate them into modern forms. This type of method not only can improve the visual appealing power, but also can show the soul of traditional culture effectively.



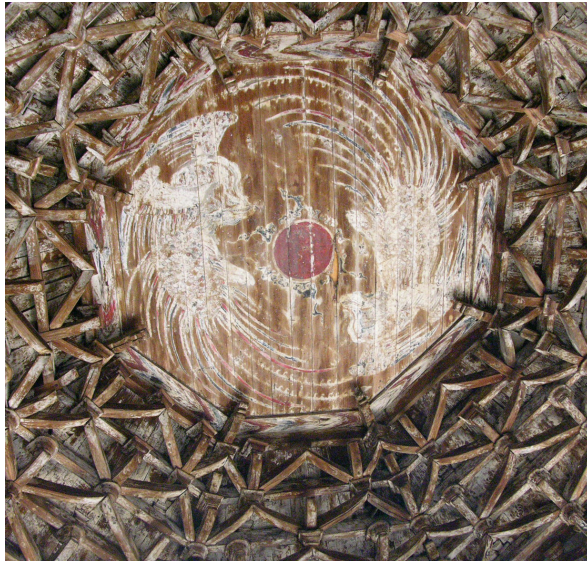


Figure 8. Phoenix pattern on ceiling



Figure 9. Logo of Phoenix TV

### 3. Evaluation and Prediction

We have to acknowledge that development of modern technology has propelled expedition of human civilization pace. However, no matter how the society is developed, human always have a desire for a more peaceful and happy life. The application of traditional auspicious pattern in modern design is a way appreciating the ancients' dream and taking its wisdom. Meanwhile, it's an endeavor finding new methods to express traditional culture. Auspicious pattern is a kind of effective element to distinguish Chinese characteristics by its rich content and relevance of social life. Application of auspicious pattern in modern design not only represents a self-innovation on form of folk art heritage, but also indicates a self-salvation to the problems of modern design. With absorption of modern design means, designers constantly look for the ethnic characteristics of traditional visual symbols, to establish the unique language design and visual image with national character.

In the past, The public and the group centered design requirement decide that the design of auspicious patterns is always based on the average value of the group and what it is aimed to suit is the generality of the group of users. Therefore, individual has to make the adapt to those patterns which might not be the most suitable for him and demand. As for the future's development, Applications of auspicious patterns will transfer from "public center" to "individual or small group center", the value and dignity of an individual will be really embodied and the ideal condition of human orientation will be attained.

In new ear, participatory design (PD) should play an important role in the application of traditional auspicious pattern in modern design. If we track back to its original intention, auspicious pattern is created by usage. In other words, auspicious pattern always attach to some kinds of commodity. Accordingly, with tech's help, more end-users and individuals should be encouraged to participate in the process of redesigning auspicious pattern, speaking aloud about their opinions on auspicious patterns. Designers should also be more involved in the big picture of socially innovative design, beyond their personal expression. New excellent auspicious patterns and their applications should come up with this compliance with the usage characteristics of individuals, and accurate indication symbol will, without doubt, bring a sense of security to modern people in psychology.

### 4. Concluding Remark

In my opinions, applying and renovating traditional auspicious pattern must base on universal design language. On the other hand, understanding different national cultures, especially about some cultural taboos is also very important. Only can we found the bridge connecting different times and cultural backgrounds, we can create new life of the traditional auspicious pattern. How to use traditional elements in international language is always a heavy historical task to nowadays designer.

Chinese traditional auspicious pattern is a valuable culture wealth. Its broad subject matters, rich connotations and diverse forms, all these things make it special to be substituted by other art forms. Through innovating its "form", extending its "moral", so as to inheriting its "verve" to apply it into modern design, and we will find out

a new vitality in traditional pattern, create out works that not only have traditional national characteristic, but also are full of spirit of modern era.

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