

THE INCORPORATION OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE FOLK-ART IN MODERN GRAPHIC DESIGN: CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS AND VISUAL COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

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Abstract

The traditional Chinese folk art also has great visual significance; it still has a great influence on the modern graphic design in terms of symbolism, color system and composition. However much of the existing literature is quite aestheticistic, rather than about the uses of folk-art as a strategic instrument in the practice of visual communication today. The paper discusses the relationship between traditional Chinese folk-art characteristics and modern graphic design, and tries to evaluate their ability to express cultural identity and communicate the power. The qualitative research methodology based on literature review and case-study analysis is used to explore the symbolic motifs used in poster design, the use of traditional color symbolism in the poster design and the stylistic composition techniques in the poster design and branding purposes such as the Chinese New Year visual communication and culturally adapted advertising campaign using Coca-Cola. The results show that application of traditional folk-art elements would affect positively the audience engagement, cultural identification and the development of the unique visual communication strategy in the context of modern design. The paper also demonstrates that reprocessing of traditional artistic resources in digital graphic design has been part of the equilibrium between cultural perpetuation and imaginative innovation in the global visual communication environments. This study offers a theoretical framework to comprehend the way in which traditional visual language may be used to help in culturally responsive and sustainable graphic design practice by filling the gaps in the systematic analysis of folk-art components as communicative strategies in past studies.

Keywords:

Traditional Chinese folk art, graphic design, visual communication, cultural identity, symbolic motifs, colour symbolism.

Introduction

Chinese folk art is one of the most significant elements of the Chinese cultural heritage and reflects the aesthetic values, beliefs, customs and the shared memory of the various regions and ethnic groups around the country. Having been developed over a long period of social practice, folk-art traditions of paper-cutting, New Year paintings, embroidery, clay sculpture, shadow puppetry, and decorative symbolism have been influential in the formation of the visual culture of China. Such traditional forms of art represent a continuity of history as well as a useful and valuable cultural symbol that conveys ideals of harmony, prosperity, identity and social aspiration. With the background of a fast globalization process, and digital transformation, the preservation and adaptation of these traditional sources of art has gained a greater significance in the context of sustaining cultural uniqueness in the context of modern visual communication.

The incorporation of traditional culture in contemporary graphic design has become a significant trend in the evolution of modern Chinese visual communication in the past few years. Graphic design is not only a medium for transmitting information, it's also a medium for transporting culture, and a vehicle for national identity and social values. The fusion of the traditional folk-art heritages with the design practice of today has made it possible for visual components of design to become much richer aesthetically and at the same time for the

designers to contribute to the continuity of the culture. The integration will make it possible to apply and use the traditional visual language within new contexts of communication, creating new solutions that will meet the expectations of the new generation of viewers, while maintaining cultural authenticity. The symbolic meanings, decorative features, and aesthetic worth of the traditional Chinese folk-art elements in visual communication design have been studied in the past. As an illustration, **Zhang (2022)** highlights the significance of folk-art motifs in the enrichment of contemporary artistic expression, and **Xie (2018)** talks about the necessity of strengthening cultural identity through the use of traditional visual symbols in the practice of graphic design. Equally, **Hua (2021)** discusses how the classic formulae of composition and color systems are applied in the design of exhibition posters, and **Cheng (2019)** examines how the use of paper-cutting technique can be applied in the modern visual language of graphics. These works indicate the increasing scholarly interest in the integration of conventional artistic material into contemporary design spaces and the cultural importance of folk-art components in contemporary visual communication.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the aesthetic and the symbolic significance of traditional Chinese folk-art elements are recognized within the existing research, the majority of previous studies are concentrated on the descriptive explanation of the same elements instead of the systematic study of their practical use in the contemporary practice of graphic design. Specifically, little focus has been placed on the contributions that these classical visual components make towards communication tactics in contemporary digital media-based settings and international design landscapes. Consequently, there is still a research gap in comprehending how the traditional folk-art visual language, when properly adapted, can be utilized to promote both cultural identity expression and innovative visual communication in modern graphic design.

Thus, the present research will attempt to explore how the elements of traditional Chinese folk-art have been incorporated into modern graphic design practice by reviewing their visual qualities, symbolism and communicative use. Alongside this, the paper will also examine the potential of traditional artistic resources to be used in creative innovation of contemporary visual communication as well as aid in the maintenance and transfer of the cultural identity within an ever-globalised design environment. The study aims to give a closer insight into the practical value and relevance of the traditional folk-art elements in contemporary Chinese graphic design by conducting a literature review and qualitative analysis of the representative design examples.

Literature Review:

The Usage of the Traditional Chinese Folk-Art Elements in Modern Graphic Design.

Chinese folk art is still an important source of culture that contributes to the graphic design, providing symbolism, composition rules and colour codes which help to represent a scene visually and can also be used as cultural identity symbolism. The findings from previous studies (such as **Zhang, 2022, Xie, 2018, Hua, 2021**) have revealed that the use of folklore themes, symmetrical pattern, and culturally appropriate colour combination play a role in achieving aesthetic continuity and effectiveness in communicating messages for the creation of posters and advertisements in the modern era. Specifically, the traditions of paper-cutting and decorative patterns provide versatile visual solutions, with the help of which designers can develop culturally identifiable, yet modern compositions (**Cheng, 2019; Su, 2019**). Likewise, existing studies of traditional colour symbolism affirm its contribution to better audience engagement and emotional reaction in present-day branding and visual communication settings (**Shu, 2022; Zeng, 2019**).

But current research is mainly focused on descriptive explanation of aesthetic qualities, as opposed to exploring the role of traditional folk-art elements in a strategic communication tool in the modern graphic design system, particularly in digital and global environments. Thus,

this paper explores the practical application and importance of communication of traditional Chinese folk-art in modern graphic design to fill this gap and add to culturally responsive design research.

Research Gap

Though there have been past studies on the aesthetic properties and symbolic meaning of the traditional folk-art elements of Chinese in modern visual communication design, the majority of the studies are described as largely descriptive and are based on their interpretation of style instead of the examination of communication strategy. The literature highlights the decorative use of folk-art motives, colour symbolism and compositional patterns, but they have relatively little attention to the functional aspect of visual communication methods in modern digital graphic design settings. Moreover, previous research seldom analyses the role traditional folk-art visual language plays in audience response, expression of cultural identity, and branding in globalized communicative practices. Specifically, the systematic examination of the ability to strategically adapt the traditional Chinese folk-art elements to the poster design and advertising campaigns and cultural branding practices is lacking. Thus, this study will fill this research gap by exploring the role of traditional Chinese folk-art elements as not merely aesthetic resources but also as communication strategies that can be used to promote cultural continuity and creative innovation in the modern practice of graphic design.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to explore the incorporation of the traditional Chinese folk-art in the modern practice of graphic design, as well as to assess how folk-art can enhance the cultural identity, expression and effectiveness of visual communication. In particular, the research aims:

- To examine the visual nature of the traditional Chinese folk-art components adopted in modern graphic design.
- To investigate how symbolic motifs, color systems, and stylistic structures are used in modern visual communication.
- To assess the usefulness of conventional artistic features in poster design and advertising campaigns.
- To investigate the role of traditional folk-art visual language in creative innovation in the world of graphic design.

Objective	Focus Area	Application
Examine folk-art motifs	Symbolic imagery	Poster & branding design
Study color symbolism	Traditional colour meanings	Festival visuals
Analyze composition techniques	Symmetry & abstraction	Layout strategy

Table 1: Research Objectives and Analytical Focus

Research Methodology

The research methodology that will be followed in this study is qualitative research, given that it aims at exploring how traditional Chinese folk-art elements can be incorporated in modern graphic design practice. Qualitative research approaches are especially appropriate when it comes to the study of visual culture and artistic expression as they enable interpretative judgment of symbolic meaning, stylistic structure, and efficiency of communication when it comes to design. The study is aimed at analysing the role of traditional folk-art visual language in maintaining cultural continuity and innovation of graphic design spaces in contemporary settings.

The research is mainly founded on the systematic literature review and visual examination of the symbolic instances of modern graphic design which includes the traditional elements of Chinese folk-art. The scholarly sources pertaining to folk art, visual communication, cultural symbolism, and modern design practice were reviewed to reveal the important theoretical approaches to the role of traditional artistic resources in the development of contemporary design. These sources can offer a conceptual perspective of how folk-art patterns, color systems and stylistic aspects play a role in shaping contemporary visual communication patterns.

This study also involves qualitative case-based visual analysis of chosen current design applications, e.g. poster design, advertisement design visuals, and cultural branding materials using traditional folk-art motifs i.e. paper-cutting motifs, symbolic imagery and traditional color structures. These examples are evaluated based on the visual composition, symbolism, transformation of style and effectiveness of communication in modern viewers. The case-study method allows the research to reveal how traditional artistic aspects are transformed and re-told in contemporary graphic design practice. Moreover, the paper will look at the three broad areas of folk-art elements that are typically used in modern graphic design, which are the graphic motifs, color symbolism and stylistic composition techniques. These categories are used to evaluate how the traditional structures of visual media have been used to improve the aesthetic value of the product, to express cultural identity and to communicate effectively in the modern visual media context. The purpose of the study is to give a systematic understanding of the practical and cultural meanings of traditional Chinese folk-art elements in modern graphic design, and the traditional Chinese folk-art elements as innovative visual communication resources in international design field by using this qualitative analysis method.

Folk-Art Elements and Contemporary Graphic Design.

The traditional Chinese folk art style is an important visual heritage that could serve as a cultural medium to foster the development of modern graphic design; it has the ability to provide a cultural language of symbols, distinctive color systems and methods of expressive composition. These artistic resources are expressions of the visual culture of people, who have experienced several hundred years of culture, and who continue to influence the strategies of visual communication today. The use of traditional folk-art elements in contemporary application of design is not only an aesthetic element, but also a means of national and international communication in which the viewers participate and express their cultural identity. The three major clusters of traditional folk-art elements that are frequently utilized in modern graphic design practice which will be the focus of this paper are Symbolic Graphic Motifs, Traditional Colour Symbolism and Stylistic Composition Techniques. These are all important visual tools through which designers are able to re-explain the culture in response to today's communication needs.

Element Type	Examples	Meaning	Modern Use
Motifs	Dragon, Phoenix	Power, Harmony	Posters
Colours	Red, Yellow	Prosperity, Authority	Branding
Composition	Symmetry	Balance	Layout structure

Table 2: Categories of Traditional Chinese Folk-Art Elements Used in Graphic Design
1. Symbolic Elements (Graphic Motifs)

Graphic motives are one of the most recognizable features of traditional Chinese folk art, and are currently employed in modern graphic design as carriers of symbolism and cultural identity. These themes are rooted in everyday life, religious belief systems, mythological stories and cultural customs, and on common aspirations to good fortune, harmony, longevity and happiness. Therefore, symbolic imagery that is derived from traditional folk art sources still has a value as a means of communication in the context of contemporary visual design.

The most common symbolic elements of Chinese folk art are dragons, phoenixes, rabbits and pandas, peonies and birds, pagodas and traditional ornamental patterns. All of these visual elements have certain cultural connotations that increase the communicative meaning of graphic design compositions. To illustrate, the dragon is a symbol of power and dominance, the phoenix signifies peace and rebirth, and the peony is common knowledge of wealth and honour. When these motifs are used together in a contemporary graphic design layout, they add to the visual interpretations of the story, bring the audience closer to the historical cultural interpretation.

In addition to mythological and natural motives, the symbolic motifs, which may be based on the traditional decoration practices such as paper cutting patterns and new year paintings can also be utilized in the design of posters, branding materials and advertising graphics. These motives are characterized by their simplified shapes, sharp lines and harmonious compositional patterns; these allow the designer to create graphically identifiable and visible graphic patterns. A transfer of the old symbolic motifs into the digital design process proves the fact that the historical art language can be successfully read in the frames of modern communication systems and can maintain cultural originality.

Furthermore, symbolic folk-art motifs help to develop culturally distinct design identities in response to a visual standardization that is increasing in the global context. The designers use the features of the national culture and culture in contemporary graphic designs, creating graphics that are understandable by people of other countries. As a result, the symbolic graphic precepts are still in use today as powerful graphic devices for enhancement of cultural expression and communication efficiency in the practice of graphic design.

2 Colour Symbolism

Another important source of the contemporary graphic design practice is the stylistic composition techniques based on traditional Chinese folk art. Symmetry, contrast, exaggeration, abstraction and rhythmic repetition are some of these techniques that contribute to the distinctive visual form of traditional artistic expression. If applied to contemporary graphic design contexts, these compositional devices highlight the savvy and cultural recognisability even more. Symmetrical layout structure is one of the most typical compositional elements of traditional Chinese folk artists. Symmetry is a cultural idea of harmony and balance and it can be applied to decorate festivals, paper cut and architectural ornament. Symmetry is also used by modern graphic designers to give structure to the safety, create stable and pleasant compositions to facilitate the clarity of the communication.

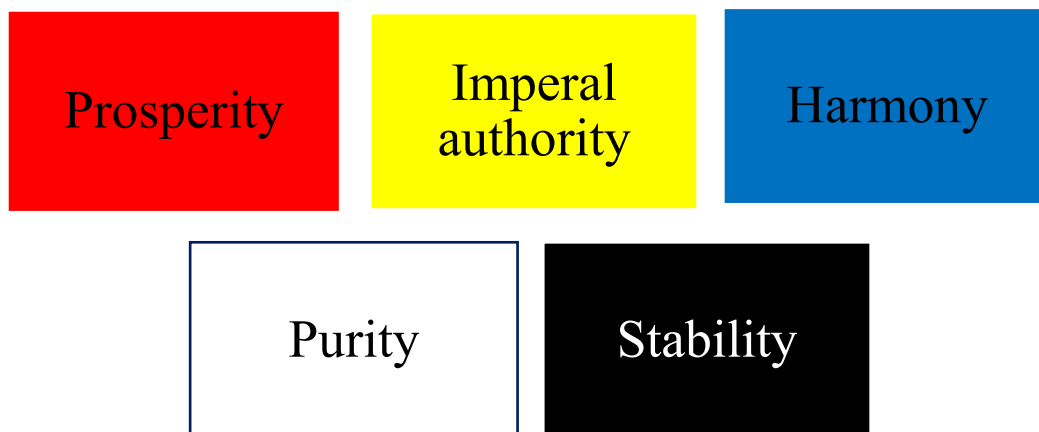


Figure 1: Traditional Chinese color symbolism in visual communication

Traditional color symbolism is also commonly used in the poster design of festivals, advertising campaigns and the material of cultural branding in the modern practice of visual communication. Chinese New Year visual communication, the concept of using red and gold combinations, is one of the most popular examples of the practice, as these colors enhance the emotional connotations of celebration and the belonging to a particular culture. Using the conventional color schemes in contemporary layouts, the designers improve the visual hierarchy, as well as the interest of the audience, without losing the valuable cultural significance that was inherent to the artistic traditions of the past.

3 Stylistic Composition Techniques

The stylistic composition techniques, which are based on traditional Chinese folk art, are another significant source of contemporary graphic design practice. Symmetry, contrast, exaggeration, abstraction and rhythmic repetition are some of these techniques that contribute to the distinctive visual form of traditional artistic expression. These compositional strategies make the savvy and cultural recognisability more prominent when applied to modern graphic design settings. Symmetrical layout structure is one of the most typical compositional elements of traditional Chinese folk artists. Symmetry represents cultural concepts of harmony and balance and is often used in decorations of festivals, paper-cutting and in architectural ornamentation. In modern graphic design practice, symmetrical patterns assist the designer to structure the safety and make compositions that are stable and appealing to the eye in promoting the clarity of communication.

The expression and stylization of the image form is another important element of the style, which is rooted in the traditional folk-art practice. The methods enable the artist to emphasize salient symbolic aspects and shed unnecessary visual clutter. The same techniques are applied by modern designers to design digital graphic versions of the old motifs to produce a pleasing visual effect that will not detract from its cultural or significant meaning but make it suitable to the new communication mediums. Alongside symmetry and abstraction, the effects of the traditional craft-based visual technologies: paper-cutting and shadow-play imagery, still have an impact on the aesthetics of modern graphic design. These methods focus on creating balanced and dynamic compositions with good contrast between positive and negative space. These principles of stylistics, applied to the production of contemporary posters, the creation of a logo and the creation of resources for cultural branding, increase the expressiveness of visual communication and consolidate the connection with traditional artistic education.

Case Study Analysis

Case Study	Folk-Art Element	Purpose	Communication Effect
New Year Poster	Red colour, symmetry	Festival identity	Emotional engagement
Coca-Cola Campaign	Zodiac motifs	Localization	Brand connection
Paper-cut design	Silhouette contrast	Cultural styling	Visual clarity

Table 3: Case Study Comparison of Folk-Art Applications

1 Chinese New Year Poster Design

Another important source of modern graphic design practice is the stylistic composition techniques that are derived from traditional Chinese folk art. Some of these methods include symmetry, contrast, exaggeration, abstraction and rhythmic repetition, which are techniques that help to create the unique visual form of traditional artistic expression. Composed these

techniques make the savvy and cultural recognisability more apparent in more contemporary graphic designing circumstances. Symmetrical layout structure is one of the most typical compositional elements of traditional Chinese folk artists. Symmetry is the cultural representation of harmony, balance and is commonly used in decoration of festivals, paper cutting and in the ornamentation of architecture. Symmetrical patterns can help the designer organize the safety and create stable, attractive compositions in order to enhance communication clarity in today's graphic design.

The exaggerated and simplified visual form is another significant stylistic element based on the traditional folk-art practice. The methods enable artists to highlight important symbolic features and minimize unnecessary visual complexity. Modern designers often use the same techniques in making digital graphic versions of the old motifs, which allow them to create a visual impression that is pleasing to the eye without losing cultural significance but adapting to the new communication channels.

<https://m.media-amazon.com/images/I/61MxWoY4MeL.AC.SY300.SX300.QL70.ML2.jpg>



Figure 2: Chinese New Year poster incorporating traditional folk-art color schemes, zodiac imagery, and symmetrical composition techniques.

Alongside symmetry and abstraction, the effects of the traditional craft-based visual technologies: paper-cutting and shadow-play imagery, still have an impact on the aesthetics of modern graphic design. The techniques focus on good contrast between positive and negative spaces, producing dynamic and balanced compositions. These principles of stylistics are used in the present day in the design of a poster, designing a logo and in cultural branding resources, thus intensifying the expressive power of visual communication and increasing the connection to traditional artistic legacy.

2 Coca-Cola Chinese New Year Campaign

The campaigns are seasonally produced by Coca-Cola's branding team and demonstrate how the brand can tap into the traditional folk art elements to be able to communicate in a culturally sensitive manner. The red color schemes, patterns of decorative knots, festive typography and zodiac images used in these campaigns enhance the visibility of the audience and their emotional attachment. The brand localizes its global identity by using culturally significant visual symbolism in packaging and promotional graphics, which, despite the high level of cultural relevance within the Chinese market, allow retaining the brand's relevance on a global scale.

<https://www.swirecocaCola.com/sbcorpweb/uploads/newsletter/images/source/4026604931000.jpg>



Figure 3: Coca-Cola Chinese New Year packaging demonstrating localization through traditional color symbolism and decorative folk-art motifs.

3 Paper-Cutting Inspired Graphic Design

The contrast, simple structure and symmetry of the antique paper-cut paintings are good sources of influence for contemporary graphic design. Many designers make use of paper cutting patterns to produce a digital image to add to posters, logos, and cultural branding. The adaptations have symbolic clarity and decorative rhythm of traditional craft skills, and are more effective in the context of modern visual communication. The design paper-cutting derived design then, reflects the effective reapplication of the traditional language of art to the modern graphic design practice.

<https://learning.hku.hk/ccch9051/group-1/files/original/3b1ece1185f54d425a17add9424538f.jpg>



Figure 4: Transformation of traditional Chinese paper-cut aesthetics into modern poster and branding design applications.

Discussion

This research reveals that the traditional elements of Chinese folk-art are still very applicable in modern graphic design as effective tools of enhancing cultural identity and visual communication. It is observed that the symbolic motifs, the traditional color schemes and techniques of style composition can still lead to a meaningful interaction with the audience and that the contemporary design practice is still related to values of historical culture.

The examples presented in the case-studies concur that the application of the traditional visual elements not only enriches the visual appeal but also enhances the impact of communication in modern poster design and branding projects. Specifically, cultural recognition is enhanced with the help of symbolic imagery, including zodiac motifs and decorative patterns, whereas the emotional response and festive association is reinforced with traditional color combinations, i.e. red and gold. All these provisions enable designers to come up with visually appealing compositions that can be culturally significant even in modern communication settings.

Furthermore, the folk-art visual language was able to function very flexibly in relation to the transfer of old artistic techniques with their associated material, such as paper-cutting buildings, into digital graphic forms. In addition, the folk-art visual language could be used very flexibly when transferring old artistic techniques with the material associated with them, for example paper-cutting buildings, into digital graphic forms. These are not just ornamental resources, but communication resources that help designers to balance traditional and contemporary visual requirements.

The research results further addressed the research gap identified in the previous literature which pointed out that traditional Chinese folk-art elements can be used not only for aesthetic expressions, but also for effective communication in the practical application of graphic design in this modern era. It confirms that the use of traditional artistic tools has been

a major factor in the development of culturally responsive design strategies in the wider visual communication field.

Overall, the paper proves the continued value of traditional folk-art elements as a viable and culturally relevant source to stimulate innovation, identity expression and audience reach in today's context of graphic design.

Folk-Art Element	Design Role	Cultural Role	Communication Role
Motifs	Visual identity	Visual identity	Symbol recognition
Colors	Emotional tone	Cultural meaning	Audience response
Composition	Layout structure	Harmony concept	Clarity

Table 4: Summary of Folk-Art Contributions to Modern Graphic Design Conclusion

This paper has explored the idea of applying the traditional folk-art elements of Chinese culture to modern graphic design and how these elements have been applied in today's world of design in terms of their contribution to the culture and their value to visual communication. Although its literature review and an examination of a sample of case studies showed that the traditional folk-art features such as symbolic motifs, color systems and compositional structures have continued to be important visual means in contemporary graphic design practice and to enhance aesthetic expression and portrayal of cultural identity, the study concluded that they have been systematically neglected in contemporary graphic design.

Based on the research results, the following conclusions can be drawn: the application of the visual language of traditional folk-art in the field of communication has the potential to improve the effectiveness of communication because of the improvement of the audience recognition, emotional involvement and cultural appropriateness. In particular, the paper cutting symbol, common symbolic imagery and culturally relevant color associations facilitates a linkage between the past and present art forms and communication methods. Not only do these aspects contribute to enriching visual composition, but also help to maintain and transfer cultural values in the quickly changing global media landscapes.

Moreover, the study defines the traditional Chinese folk art that is not only applicable to decorative purposes but also a strategic tool for designers to strike a balance between continuity of traditional culture and creative creation. Using traditional visual sources in the context of modern graphic design, designers can create works which are both responsive to the local cultural expectations and the global context of communication. It reflects the continuity of folk-art traditions as sources of inspiration in the current practice of visual communication.

The other significant contribution of the study is the fact that it fills the research gap that is evident in the previous literature. While the bulk of the literature from the previous studies was descriptive and explained folk-art symbolism and aesthetic characteristics, the current study provided a more analytical explanation on the function of the elements of folk-art in the current system of communication in graphic design. In this way, the research also adds to the current body of knowledge on the usefulness of traditional arts in the design development process, which is culturally and globally aware. Although these were contributed, there are limitations to the study. This study is based on a qualitative visual analysis, rather than on extensive empirical studies, using the selected representative examples. In the future, broader comparative case studies, audience reception analysis, or digital media design application could be used to further explore the changes of the traditional folk-art elements in the visual communication environment today.

On the whole, this paper shows that the incorporation of traditional Chinese folk-art into modern graphic design is an effective approach toward reinforcing cultural identity

expression, making communication more effective, and ensuring a sustainable development of culturally unique design practices in the international system of visual communication. Further exploitation of the traditional artistic resources will still be a crucial aspect towards facilitating innovation and maintaining the heritage of culture in the practice of graphic design in the future.

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