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Poetic Translation and Connotation Construction: Reflections on the Design Value of Chinese Traditional Decorative Patterns

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Abstract: Chinese traditional decorative patterns are a unique humanistic art paradigm with oriental poetic charm that has emerged in the development process of Chinese decorative art. They express the aesthetic trends and aesthetic practices of Chinese decorative art. Based on the understanding of the three characteristics of the poetic connotations of Chinese traditional decorative patterns, namely "poetic semantics", "harmonious aesthetic feeling", and "inclusive nature", this paper attempts to present the root aesthetic logic in the tradition of decorative art from an oriental context. It also hopes to create an internal cultural identity with poetic connotations in modern design through this exploration.

Keywords: Chinese Traditional Decorative Patterns; Poetic Translation; Connotation Construction; Modern Design

1. Conceptual Analysis of Decorative Patterns

(1) The Concept of Decorative Patterns

Zong Baihua stated when elaborating on the foundation of the emergence of fine arts: "Each form of fine arts is deeply rooted in its unique worldview and emotional perception of life" (Zong, 1978). Decorative patterns, as a special form of symbolic artistic expression in fine arts, tracing back the origin of its logical thinking is one of the approaches to exploring its development laws.

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The term "decoration" emerged in Western decorative art during the 17th to 18th centuries. It generally refers to the artistic embellishment carried out through decorative means or techniques. In the Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, there are two interpretations of the word "decoration". One refers to the adornment of the body or the appearance of objects in daily life, and the other refers to the decorative items that serve the function of beautification (Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 1978). From this, it can be seen that the term "decoration" has different meanings in different contexts. On the one hand, it represents the act and phenomenon of decoration, and on the other hand, it refers to the result produced by the act of decoration. In the Book of the Later Han Dynasty: Biography of Liang Hong, it is recorded that: "The woman requested to make plain clothes, hemp shoes, and tools for weaving baskets and spinning. When she got married, she first entered the husband's family after dressing up (Fan & Sima, 1965)." At this time, the word "decoration" did not belong to the process and result of the act of decoration, nor did it involve the field of arts and crafts or the design discipline. Instead, it was an autonomous and spontaneous daily activity that permeated social life. This shows that "decoration" also has a broad and a narrow sense in terms of specific acts and results. In his book *The Tao of Decoration*, Li Yanzu also pointed out that decoration can be divided into broad and narrow aspects, and he cited the English language system for distinction. In addition to the term "decorative art" which specifically refers to decorative art in English, other so-called decorative words can generally be divided into two categories. One category, such as "decoration", mainly refers to the decorative phenomenon in a broad sense, representing the decorative phenomenon and act on the surface of people or objects in an overall sense. While "ornament" refers to specific types or individual decorative items, as well as the narrow decorative phenomena and results such as patterns and decorative forms, that is, the meaning of "decorative art", such as specific decorative items, patterns and decorative motifs (Li, 1993).

Regarding the term "pattern", Lei Guiyuan stated in his book *Basics of Pattern* published in 1963: "Patterns are the preliminary designs of form, color, and structure in applied art, decorative art, architectural art, industrial art, and other fields (Lei, 1963)." According to Li Yanzu's textual research, the term "pattern" is a borrowed word translated from Japanese at the beginning of this century, and it also has a broad and a narrow sense. In a broad sense, it refers to the design plans and drawings for achieving a certain purpose. For example, after a certain amount of conceptualization, the elements such as shape, color, and decorative patterns are redesigned. It is a non-representational graphical manifestation, which is directly related to the English word "design". That is what Pang Xunqin said: "Pattern work is to design the shape of all utensils and the decoration of all utensils (Pang, 1986)." When specifically manifested in combination with carrier factors such as craftsmanship materials, patterns in a broad sense can be divided into planar patterns or decorative motifs with a decorative meaning in a two-dimensional space and the three-dimensional shapes of utensils or products in a three-dimensional space. The former is commonly known, while the latter, such as the Ming-style wooden furniture with a modeling structure but without additional decorative patterns, is also included in the category of patterns, or it can be called three-dimensional patterns. As design became an independent discipline, the significance of the existence of three-dimensional modeling patterns was obviously diluted. At this time, the main manifestation of patterns existed in a narrow sense, that is, as planar patterns with decorative motifs or the composition of decorative motifs as the main forms.

(2) The Artistic Role of Decorative Patterns

Through the separate interpretations of the two concepts of "decoration" and "pattern", the concept of "decorative pattern" has become increasingly clear. However, the deep connotation of "decorative pattern" is not simply a mechanical combination of the two concepts, but rather a complementary and mutually enhancing relationship between the two in the creation of materials. Decoration expresses the various attributes and characteristics of the decorated objects through patterns. In the

expression of patterns, whether it is decorative deformation or imagery modeling, it refines, condenses, and exaggerates the decoration itself (Zhong, 2011). From this perspective, decorative patterns are an orderly, regular, and idealized type of pattern that combines application and beauty. They are a means or technique for beautifying objects that meets visual needs and is in line with aesthetic ideals. In addition to meeting the standards of artistic embellishment, decorative patterns also take into account the practical requirements of the craftsmanship and materials of the decorated objects. They need to fully conform to the elements such as the function, theme, shape, and structure of the decorated objects. Through the redesign and construction of patterns and decorative motifs such as individual motifs, suitable motifs, two-way continuous patterns, and four-way continuous patterns, a holistic decorative space full of order and narrative is created. The overall design temperament of decorative patterns can be either lively and free or solemn and serious. This special temperament permeates people's daily behaviors through a special sensory perception, and forms the medium and carrier for the generation of decorative effects through people's observation and practice. In this process, simple pattern design is sublimated into an overall consideration of decorative art. Decorative patterns also reflect the dominant selection factors of people in the process of pattern reconstruction. This is an objective summary of people's practice of decorative art in the natural and social environment, and this objective cognition is transformed into a subjective artistic creation that reflects the context of cultural traditions.

2. The Concept and Aesthetic Value of Chinese Traditional Decorative Patterns

(1) The Concept of Chinese Traditional Decorative Patterns

Chinese traditional decorative patterns are a unique humanistic artistic paradigm with oriental poetic charm nurtured in the development process of traditional decorative art, and a splendid epitome of traditional culture and art. They are a traditional art form that combines aesthetically pleasing shapes and auspicious implications. Our ancestors integrated their imagination with the observation of objects and phenomena on the basis of conforming to the laws of natural life. These patterns go beyond their simple decorative function and comprehensively reflect the integrity and particularity of Chinese traditional culture, encompassing numerous elements such as primitive worship, religious beliefs, philosophical concepts, and traditional folk customs. After going through the trials of a long history, Chinese traditional decorative patterns have gradually developed unique folk characteristics that appeal to both refined and popular tastes and have been widely integrated into people's daily lives. Compared with other art forms, they have also become one of the most intuitive and explicit means of expression in Chinese traditional culture and art, and an indispensable national symbol in Chinese traditional culture and art.

(2) The Aesthetic Value of Chinese Traditional Decorative Patterns

The German art historian Wilhelm Worringer once described the essential connotation of decorative art in this way: "The artistic will of a nation is most purely expressed in decorative art. Decorative art is like a chart, in which people can clearly discern the unique and inherent elements of the absolute artistic will (Worringer, 1992)." During the long process of cultural integration and historical accumulation, as an artistic form of expression for understanding the natural world, Chinese traditional decorative patterns reveal a simple aesthetic taste and the longing for a better life. They have also formed a unique expressive style that is lively in image yet clean and plain, manifesting a unique national cultural atmosphere. Chinese traditional decorative patterns express the beautiful wishes of seeking good fortune and avoiding disasters through means of moral implications such as metaphor, analogy, pun, homophony, and symbolism. They adopt an expression method in which the figurative and the abstract coexist in parallel, and the emotional and the rational coexist, transforming themes such as auspicious birds and beasts, flowers and fruits, and auspicious

characters into simple and beautiful artistic languages. In addition to the characteristics of expressing national aesthetics and customs, this artistic language is diverse in its modeling, and it also encompasses the concepts of formal aesthetic feeling in modern design, such as repetition, alternation, and opposition (Zhou & Kim, 2020). As a manifestation of the planar decorative art of Chinese traditional culture, it not only conveys and expresses the traditional oriental poetic connotations of China, but also the cultural connotations, modeling thinking, aesthetic characteristics, and laws of formal beauty contained in it provide practical reference value for the integration of the modern design industry and traditional culture and art.

3. The Aesthetic Consciousness of Chinese Traditional Decorative Patterns

(1) The Symbolic Consciousness of Chinese Traditional Decorative Patterns

The embryonic form of early decorative patterns, as a visual means of communication with the outside world, is a non-deliberate expression with special symbolic connotations. It is "a chaotic entity of matter and spirit, a mixture of pleasure and aesthetic feeling, and the initial form of artificial objects (Zhuge, 1991)." It reflects the objective understanding of aesthetic practice by primitive aesthetic consciousness during group life. From the initial simple symbols to the gradually stylized and systematic patterns, the repeated influence of aesthetic consciousness in the process endows them with both symbolic meaning and simple aesthetic feeling. This is an aesthetic cognitive system that coordinates and adapts to the external environment and is continuously revised and shaped by the collective consciousness and collective values of various groups. In the process of expressing symbolic meanings, the differences in social development levels and collective cognition have led to patterns with different styles in various regions. Among them, Chinese traditional decorative patterns symbolize China's collective emotions of simplicity, modesty, and love for life, as well as the ethical values of respecting culture and advocating etiquette.

(2) The Modeling Consciousness of Chinese Traditional Decorative Patterns

At the very beginning of the origin of primitive thinking and nature worship, the consciousness of decoration emerged in response to the subtle relationship between nature and human beings. Along with people's fantasies and contemplations about themselves and all things in the world, creation myths and primitive decorative patterns came into being hand in hand. Such decorative patterns with mythological themes reflect the understanding and interpretation of primitive groups in their life practices. They also transform this understanding and interpretation into a form of subjective artistic creation that mirrors the roots of regional culture and the aesthetic characteristics of the region.

Specifically, under the influence of primitive thinking and nature worship, the human spirit was unable to explain and control many natural phenomena. People conjectured that primitive images were a true manifestation of some supernatural power, and then used patterns or primitive images to express their worship or awe of nature. In other words, the ancestors used decorative behaviors to reduce the degree of threat that external forces posed to their spirits, thereby alleviating psychological pressure, which led to the birth of primitive patterns (Zhang, 2003). During this period, primitive decorative patterns took all natural things in the human world, such as the sun, the moon, clouds, wind, and fire, as their objects, endowing them with certain symbolic meanings and making corresponding expressions, thus forming the most primitive connection between art and nature. Later, with the widespread dissemination of myths and legends, the range of materials for pattern depiction was expanded. Gradually, various images in primitive and mythological worship were deified. Using abstract and concise expression techniques, natural images with aesthetic significance, such as the sun, the moon, stars, etc., which originated from nature or primitive worship, were depicted. In terms of modeling, they were mostly composed of rigorous geometric shapes or abstract graphics, creating

a solemn and stable modeling atmosphere. This expressed the aesthetic practice in which the subject's objective understanding was sublimated into artistic creation, and finally formed the theme expression centered on natural phenomena and myths and legends. With the development of social productive forces, the good wishes for real life gave birth to the emergence of auspicious patterns, marking a further enrichment and expansion of the themes of Chinese traditional decorative patterns. It eliminated the serious awe of nature conveyed in primitive decorative patterns and was replaced by a lively and interesting life ideal. The richness of themes also made the ways of expressing emotions more flexible and diverse. The simple expectations for real life showed the traditional oriental emotions of China through the vivid colors and shapes, and conveyed the simple temperament of longing for nature and beauty.

4. The Poetic Connotations of Chinese Traditional Decorative Patterns

(1) The Poetic Semantics of Chinese Traditional Decorative Patterns

"Poetic quality" should originally be a blended experience of the material and psychological expressions of the essence of an object. It encompasses the material and spiritual connections between the subject and the object, and implies the speculation between the perceptual and the rational in thinking patterns. It is the true and comprehensive perceptual experience of the mind towards the images of objects. The perceptual characteristics of this poetic connotation are destined to be sudden and instantaneous, while the rational factors contained therein lie in its associativity and connotation. These characteristics together endow Chinese traditional decorative patterns with poetic semantics. Chinese traditional decorative patterns explore and shape the potential aesthetic elements in primitive images. With the development of society, this traditional aesthetic connotation has become increasingly refined, and in turn, nourishes the latent aesthetic concepts of the general public. This process reflects the guidance of perceptual factors on the rational expression factors in Chinese traditional decorative patterns, enabling them to continuously revolve around and inherit the core connotations of traditional aesthetic thoughts with an unbroken stream of emotions. In terms of the cultural soil in which Chinese traditional decorative patterns are rooted, compared with the West, their oriental poetic semantics are more prominently highlighted.

(2) The Harmonious Aesthetic Feeling of Chinese Traditional Decorative Patterns

After examining and reflecting on the metaphysics of Confucianism and Taoism and post-ontology, Cheng Chungying, a Chinese-American philosopher, believes that the primary characteristic of Chinese philosophy lies in the "principle of integral unity." That is, all things in the world continuously originate from the same root and are thus integrated into one entity (Cheng, 1991). The most highly regarded and long-standing concept in traditional aesthetic thoughts and aesthetic philosophy stems from the idea of harmony, which emphasizes the coordination of internal and external forms. It represents a "harmonious aesthetic feeling" within a contradictory entity, where there is mutual coordination and a dynamic balance of give and take. The traditional humanistic thought centered around the "harmonious aesthetic feeling" has subtly guided the aesthetic concept of the harmonious unity of the modeling, color, and formal elements of Chinese traditional decorative patterns. It can be observed that from the origin to the development of Chinese traditional decorative patterns, they have been nurtured by traditional aesthetic thoughts and traditional humanistic thoughts. The "harmonious aesthetic feeling" running through them provides us with a wealth of cultural connotations from various aesthetic perspectives that cannot be explained by Western art theories. It not only aligns with the political ideals of ancient Chinese society but is also regarded as the standard of Chinese traditional aesthetic thoughts. It is one of the most important interpretations of aesthetic concepts in Chinese traditional decorative patterns.

(3) The Inclusive Nature of Chinese Traditional Decorative Patterns

For a long time, Chinese traditional decorative patterns have undergone the baptism of different cultures. While inheriting the Eastern ritual and music civilization and aesthetic traditions represented by the Huaxia ethnic group, they have also been profoundly influenced by the cultures of all ethnic groups in China. After absorbing the nutrients of different ethnic and regional cultures, Chinese traditional decorative patterns have been constantly practicing their own cultural inclusive nature. Their unique and diverse temperament and forms, as well as vivid and flexible colors and shapes, can weaken the constraints of uniform industrial technology in design, and possess broad inclusive value. This process of absorbing and drawing on diverse cultures has continuously given rise to new appearances of decorative art in different eras. It is also one of the important reasons why Chinese traditional decorative patterns have been passed down from generation to generation and never faded. It reflects the precious cultural inclusive nature and the cultural core that keeps pace with the times of Chinese traditional decorative patterns, laying a prerequisite for their inheritance in modern design.

5. Conclusion

With the in-depth development of the globalization trend in the 21st century, the mass media, which is gradually becoming more large-scale and intensive, has eliminated the cultural differences between different cultures, making communication between heterogeneous cultures extremely smooth. In this process, in order to maximize their profits, producers strongly advocate and produce goods with mass appeal and universality. As a result, the frequency of the appearance of personalized emotional elements in goods has been reduced, and the important role played by cultural individuality in the design connotation has been inadvertently ignored. Consequently, the connection between design emotion and culture has gradually shown signs of fatigue. Li Yanzhu believes that, looking at the history of craftsmanship and design on a global scale, in the era of large-scale industry, cultural and technological exchanges among various ethnic groups have become increasingly frequent. Technology has become an international language and culture. Based on this, the national and regional characteristics of products and designs have been greatly diluted (Li, 2006). Although the integration of ethnic arts with the core of heterogeneous cultures is a development trend brought about by the technological trend, in this wave of uniform globalization, it brings not only the homogenization of goods and designs but also the homogenization of culture and connotation. Therefore, while paying attention to the convenience brought by the functions of goods, we should also be alert to the cultural nihilism hidden in the trend of the times. Kim Minsu believes that "the root of the competitiveness of goods lies in the cultural interpretation through design" (Kim, 1996). Therefore, in order to highlight the charm of Chinese design in the torrent of cultural homogenization, it is necessary and urgent to inherit and develop Chinese traditional decorative art.

As a humanistic and artistic bond with oriental poetic charm, Chinese traditional decorative patterns integrate traditional concepts such as Chinese language, moral values, and aesthetic ideas, and have already formed a highly complete ideological system of decorative art. The connotations it contains far exceed the appearance of the form of decorative patterns in the traditional sense. It is a microcosm of Chinese cultural forms and a true reflection of spiritual identity. Weng Bingfeng pointed out that "design and national culture develop in parallel, and culture is the foundation and visual carrier of design" (Weng, 2007). It can be seen that in the trend of cultural homogenization, Chinese traditional decorative patterns will create possibilities for the realization of new modern designs that combine nationality and the characteristics of the times. Wang Defeng once said that "only through tradition can true innovation be possible" (Wang, 2005). Summarizing and extracting the classic images with originality and forward-looking in Chinese traditional decorative patterns

enables modern design to draw humanistic warmth and historical emotions from traditional plastic arts, inherit the national elements and spiritual connotations in Chinese traditional decorative patterns, break free from the fetters of cultural homogenization, understand the poetic connotations of Chinese traditional decorative patterns in the "origin" of Chinese traditional decorative art, present the original aesthetic logic in tradition through a new poetic context, and then create an internal cultural identity with poetic connotations in modern design.

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