

A Study of Auspicious Motifs in Qing Dynasty Chinese Ceramics from the Perspective of Design Semiotics

Jin Ke and Ahmadreshidi Bin Hasan

Abstract- This study explores the auspicious patterns in Chinese ceramics of the Qing Dynasty from the perspective of design semiotics. The study aims to reveal the cultural values, symbolic meanings and aesthetic principles embedded in these patterns, and explore their innovative applications in contemporary design and art education. Using a combination of historical analysis, semiotic theory and visual analysis, the study systematically comprehends the development of auspicious motifs, categorizes different types, and interprets their symbolic structures. Through case studies of representative examples of ceramics from the Qing Dynasty, key visual elements such as shape, color, and composition are identified, and how these elements act as symbols to convey auspicious symbolism in a specific social and cultural context is analyzed. It is found that auspicious motifs not only reflect the aesthetic ideals and ideological pursuits of the Qing society, but also demonstrate the dual characteristics of the symbol system in continuity and change. In addition, the thesis discusses the transformation and application strategies of traditional auspicious patterns in modern design practice and art education, emphasizing their innovative potential and cultural heritage value. By combining design semiotics with historical and cultural analysis, this study deepens the understanding of Qing Dynasty ceramic art and provides theoretical and practical references for contemporary design innovation and art education.

Keywords – Qing Dynasty Ceramics; Auspicious Patterns; Design Semiotics; Visual Analysis; Cultural Inheritance; Art Education; Modern Design Application

I. INTRODUCTION

“Ji” means auspicious and smooth. The Shuo Wen Jie Zi (Explaining Characters) explains: “Ji, also good.” The Middle Kingdom also says, “When a country is about to rise, it must be auspicious.” Since ancient times, the concept of “good luck” is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture, carrying people's universal pursuit of happiness, well-being and a better life. As an important component of material and spiritual culture, auspicious patterns are widely used in rituals, daily utensils and works of art, and have become an important visual symbol of wishing and symbolism.

It is widely believed that the germination of auspicious motifs can be traced back to the Neolithic Age. Zhang Zhiheng (2005) pointed out that the fish and bird motifs on early colored pottery were initial attempts to use natural images to send wishes of good luck. Entering the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the concept of auspiciousness was systematized, and Sun Ji (2010) emphasized that bronze animal motifs were not only decorative, but also carried the meanings of blessing and shelter. After the Qin and Han

dynasties, with the development of religion and philosophy, auspicious motifs gradually formed a complex system of cultural symbols. According to Chen Zhaofeng (2012), since the Han Dynasty, auspicious motifs were widely used in everyday objects, reflecting the diversification of social life and the evolution of spiritual support.

By the Ming and Qing Dynasties, especially the Qing Dynasty, the development of ceramic auspicious motifs reached its peak. Ye Chemin (1986) pointed out that the Qing dynasty ceramics decorated with a wide range of subjects, sophisticated symbolism, colorful, reflecting the ruler of the “peace in the world” concept of respect. Wang Xufeng (2001) also pointed out that the palace and folk porcelain production is highly developed, auspicious motifs both aesthetic and symbolic dual function, such as the “five blessings of longevity”, “rich and noble everlasting spring” and so on widely popular, a blend of painting, carving, stacking, hollowing and other craft techniques, the level of art is unprecedented. The artistic level was unprecedented.

Contemporary scholar Li Zehou (1996) pointed out from the perspective of cultural psychology that auspicious motifs embody the aesthetic qualities of the Chinese people: “symbolism and trust”, conveying abstract emotions and ideals through figurative images, which provides an important theoretical support for the understanding of the cultural connotation of auspicious motifs.

With the deepening of global cultural exchanges and design diversification, how to inherit and innovate auspicious patterns in modern design has become an important issue. Li Yanzu (2018) proposed that traditional auspicious patterns should focus on the reinterpretation of symbolic meaning and the modern transformation of visual language in contemporary expression to realize the unity of cultural heritage and innovative design. At the same time, as an important content of art education, auspicious patterns play a fundamental role in traditional crafts, design teaching and cultural literacy training. Systematic art education can not only deepen students' understanding of the traditional symbol system, but also stimulate their innovation ability and promote the integration of cultural confidence and contemporary expression.

Based on this, this study takes design semiotics as the theoretical framework, systematically combs through and analyzes the historical evolution, symbolic characteristics and cultural implications of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious patterns, explores their application value and innovation path in modern design and art education, and aims to provide theoretical basis and practical reference for the contemporary expression of traditional auspicious culture and education practice.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Auspicious patterns, as an important visual symbol system in traditional Chinese culture, carry rich social connotations and spiritual trust, and are the image embodiment of the Chinese people's good wishes and ideal pursuits. As early as in the Neolithic period, the concept of auspiciousness was presented in simple and symbolic colored pottery patterns, such as swirls and folds, reflecting primitive man's expectation of nature worship and life reproduction (Su Bingqi, 1999). Entering the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, the system of auspicious motifs gradually matured, with a well-organized pattern structure, and became an important medium for power symbols and spiritual support (Yang Hong, 2003). Dragons, phoenixes and kui dragons were not only widely used in bronze decoration, but also laid an important foundation for the evolution of auspicious motifs. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, especially the Qing Dynasty, ceramic art flourished, and auspicious motifs reached a peak in terms of subject matter, composition, and color, forming a unique and complex visual language system (Chen Wanli, 1987).

However, most of the existing studies have focused on the classification of auspicious motifs, interpretation of their symbols, and analysis of their craftsmanship, while the systematic exploration of their symbolic structure, generative mechanism, and cultural functions is still lacking. Wang Yuejin (2014) pointed out that traditional art emphasizes symbolism and cultural support, and auspicious motifs are not mere decorations, but visual expressions of social consciousness and aesthetic ideals. Therefore, it is difficult to reveal the deep cultural significance of auspicious motifs by only interpreting them from the perspective of iconography or craftsmanship. It is urgent to use design semiotics to systematically interpret visual elements such as shape, color, and composition from the levels of symbolic forms, meanings, and operation mechanisms, and to reveal their complex meaning construction process and cultural connotation system.

Under the background of globalization and the accelerated development of design diversification, traditional auspicious motifs face both opportunities and challenges in modern design. On the one hand, the rich cultural meaning gives it unique charm; on the other hand, Zhu Heping (2016) points out that there is a problem of "formalized reproduction" in contemporary design, which fails to deeply explore its cultural logic and leads to symbolic rupture. Li Yanzu (2018) emphasized that the innovation and transformation of traditional patterns need to be based on a deep understanding of the cultural spirit and the re-creation of symbolic language.

In addition, traditional auspicious patterns, as an important carrier of national cultural genes, occupy an important position in contemporary art education. Zhu Liangzhi (2012) suggests that art education should focus on the cultivation of cultural cognition and symbolic thinking, and through systematic lectures and case studies, promote students to form cross-cultural understanding and local cultural self-consciousness in the context of globalization, and enhance design thinking and cultural creativity.

Based on this, this study takes design semiotics as the theoretical framework, combines historical compilation,

visual language analysis and case studies to systematically explore the development, symbolic characteristics and cultural connotations of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious patterns, and explores their application path in modern design and art education, aiming to provide theoretical support and practical reference for the creative transformation of traditional culture and the reform of art education.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Auspicious motifs are important visual symbols in traditional Chinese culture, and with the evolution of history, they have gradually transformed from simple decorative elements to a symbol system that carries deep cultural significance. From the colored pottery of the Neolithic Age to the exquisite porcelain of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, auspicious motifs not only carry prayers for a better life, but also reflect the religious beliefs, philosophical thoughts, and cultural sentiments of the society (Wu Shan, 2009). In ancient China, especially during the Shang and Zhou periods, the symbol system of auspicious motifs had begun to show its symbolic meaning and social function. Xie Jinglin (2011) pointed out that most of the auspicious motifs on Shang and Zhou bronzes used animal figures, which not only symbolized strength and shelter, but also represented reverence for the power of nature and the pursuit of social power. The auspicious motifs of this period show the complex relationship between man and nature, man and society, reflecting the concern of the society at that time for the order of the universe and the continuation of life.

Entering the Han Dynasty, the cultural connotation and symbolism of auspicious patterns gradually deepened. Li Zhaoyuan (2015) suggests that the auspicious motifs of the Han Dynasty were mostly based on the theme of the three gods of "Fortune, Luck and Longevity", which embodied the desire for longevity, wealth and happiness, and reflected the pursuit of an ideal life of the middle class of the society at that time. These auspicious motifs are not only decorative symbols, but also symbols of social and cultural identity. The Qing Dynasty was the golden age of Chinese ceramic art, and the prosperity of auspicious motifs reached unprecedented heights. Zhu Zhiheng (2008), in his study of Qing dynasty porcelain, pointed out that the diversity and complexity of auspicious motifs in the Qing dynasty reflected the expectation of national stability and people's well-being. Auspicious motifs during this period were closely linked to politics, economics, and folk beliefs, and became an art form that expressed both imperial power and folk sentiment.

However, although there have been many studies on the form and symbolism of auspicious motifs, relatively few have explored their semiotic structure, cultural mechanisms, and their modern transformation. In her study of traditional Chinese motifs, Zhou Xiaomin (2010) points out that auspicious motifs, as a symbolic system, have unique symbolic meanings for their constituent elements (e.g., shapes, colors, and pattern arrangements), which are capable of conveying specific cultural messages. The combination and transformation of these elements reflect social and cultural changes and people's aesthetic concepts. However, most studies have focused on the symbolic interpretation of

single motifs, lacking a comprehensive analysis of the overall symbolic system of auspicious motifs.

Entering the modern society, the modern application of auspicious motifs has gradually become an important topic in the field of design. According to Xian Zhang (2017), under the background of globalization, the symbolic reengineering of traditional auspicious patterns has become the key to design innovation. Many modern designers tend to pay excessive attention to the visual form of auspicious patterns when borrowing from them, ignoring the deeper cultural symbols in them. Therefore, how to innovatively transform auspicious motifs to adapt them to the aesthetics and needs of modern society while maintaining traditional cultural values has become an urgent problem. Wang Peng (2020) also mentioned that the application of auspicious motifs in modern design should not only pay attention to their formal aesthetics, but also focus on the reinterpretation of the cultural connotations behind the motifs to avoid the loss of their cultural significance.

In addition, the artistic educational value of auspicious patterns has also gradually gained the attention of scholars. Li Yunfan (2014) pointed out that art education should not only teach skills, but also promote students' understanding and recreation of traditional culture. In the teaching of auspicious patterns, semiotic theory provides students with a new way to understand and express traditional culture. Through the perspective of semiotics, students can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural background and social functions of auspicious motifs, and then incorporate richer cultural elements in their designs.

In summary, although existing studies have achieved certain results in the formal analysis and symbolism of auspicious motifs, in-depth exploration of their semiotic structure, cultural mechanism and modern transformation is still insufficient. For this reason, this study intends to analyze the symbolic features of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs and their cultural connotations through the theoretical framework of design semiotics, and explore their potential for application and innovative paths in modern design, with the aim of providing theoretical support and practical guidance for the contemporary expression and development of traditional auspicious culture.

IV. METHOD

Based on the theoretical foundation of design semiotics and using a combination of research methods, this study seeks to comprehensively and systematically explore the cultural connotations and symbolic features of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious patterns and their potential for application in contemporary design and art education.

The historical analysis method is used to systematically sort out the development and evolution of Chinese auspicious patterns. We analyze the development of auspicious patterns from the Neolithic Age to the Qing Dynasty by reviewing a large amount of literature and archaeological reports, and combining them with the image data of ceramic objects in different periods, focusing on the changes of the Qing Dynasty in the content of the themes, decorative techniques, and aesthetic styles. This process helps to understand the interaction between auspicious patterns and specific historical and cultural backgrounds.

Design semiotic analysis is used to explore the symbol system of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious patterns in depth. Guided by Peirce's symbolic trichotomy and Saussure's theory of symbolic structure, we analyze the expressive features of the auspicious patterns in visual elements such as shape, color and composition, and reveal their mechanisms in the process of symbolic encoding, meaning generation and cultural communication. At the same time, through interpreting the symbolic meanings behind the motifs, we explore how the social ideologies, values and aesthetic ideals of the Qing Dynasty were expressed through visual symbols.

The visual analysis method is adopted, and representative ceramic objects of the Qing Dynasty are selected as cases for detailed analysis. The study focuses on the application of various auspicious patterns (such as dragon and phoenix, blessings and longevity, flowers and birds, and auspicious beasts, etc.) in different ceramics and crafts, and summarizes the basic characteristics of the visual language and aesthetic rules by combining the color matching, layout form and technical characteristics.

In addition, this study also uses the comparative research method to compare and analyze the application cases of traditional auspicious patterns in modern design works. By analyzing the innovative transformation of traditional motifs in contemporary product design, brand visual and spatial design, it explores how traditional symbols can achieve cultural reengineering and modern value continuity in the context of globalization and diversification.

Combining with the art education research method, we examine the teaching practice and innovative application of traditional auspicious patterns in contemporary art design education, analyze the status quo and problems of traditional symbols inheritance and innovation cultivation in art education, and put forward the optimization suggestions of teaching based on design semiotics.

Through the comprehensive application of the above multi-methods, this study seeks to establish an effective connection between macro history and micro symbols, traditional culture and modern design, theoretical analysis and practical exploration, so as to provide solid theoretical support and practical paths for the in-depth understanding and innovative application of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs.

V. FINDINGS

Based on the theoretical framework of design semiotics, this study systematically reveals the multiple characteristics of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs in terms of morphological evolution, cultural connotations, symbolic mechanisms and their modern transformations through the combing of historical documents, analysis of physical cases and interpretation of symbolic structures, and mainly draws the following findings:

In terms of visual form and symbol generation, Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs show highly programmed and systematic features. It is found that the auspicious motifs not only cover a variety of elements such as animals, plants, auspicious beasts, auspicious artifacts, myths, etc., but also reflect the coexistence of normative and innovative features in the modeling techniques. Typical

elements such as bats symbolize good fortune, deer symbolize fortune, cranes symbolize longevity, peonies symbolize wealth, and these symbols have formed highly stable symbolic meanings through continuous visual coding and cultural accumulation in the long-term historical development. At the same time, the combination of different pattern elements also reflects a rich symbolic narrative strategy, such as the combination of the patterns of "Fortune and Longevity", "Lunar New Year" and "Prosperity", through the superposition of imagery and the expansion of meaning. Imagery superposition and meaning expansion, so that ceramic decoration not only becomes an aesthetic expression, but also an important medium for symbolic narrative.

In the social and cultural functions and class identity, the Qing dynasty ceramic auspicious patterns show obvious functional stratification and cultural symbols of difference. Palace ceramics in the design of the solemn and magnificent, symbolizing power and sanctity of the subject, such as the nine dragons play beads, longevity, phoenix and sunrise, etc., to emphasize the royal majesty and the world's political ideals of peace. On the other hand, folk ceramics preferred auspicious themes in daily life, such as Fish Leaping Dragon Gate, Ten Thousand Generations, and Joyous Celebration, reflecting the people's simple desire for a stable life, reproduction of heirs, and accumulation of wealth. This difference in the use of motifs between classes reflects the different layers of social structure and ideology in the Qing Dynasty, and also shows that auspicious motifs as cultural symbols played different but complementary cultural functions in different social groups.

From the point of view of symbolic mechanism and visual language, it is found that Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs constructed a symbolic system that is both figurative and abstract, stable and flexible. Each pattern element has a specific symbolic meaning in the historical and cultural context, but it can be given new cultural meanings through different graphic variants, combinations and contextual replacements. For example, the "Pine and Crane" pattern in different dynasties and regional contexts, its composition and layout, the use of color, styling style have changed, not only to maintain the core symbolic meaning, but also to achieve synchronous evolution with the aesthetic and cultural needs of the times. The dynamic nature of this symbolic system ensures that auspicious motifs are able to adapt to social changes and become cultural assets that can be passed on across historical cycles.

At the level of modern application, this study finds through the analysis of contemporary design cases that although traditional auspicious motifs have been widely used in the fields of modern product design, visual communication and public art, there is an overall tendency of formalization and superficiality. Many design works only stay in the visual reproduction or partial deformation of traditional patterns, lacking in-depth interpretation and creative transformation of the cultural meaning and symbolic logic behind the patterns. This phenomenon leads to the weakening of the cultural thickness of the traditional symbols in the contemporary context, the gradual loss of the true meaning of the symbols, and the tendency of "cultural hollowing out". This finding suggests that in the application of traditional auspicious patterns in modern design, it is

urgent to use the method of design semiotics to deeply explore the symbol structure and cultural connotation, so as to realize real innovation and reconstruction on the basis of maintaining cultural identity.

In the observation and analysis in the field of art education, the study found that the teaching of traditional auspicious patterns in the current art education system generally focuses on technique rather than culture, and imitation rather than understanding. Students are often able to skillfully copy the appearance of traditional patterns, but lack an in-depth grasp of their symbolism, cultural background and symbolic mechanisms, resulting in a limited ability to innovate. By introducing semiotic theories and cultural research methods, students' understanding of the traditional auspicious symbol system can be effectively enhanced, and their cultural sensitivity and creative expression ability can be strengthened. This not only helps the living inheritance of traditional culture, but also provides theoretical and methodological support for the cultivation of new era design talents with cultural depth and international vision.

In summary, this study reveals the multidimensional characteristics of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs as a visual symbol system at the theoretical level, and points out the opportunities and challenges of applying traditional auspicious motifs in modern design and art education at the practical level. These findings provide an important reference for the innovative transformation and continuous dissemination of traditional cultural symbols in contemporary society, and also expand new space for the application of design semiotics in cross-cultural design research.

VI. DISCUSSION

Based on the theoretical foundation of design semiotics, this study analyzes the symbolic features, cultural significance and modern application of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs, and the findings not only confirm the basic understanding of the previous scholars on the historical evolution and cultural functions of auspicious motifs, but also put forward new observations and reflections on the symbolic structure, the systematization of the visual language, and the paths of modern transformations, which are of certain significance for both theoretical and practical enlightenment.

Regarding the visual form and symbolic evolution of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs, the findings of this study echo the basic lineage of scholars such as Zhang Zhiheng (2005) and Sun Ji (2010) on the historical development of auspicious motifs. On the basis of previous studies, which have emphasized the continuous enrichment of auspicious motifs as cultural representations in response to social changes, this study further points out that auspicious motifs in Qing dynasty ceramics are not only the result of the richness of the subject matter and the diversity of the styles, but also the product of the continuous specification and reconstruction through the rules of symbols. Through semiotic interpretation, it can be clearly seen that there is a systematic visual coding and meaning generation mechanism behind these patterns, and this

discovery provides a new perspective for understanding the internal logic of auspicious patterns.

Regarding the socio-cultural functions of auspicious motifs, this study reveals the differences in the use of auspicious symbols between court and folk porcelains, a finding that creates an effective dialog with the discourses of scholars such as Ye Chemin (1986) and Wang Xufeng (2001) on the social structure and aesthetic stratification of the Qing dynasty. The choice and interpretation of auspicious motifs by different strata not only reflect differences in aesthetic interests, but also, at a deeper level, differences in power relations, social expectations and spiritual needs. Through the analysis of specific pattern cases, this study further reveals the positive role of auspicious patterns in maintaining social order and shaping cultural identity, expanding the socio-cultural dimension of auspicious pattern research.

Regarding the modern application of auspicious motifs, this study finds that traditional symbols are often reduced to formalized decorative elements in contemporary design practice, and the cultural connotation and meaning-generating mechanism behind the symbols are ignored. This phenomenon confirms Li Yanzu's (2018) concern about the risk of "superficialization" of traditional culture in the context of globalization, and suggests that the design community should strengthen its understanding of the symbolic nature of traditional elements and its ability to transform them innovatively when applying them. This study proposes that the visual language and cultural logic of traditional motifs should be analyzed by means of design semiotics, and that their revitalization and innovation in new social contexts should be promoted under the premise of respecting the spirit of the original culture. This discussion provides theoretical support and methodological reference for the sustainable application of traditional cultural symbols in modern design.

Regarding the discussion on art education, this study points out the problem of overemphasizing formal techniques and neglecting cultural understanding in the current teaching system. This view is consistent with Wang Hongjian's (2015) claim that "art education should be integrated into the construction of cultural identity," but this study further emphasizes the importance of semiotic methods in art education. By guiding students to understand the cultural meaning and historical context behind the symbols, not only can they enhance their innovative design ability, but also deepen their sense of identity and responsibility towards their own cultural traditions, laying the foundation for future cultural innovation.

Overall, this study analyzes the symbol system, cultural function and contemporary expression path of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs systematically through the theoretical perspective of design semiotics, which to a certain extent makes up for the insufficiency of the systematic exploration of the symbol structure in the existing studies. However, there are some limitations in this study, such as the lack of detailed examination of regional differences and time variations, and the need to further expand the empirical research on the application of modern design. Future research can further deepen the cross-cultural comparison, user acceptance survey, and the construction of

symbolic innovation mechanism, in order to establish a closer connection between theory and practice.

VII. CONCLUSION

Based on the theoretical foundation of design semiotics and focusing on the symbolic features, cultural connotation and modern application of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs, this study systematically comprehends the visual features, evolutionary lineage and the deep cultural significance of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs and explores their regeneration and innovation paths in contemporary design and art education by means of literature analysis, case studies and symbolic structure analysis. The study mainly draws the following conclusions:

First of all, Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs are the product of continuous enrichment and systematization based on the long tradition of auspicious culture, combined with the specific historical background and social psychology of the Qing Dynasty. The patterns are not only diversified in form and rich in subject matter, but also highly standardized in symbolic structure and complex in symbolic association. Through the combination of different elements such as animals, plants, artifacts and words, the auspicious motifs constructed a visual symbol system with multiple levels and meanings, reflecting the common pursuit of the Qing society for the ideals of auspiciousness, wealth and longevity.

Secondly, as a kind of cultural symbols, auspicious patterns of the Qing Dynasty showed a differentiated development direction in different contexts of the court and the folk. Auspicious motifs in court porcelain emphasize dignity, power and providence, and are rigorous, refined and symbolic, while folk porcelain embodies more of the beautiful expectations of a happy life, family harmony and wealth and well-being. The understanding and application of auspicious motifs by different classes reflect the diversity of social values and the profound influence of class culture in the Qing Dynasty.

Again, through the theoretical perspective of design semiotics, this study points out that the meaning generation of auspicious motifs not only relies on the intuitive symbolism of a single image, but also encodes through a complex visual language system. The combinations of elements, compositional approaches and use of colors in Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs constitute a complete network of symbols, enabling the motifs to convey both aesthetic meaning and cultural value at different levels. This interpretation method based on the symbol system provides a new path to understand the deeper cultural logic of traditional patterns.

Finally, regarding the application of auspicious motifs in modern design and art education, this study proposes that there is a general tendency of formalization and superficialization in the application of traditional symbols, and there is an urgent need to deeply excavate the cultural semantics of them by means of semiotics, and to carry out creative transformation and contemporary expression based on respecting the spirit of tradition. Only by truly understanding the cultural connotations and meaning mechanisms behind auspicious motifs can we realize the

effective inheritance and innovative development of traditional culture in modern society.

Overall, this study not only enriches the semiotic perspective of Qing Dynasty ceramic auspicious motifs, but also provides a theoretical basis and practical reference for the application of traditional cultural symbols in modern design and education. Future research can further combine interdisciplinary approaches to further explore the cultural reproduction and innovative expression of auspicious motifs in the context of globalization, in order to promote the contemporary dissemination and international exchange of traditional Chinese culture.

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