

Research on Modern Translation of Traditional Cultural Symbols in Visual Communication

Yongdan Zhou

Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou 571126, China

Abstract

In the dual context of globalization and digitalization, the modern translation of traditional cultural symbols has become a core issue in the field of visual communication design, connecting history and the future, and bridging the local and the world. This study systematically explores the underlying motivations, basic principles, specific strategies, and innovative practices of this translational process. The study finds that its motivation is not only due to the inherent needs of cultural inheritance and innovation, but also driven by the era of building a Chinese-style modern narrative system and reshaping cultural global identity. In the process of translation, core principles such as cultural gene identification and extraction, modern aesthetic adaptation, and cross-media communication efficiency should be followed. This study proposes and demonstrates systematic design strategies from morphological structure purification, color system transcoding, narrative logic reconstruction to multi-sensory experience integration. This paper deeply analyzes the latest cases such as the image system of the 2025 World Intelligent Industry Expo (Intelligent Industry Expo), and reveals how cutting-edge digital technology activates the spiritual core of traditional culture and realizes its profound transformation from "visual reproduction" to "value regeneration". The final study shows that successful modern translation is not a simple form of grafting, but a creative design language that makes traditional cultural symbols glow with new vitality in the contemporary social context and global perspective, providing theoretical support and practical path for the construction of a modern visual communication system with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords

Traditional cultural symbols; Modernized translation; Visual communication; Design strategy.

1. Introduction

In the third decade of the 21st century, the environment of visual communication design is undergoing profound changes. The cultural integration brought about by globalization and the media revolution triggered by digital technology have jointly placed the modern fate of traditional cultural symbols at a tense and dynamic crossroads. On the one hand, marked by the rise of "national tide", the market and public demand for local cultural elements is increasing day by day; On the other hand, simple retro or symbol stacking can no longer meet the aesthetic expectations and emotional appeals of contemporary people, especially the younger generation. As the crystallization of national collective memory and aesthetic wisdom, the inheritance and development of traditional cultural symbols are facing a critical transition from "protective survival" to "creative transformation". This process, namely "modern translation", is far from simple graphic borrowing or style imitation, but refers to the deconstruction, refinement, reorganization and reinterpretation of traditional symbols by using modern design thinking, technical means and communication logic on the basis of a deep understanding of the core of traditional culture, so that they not only retain identifiable cultural genes, but also seamlessly

integrate into contemporary life scenes and global dialogue systems. The purpose of this study is to systematically sort out the socio-cultural motivations behind this translational behavior, refine its guiding design principles, and construct a system of innovative strategies from theory to practice. By focusing on the latest design cases in 2025, this paper will reveal how traditional cultural symbols transform from static heritage to dynamic resources in the context of cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence and mixed reality (MR), so as to provide forward-looking thinking and practical solutions for visual communication design to shoulder the dual missions of cultural inheritance and innovation in the new era.

2. Motivation and Principles of Modern Translation of Traditional Cultural Symbols

Traditional cultural symbols have moved from dusty historical scrolls to the forefront of modern visual communication, which is intertwined with multi-level driving forces and derived from the basic principles guiding their creative transformation practice.

(1) Core motivation of modern translation

The motivation to promote the modern translation of traditional cultural symbols is complex and profound. The primary motivation stems from the inherent law of cultural inheritance and innovation. Any living culture must resonate with the pulse of the times if it is to avoid becoming a specimen in a museum. The success of programs such as "China in Classics" and "Legend of Silk Books" launched by China Central Radio and Television General Station and other institutions lies in the fact that they do not stop at the cultic presentation of classics, but transform ancient wisdom into perceptible and empathic stories through modern narrative strategies such as "cultural interview + drama + film and television", thus realizing the "visual rebirth" of traditional culture. This "rebirth" is essentially a vivid practice of the concept of "two innovations" (creative transformation and innovative development) of culture, aiming to activate the contemporary value of traditional context and make it an important source of modern spiritual civilization.

Secondly, national strategy and social ideology constitute a strong external driving force. Building a Chinese-style modern discourse and narrative system requires a deep cultural foundation as a support. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasized the combination of the basic principles of Marxism with the excellent traditional Chinese culture, which pointed out the direction for the design field: visual communication is not only the creation of form, but also the modern writing of Chinese stories and Chinese spirit. At the same time, the rise of "national trend" fashion at the social level reflects the strong demand of the younger generation for products with both national identity and fashion taste in the context of increasing cultural self-confidence. This has prompted brands and designers to go beyond the simple printing of traditional patterns and turn to the deep extraction and modern reconstruction of their spiritual core.

Finally, technological evolution and global dialogue are unavoidable realities. The popularization of digital media has completely changed the way of information generation and dissemination. If traditional symbols stick to their original forms, they will lose their competitiveness in the rapidly iterative visual environment. Therefore, the need for translation becomes particularly prominent. On the other hand, in the arena of globalization, the effectiveness of cultural communication depends on "commensurability". This requires that the translation should not be a self-admiring cultural monologue, but should follow the principle of "harmonious translation" - while adhering to the subjectivity of Chinese culture, it should seek cognitive and emotional resonance with global audiences, and transform local concepts into world-understandable discourse forms through multi-modal collaborative narrative.

(2) Basic principles of modern translation

Guided by clear motivators, successful modern translation follows a set of core principles to ensure that the transformation process stays true to its cultural roots and remains modern. First, the principle of gene identification and deep extraction. This is the cornerstone of translation. Traditional cultural symbols are not scattered decorations, but a set of symbol systems containing order, concepts and emotions. Drawing on the theory of cultural genes, designers need to deconstruct traditional symbols like genetic sequencing, and distinguish their "dominant genes" (such as visual elements such as shape, color, composition) from "recessive genes" (such as spiritual connotation, historical context, allegorical symbol, etc.). For example, the translation of the Yuanmingyuan culture should not only extract its architectural contours or painting colors, but also interpret the royal philosophy and cultural ideals carried by "upright and bright" and "ru ancient and modern" in its scenic theme. Only deep-core extraction can ensure that the subsequent design does not flow to the surface.

Second, the principle of contemporary aesthetics and context adaptation. The extracted genes need to be grown in new age soils. This means that it must be reconstructed in accordance with the aesthetic laws and communication context of modern design. This includes simplification and geometric treatment of form (such as refining complex Miao embroidery patterns into concise rhythmic lines), systematic transcoding of color (transforming the perceptual color that relies on materials in traditional craftsmanship into a standard color value system that can be stably reproduced in digital media), and transformation of narrative perspective. For example, traditional narrative images are often used to represent fixed mythological or folkloric scenes, while in modern poster or UI design, their core action or symbolic elements may need to be abstracted and transformed into a more open and interactive visual language.

Third, the principle of cross-media and systematic extension. In modern visual communication, a cultural symbol may need to travel through print, screen interfaces, dynamic video, physical space, and even mixed reality. Therefore, its cross-media adaptability and systematic extensibility must be considered at the beginning of translation. The design output shall be "variable" to adapt to the needs of different platforms, sizes and scenarios, while maintaining a unified style and coherent cultural temperament in multi-dimensional applications. This requires a shift from the design of a single symbol to the construction of a complete vision system that includes basic units, compositional specifications, and dynamic rules.

3. Design Strategies and Methods for The Modern Translation of Traditional Cultural Symbols

Based on the above principles, designers have developed a set of systematic and operational modern translation strategies and methods in practice. This methodological chain covers the whole process from symbolic deconstruction to final experience generation.

(1) Morphological structure purification and modular reconstruction

In the face of complex traditional patterns and shapes, the first strategy is to purify the shape. This is not a simple simplification, but a capture and stripping away of its most essential structural logic and sense of order. For example, the value of the clothoid of Miao embroidery in intangible cultural heritage techniques or the knife lines of woodcut New Year pictures lies in the long-term settlement of line direction, rhythm and composition. Designers can "raise" it from the original carrier and disassemble it into clear and regular directional sequences or geometric units to form a structural sketch that can be processed digitally. Subsequently, it enters the modular reconstruction phase. Using vector design software, these basic units are regarded as "cultural building blocks" to generate new compositions that adapt to different layouts (such as icons, borders, shading) through digital operations such as rotation, stitching, mirroring, and arrays. This strategy ensures stable replication of cultural genes and endows them with infinite combinatorial possibilities to adapt to modern media. In higher-order

practice, parametric design and artificial intelligence algorithms are introduced to enable traditional patterns to "grow" dynamic and non-repetitive visual patterns according to set rules, completely breaking the limitations of static presentation of traditional patterns.

(2) Transcoding and digital application of color system

The charm of traditional colors is often closely linked to specific materials (such as mineral pigments and vegetable dyes) and processes, and their cultural symbolism is deep. The key to modern translation is to translate this perceptual, medium-dependent color experience into a color system that can be accurately transmitted in the digital world and remains relatively consistent across different outputs. This requires a scientific "transcoding" process: first, finely sample and measure representative colors, determine their numerical characteristics of hue, brightness and saturation in a standard environment, and anchor them in international standard color systems such as RGB, CMYK and Pantone. Next, it is necessary to establish a logical level of color application, and clarify the relationship between the main color, auxiliary color and embellishment color and the use context. For example, the upgrade of the mascot of the 2025 Smart Expo established the main color of "cosmic blue + mountain city gold", and carefully designed the gradient logic from silver to blue and from green to gold, which not only conveys the future sense of science and technology, but also contains regional cultural characteristics. Ultimately, these efforts should be consolidated into a "Handbook of Digital Applications of Traditional Color" that will serve as a consistent basis for guiding design across media.

(3) Narrative logic detachment and multi-sensory immersion reconstruction

Many traditional cultural symbols carry rich narrative content, such as New Year pictures, shadow puppets, and story scenes in murals. The modern strategy is not to retell the whole story, but to "extract" its most powerful narrative core—a signature action, a central scene, or a key symbol—and transform it into highly concise visual symbols. For example, the silhouette of a shadow puppet figure stepping sideways is itself a highly tensile narrative fulcrum. This symbol can be simplified and geometrified, and then applied to posters, guideways or dynamic signs to evoke the audience's association with the cultural story behind it.

As technology evolves, the dimension of translation is expanding from visual to full-sensory. Recent practices are beginning to leverage technologies such as mixed reality (MR) and haptic feedback to create immersive cultural experiences. For example, the "MR + tactile full-sensory interaction scene" unveiled at the 2025 Service Trade Fair allows viewers to not only "see" virtual cultural scenes, but also "touch" the texture of virtual cultural relics through flexible tactile gloves and hear environmental sound effects. This kind of translation at the level of "somatosensory participation" enables the millennium context to "live" in an interactive and perceptible way in the digital age, and realizes the experience upgrade from "far-viewing" to "integration", representing one of the future directions of modern translation of traditional culture.

4. Case Analysis and Practice Review: Image System Upgrade of 2025 World Intelligent Industry Expo

The value of theory lies in observing practice. The image system upgrade project of the World Intelligent Industry Expo (Smart Expo) held in Chongqing in 2025 is a highly representative cutting-edge case, which embodies the innovative path of modern translation of traditional cultural symbols in the context of high-end science and technology.

The project is presided over by a team of teachers and students from Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, and the core task is to re-design the mascots of the conference "Zhi Cub" and "Huilele". Its design positioning - "intelligent technology, future fashion, smart and colorful, friendly and close to the people" - itself implies the integration requirements of tradition and modernity,

technology and humanities. The success of the team lies first in the symbolization and contemporary translation of "wisdom", the core concept of traditional Chinese culture. Instead of using direct symbols such as traditional dragon patterns and scrolls, they went deep into the recessive genetic layer of "wisdom" and conceptually integrated it with contemporary technological imagery. In the end, wisdom is translated into a visual system of "light": the combination of straight lines, curves and polylines simulates the ups and downs of Chongqing's mountain roads and metaphors the exploration path of scientific and technological development; Radial lines and light clusters, drawing on the form of cosmic rays, symbolize the infinite prospects of the intelligent industry. This transforms an abstract spiritual concept into a visual symbol with modernity and dynamic tension.

Secondly, in the detailed translation of the mascot styling, the team showed superb fusion skills. They infused the mascot with a "liquid metal" texture, added fluorescent lines simulating circuit light tracks at the hand and foot joints, upgraded the hands to segmented movable metal knuckles, and changed the feet to multi-functional mechanical feet. All of these designs are full of futuristic technology. However, the underlying logic of its color system is rooted in cultural geography: the main color combination of "cosmic blue" and "mountain city gold" and the carefully designed gradient rhythm subtly connect the regional cultural identity (mountain city Chongqing) with the grand cosmology, giving the tech IP a warm cultural background. This translation is not a physical splicing of "traditional culture" and "modern technology", but a chemical reaction at the level of mental images.

Finally, the project implements the principle of systematic extension and popular connection. The upgraded visual symbols are widely used at all levels, from robot clothing to series of cultural and creative products. The team also organizes flash mob activities to bring cultural and creative products to public spaces such as science and technology museums, museums, and city squares. This initiative is crucial. It breaks the professional barriers of science and technology events, allows science and technology aesthetics based on traditional culture to enter daily life, and completes the final closed loop of cultural translation from "design work" to "social landscape", from "industry narrative" to "public emotional connection". This case eloquently proves that in the era of artificial intelligence, the modern translation of traditional cultural symbols is not only possible, but can become a key force in shaping future visions and enhancing design character.

5. Conclusion

The modern translation of traditional cultural symbols in visual communication is a systematic project related to the continuity of cultural blood and the shaping of the spirit of the times. Through a layered analysis of its motivations, principles, strategies and recent practices, this study reveals the essence of this process: it is a creative dialogue based on deep cultural consciousness, between deep historical traditions and vivid contemporary realities, with the goal of generating a new visual language that can both carry cultural DNA and respond to the propositions of the times.

The study shows that successful translation is by no means accidental. It is based on the accurate identification and extraction of cultural genes, follows the scientific principles of aesthetic adaptation and systematic extension, and relies on a diversified strategic toolbox from morphological purification, color transcoding to narrative reconstruction and sensory fusion. Cases such as the 2025 Smart Expo show that cutting-edge digital technology is not only not the enemy of traditional culture, but also provides an unprecedented broad stage for its "active" inheritance and "value-added" dissemination. AI generation, MR interaction and other means are helping traditional cultural symbols to break through the stereotype of static and one-way

communication and evolve into growable, interactive and immersive experiences, thus winning new vitality among the younger generation.

Looking forward to the future, the modern translation of traditional cultural symbols will be more diversified and in-depth. It requires designers and researchers not only to be form carriers, but also to be cultural interpreters, perceivers of the times and drivers of technology. In the global cultural landscape, this self-centered and inclusive translation practice is a vivid manifestation of building a design discourse system with Chinese characteristics and promoting civilized exchanges and mutual learning. In the end, the millennium-spanning cultural symbols are revived in contemporary design, not only to remember where we came from, but also to illuminate where we are going, and to contribute a solid and bright force to the construction of modern civilization of the Chinese nation in the visual dimension.

References

- [1] Zhang, X. W. (2025). Research on the visual translation of traditional cultural symbols in cultural and creative products. *Comparative Research on Cultural Innovation*, 9(33), 89–93.
- [2] Zhou, W. (2025). Modern interpretation of traditional cultural symbols in interior decoration design. *Footwear Craft and Design*, 5(16), 90–92.
- [3] Geng, J., Yu, S. Y., & Zhang, T. Y. (2025). Analysis of the integration of visual communication art and traditional culture from the perspective of new media. *East China Paper*, 55(8), 99–101.
- [4] Li, K. X. (2025). Translation and digital reconstruction of traditional cultural symbols in modern visual communication design. *Art Grand View*, (20), 31–33.
- [5] Zhou, Q. M., & Xie, J. F. (2025). Research on the application of traditional cultural symbols in contemporary interior design. *Times Report (Running Flow)*, (6), 132–134.
- [6] Zhang, L. (2025). Application of traditional cultural symbols in the visual image design of Shangdu historical and cultural district. *Daguan*, (6), 33–35.
- [7] Dong, W. T. (2025). *Research on digital jewelry design based on traditional Chinese cultural symbols* [Master's thesis]. Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts.