
Translation of Bangkok Chinatown Cultural Symbols in Applied Art Creation

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Abstract: Bangkok Chinatown can be considered one of the most recognizable Chinese communities of Southeast Asia where centuries of cultural interaction between Chinese and Thai communities have collected a historical value, functioning as a vessel of co-existence between ethnic and local cultures. The features like Chinese-style gateways, traditional Chinese character signage, Chaozhou-style arcades, auspicious designs, and temple incense offerings do not merely record the genealogy of traditional Chinese culture, but also reflect the aesthetics of Thai architecture and the diversity of human existence, creating an original and lively cultural symbol system. Such a system is a valuable reservoir of resources to design art creation and a way of understanding the cross-penetration and fusion of the multicultural components. In this paper, I will begin with the definition and meaning of cultural symbols in Bangkok Chinatown followed by the analysis of how they influence the world of art and lastly what are the outlooks regarding the transformation of these cultural symbols in the field of applied art creation.

Keywords: Bangkok Chinatown; cultural symbols; applied arts; translation

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1. Introduction

Under the background of the integration of world culture and the innovative development of culture, the modern interpretation of traditional symbols is an important issue to be solved in the development of applied art. The cultural symbols of Bangkok Chinatown are both exotic and have a sense of national identity. Its diversity just meets the needs of the current cross-border integration of art and cultural inheritance. Applying it to applied arts such as graphic design, product cultural creation and space installation can not only activate the stock of our traditional culture, break the barriers between traditional symbols and modern aesthetics, but also spread the essence of Sino-Thai cultural exchanges in an artistic form, inject new vitality and vigor into traditional culture, and enhance the influence and communication of traditional culture, which has a strong knowledge and operability.

2. Main Types and Connotations of Cultural Symbols in Bangkok Chinatown

2.1. Architectural Space Symbol: Dwelling Mark

The architectural space symbol of Bangkok Chinatown is an intuitive reflection of the integration of diverse cultures,

mainly including Chaoshan arcade, Chinese style memorial archway, temples and alleys with the combination of Golden Buddha Temple and Thai style eaves, etc. In the early years, the Chinese living in Southeast Asia continued the form of arcades in the Lingnan region, which had the functions of sunshade, rain proof and commodity sales. Later, they added Thai style carvings, glazed tiles, minarets and so on, forming a unique architectural landscape. The Chinese couplets and gilded characters on the memorial archway are the sustenance of the homesickness of the Chinese clan, and the street texture is the memory of the hundreds of years of Chinese business and trade activities^[1]. These symbols are not only the physical space in people's lives, but also the material evidence for the overseas settlement, cultural integration and inheritance of Chinese. They contain the cultural spirit of mutual tolerance and coexistence of Chinese and Thai cultures at a deep level, and also reflect the sense of ethnic identity and regional cultural characteristics.

2.2. Visual Symbols: Cultural Ties

Chinese character signs are the most representative symbols of Bangkok Chinatown. They are mainly in the form of traditional Chinese characters, Cantonese homophonic characters, and Chinese English Thai composite plaques. Traditional Chinese characters can be seen in corner shops, temple plaques, and new year goods markets. They maintain the traditional writing style of the Chinese nation, represent the inheritance of Chinese family culture and the language feelings of the hometown. Some signs skillfully integrate Thai letters and Chinese character calligraphy to meet the dual needs of the local people and the Chinese ethnic group, and achieve the localization of culture; The homophonic auspicious characters (FA, Xing, long, etc.) appear repeatedly on different text carriers, containing the wishes of Chinese people to do business and prosper. The text marks across the language barrier, which is not only homesick, but also an important bridge for economic, trade and cultural exchanges between China and Thailand, recording the continuous process of Chinese living abroad.

2.3. Folk Belief Symbol: Spiritual Carrier

Folk belief symbols are the soul of the superstructure of Bangkok Chinatown, integrating traditional Chinese folk beliefs with Thai Buddhist culture, including dragon and lion totems, statues of fortune, longevity, Avalokitesvara, lotus patterns, incense tables, etc. The Chinese immigrants brought the local deity beliefs of Mazu, Guangong and Chaoshan to Thailand, and blended with the local Thai Buddhist culture. In the temples, we can often see the coexistence of Chinese gods and Buddha statues, and the patterns of dragons and lions will be matched with Thai lotus, golden rooster, etc. During the Spring Festival, Water Lantern Festival and other festivals, folk celebrations such as incense and fire sacrifice, dragon and lion dance will be held, which retains the Chinese custom of worshipping ancestors and praying for blessings and auspiciousness, and is also in line with the local festival customs of Thailand^[2]. These symbols represent the emotional sustenance of the Chinese, alleviate the loneliness of the foreign land, and show the mutual integration and mutual growth of Chinese and Thai belief cultures, enhancing the cohesion of the community.

2.4. Symbols of Market Scenery: Life Map

The symbols of market scenery are rooted in the life atmosphere of ordinary people in Chinatown, including Chinese snacks, fish sauce seasoning, Chaozhou tea sets, red lanterns, Spring Festival couplets, Fu characters, old bronze pots and so on, which are all portraits of the Chinese way of life. The red lanterns and the Spring Festival couplets carrying the Chinese tradition of praying for blessings during the Spring Festival have become the landmark decoration of the block here. Chaoshan Kung Fu tea and Chinese snacks maintain the Chinese food culture, and combine with Thai spices and ingredients to form a unique taste. All kinds of retro gadgets and handicrafts also reproduce the appearance of Chinese traders in Chinatown more than 100 years ago. They break away from the sense of estrangement of traditional culture and enter people's lives in a grounded manner. They are not only the habits of Chinese life and the memory of taste buds, but also the elements of Thai life, forming a mixed and matched picture of daily life in Chinatown. It shows the vigorous vitality of Chinatown.

3. The role of Bangkok Chinatown Cultural Symbols in Applied Art Creation

3.1. Establish Cultural Roots and Realize Living Inheritance

The cultural symbol of Bangkok Chinatown is an intuitive representation of the integration of Chinese and Thai culture. It plays a leading role in the revival of intangible cultural heritage and cultural inheritance in the use of artistic creation. Whether it is Chinese architectural texture, folk totem, text symbols or market landscape, the cultural symbols scattered in the block are integrated into graphic design, cultural creativity, space display and other forms of art works through artistic transformation, and are no longer limited to the specific space background, becoming an artistic expression that can be viewed and transmitted. The creation process of the works not only reshapes the nostalgic complex and group beliefs of the Chinese community, but also protects the historical witness of the integration of Chinese and Thai cultures, so that some traditional elements that are on the verge of being lost, the meaning and connotation of clothing patterns, and the ethnic spirit can be continued, so that the overseas Chinese culture will not become a rigid mummy, providing a long-term preservation art carrier for minority regional culture, and consolidating the foundation for the inheritance between different cultures.

3.2. Breaking Aesthetic Barriers and Shaping Differentiated Art

In the design application field with serious homogenization, the cultural symbol of Bangkok Chinatown in Thailand has become a unique entry point to highlight its differences with the unique characteristics of Sino-Thai mix and match. It has the thick beauty of Chinese traditional culture and the elegant feeling of Thai exotic customs. It is neither pure Chinese style nor pure Thai tradition, and can effectively break through the aesthetic stereotype. The designer refines the color, shape and texture characteristics of the symbol, reorganizes the visual language that meets the requirements of modern aesthetics, and makes its cultural and creative products, packaging, space design, etc. have their own local characteristics and humanistic feelings^[3]. This unique aesthetic tension can not only satisfy the curiosity of the public, but also arouse the emotional resonance of the Chinese community, enhance the attractiveness of the art market and brand memory, and enrich the scope of applied art creation.

3.3. Build a Communication Bridge to Promote Cross-cultural Exchanges

The cultural symbol of Bangkok Chinatown is the artistic carrier of cultural coexistence. When applied to artistic creation, it is a link to promote the spiritual integration of the people of the two countries and even the people of the world. It is responsible for the dissemination of culture and values. The cultural symbol products processed by artistic transformation have abandoned the rigid cultural propaganda, and used the subtle way to spread the basic spiritual core of the Chinese people to help each other, live in harmony, and pray for good. Whether it is cultural creation, public art or exhibition design, such works of art can not only enable the local people in Thailand to appreciate the cultural heritage of Chinese people and narrow the distance between nations, but also enable people around the world to understand the long history of Sino-Thai cultural exchanges and feel the significance of mutual respect and harmonious coexistence of different civilizations. At the same time, the artistic presentation reduces the threshold of cross-cultural communication, makes the regional minority culture onto a larger stage, and realizes the mutual promotion of culture and art.

4. Translation Suggestions of Bangkok Chinatown Cultural Symbols in Applied Art Creation

4.1. Deconstruct the Traditional Symbol Form and Embody the Minimalist Aesthetics

Most of the cultural symbols of Bangkok Chinatown are based on cumbersome traditional patterns, old-fashioned shapes, and heavy cultural heritage. Direct reproduction will appear too traditional and cannot be integrated into the application environment of modern society; The core of reinterpretation is to get rid of its complicated parts and extract the spiritual

core. For various cultural symbols such as Chinese style memorial archways, arcade carvings, dragon and lion totems, plaque calligraphy and so on, after removing the redundant parts, the visual features such as contour lines, geometric structures and main lines are extracted and recreated in a concise, generalized and geometric form. For example, the pillars of the arcade and the upturns of the archway are refined into simple curves, the dragon and lion patterns are decomposed into geometric modular graphics, and the complex Traditional Chinese characters are transformed into simple modern fonts. While paying attention to symbolism, it is also necessary to meet the requirements of fashion trends. When translating, the cultural core of symbols should be preserved to prevent faults caused by excessive splitting^[4]. In addition, conversion and application should be carried out for graphic design, cultural and creative products, digital media and other occasions, so that the traditional symbols can break through the rigid label bondage, cater to the current younger and simpler aesthetic trend, achieve the perfect collision between ancient culture and modern minimalist aesthetic style, and enhance the universality and dissemination of the overall works. It can also integrate some modern design concepts such as blank space and superposition, weaken the heavy texture of the symbol and increase its vivid image, so that the traditional symbol can have both cultural heritage and a sense of fashion in the application scene of the new era, and resolve the contradiction between traditional symbols and modern aesthetics.

4.2. Integrate Sino-Thai Color System to Create Visual Tension

Color is the emotional sustenance of cultural symbols. In the process of translating cultural symbols in Bangkok Chinatown, we should fully integrate the traditional Chinese color system and the local color of Thailand to form a visual recognition system with both differences and resonance. Chinese traditional colors are mainly vermilion in red series, gilding in gold series, ink black in black series, and yellow in yellow series, representing festivity, auspiciousness and solemnity, which are in line with the color characteristics of Chinatown Spring Festival couplets, lanterns, and temples; The colors of Thailand are bright orange, turquoise, sapphire blue and brown, with strong tropical flavor and religious atmosphere. The two seem contradictory but cooperate with each other. In the process of translation, we should avoid the accumulation of monotonous colors, adhere to the concept of coordinated proportion, use the traditional Chinese color system as the background, and add the bright colors of Thailand to set off, so as to achieve a clever combination between calm and lively. For example, in the development of cultural and creative products, red is the basic tone, and Thai green is used as decoration pattern. In terms of the design of space devices, gold and silver are combined with blue to create an environmental atmosphere, taking into account the dual emotional experience of Chinese culture and Thai local aesthetics. On this basis, the color saturation is adjusted. Commercial cultural and creative enterprises can use bright colors with high saturation to increase the value of interest, and public art can use colors with low saturation to increase the sense of sophistication and art. In addition, attention should also be paid to the cultural meaning it represents, so as to prevent it from violating the taboos of China and Thailand. On the premise of reasonable color conversion, the logo has a deeper meaning, overcome the aesthetic barriers in different regions, catch the attention of the Chinese community and local people at the same time, and improve the effect of cross-cultural transmission.

4.3. Anchor Multiple Application Scenarios to Achieve Accurate Landing

The art of design and application involves many aspects, such as cultural and creative products, graphic design, space devices, digital media, clothing and soft clothing, and so on. There are different requirements for the transformation of cultural symbols in different application scenarios. It is necessary to match them according to the actual situation and scene to avoid the excessive use of symbols. For cultural and creative derivatives, such as key chains, bookmarks, gift boxes, ornaments, etc., they are transformed into small and beautiful, dexterous and practical, refining miniature graphics, paying attention to the characteristics of beauty and portability, and implanting them into daily life scenes to make cultural symbols within reach; For graphic design, such as posters, packaging, brochures and other forms, they are transformed into visual shock, highlighting the uniqueness and symbolic characteristics of culture and giving concise and powerful text description to enhance the recognition, which is very suitable for commercial publicity or cultural communication; For the

art of public places, such as street view installations, exhibition hall design, landscape sketches, etc., translation focuses on large-scale and participation. Reshape the symbol form based on the spatial layout, create an immersive experience environment, and reflect the characteristics of local cultural symbols. Digital media, such as animation posters, short film vision, animation images, etc., pay more attention to flexibility and novelty in translation, add dynamic elements of symbols, and create a unique cultural IP, which is suitable for the communication environment in the new media era. Before translation, the audience of application scenarios should be fully understood. Young people tend to be interesting and trendy, cultural landmarks tend to be atmosphere and immersion, and cultural exhibitions tend to be serious and connotative^[5]. With the accurate translation of scenes, cultural symbols are no longer just used as decorative functions, making the combination of artistry and practicality, rejecting the stereotyped design, and improving the adaptability of products to scenes and the rate of commercial conversion.

4.4. Dig Deep into the Core of Cultural Spirit and Sublimate the Value of Translation

The reinterpretation of the cultural symbols of Bangkok Chinatown is not only a visual reproduction and a change in form, but also to explore the cultural connotation and national emotions, so as to transform from “form” to “spirit” from simple to profound, so that the works have a profound cultural heritage. These symbols are not only visual images, but also contain the nostalgic memory of Chinese people, the concept of harmonious coexistence of Chinese and Thai cultures, and the spiritual style of Chinese people who have gone through thousands of hardships to work abroad, as well as good wishes. When interpreting, we must see the essence through the phenomenon. For example, the design of folk belief symbols should not only reproduce the images of dragons and lions, wealth and longevity, but also convey the idea of exorcising evil spirits, accepting auspiciousness, and tolerance and symbiosis. The design of architectural design symbols should not only copy the image of arcades and memorial archways, but also reflect the overseas Chinese rooted in foreign countries and sticking to the backbone of Chinese culture. The translation process should integrate modern concepts, inject new connotation into the logo, and combine the logo with modern social themes such as openness and inclusiveness, cultural confidence, and cross-cultural exchanges while inheriting Chinese culture, so as to make it have a profound historical culture and strong flavor of the times. At the same time, it is also necessary to prevent the occurrence of the abuse of vulgarization and excessive commercialization of symbols, adhere to the principle of culture, maintain the original meaning of the logo, and tell the beautiful story of Sino-Thai friendship and national unity in the form of art, so that applied art is not only a tool of visual perception, but also a way of cultural and spiritual communication, so that the dissemination of applied art creation and applied art culture complement each other.

5. Summary

To sum up, the cultural symbol of Bangkok Chinatown is a precious wealth of cultural exchanges between China and Thailand. When it is applied to artistic creation, the transformation is one of the most representative traditional to modern transformation and the important embodiment of multicultural localization. Only by doing physical innovation, color resonance, scene fit and spiritual leap at the same time, can we break through the gap between the old and the present, between the local and the other, and give new vitality to the traditional culture while preserving the cultural gene. Excellent works can not only inherit the root of Chinese culture and promote cultural exchanges between the two countries, but also enhance the cultural connotation of Chinese applied art works, enrich the regional characteristics of works, and make the artistic value, cultural value and social value complement each other, so as to make this cross-cultural heritage shine in the years.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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