

## PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

### RESEARCH ON THE EXPRESSION DESIGN OF VISUAL SYMBOL IMAGE OF CHINESE AND THAI ZODIAC WORDS

*Zeyu Cao<sup>1</sup>, Jirawatvongphantuset<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1,2</sup> Faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, 10170, Thailand

Email: <sup>1</sup>275100996@qq.com

**Zeyu Cao, Jirawatvongphantuset: Research On The Expression Design Of Visual Symbol Image Of Chinese And Thai Zodiac Words -- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(9). ISSN 1567-214x**

**Keywords: Chinese and Thai Words, Zodiac, Image Design**

#### ABSTRACT

Based on the cultural characteristics and aesthetic connotation of the Chinese and Thai zodiac words, the design research of Chinese and Thai words are made from the perspective of image design and expression. By using methods such as documentary method, case analysis, comparative analysis, the author conducts theory with practice to make useful discussions, and puts forward his own ideas and opinions. At the same time, the paper looks forward to the spread of element symbols in Chinese and Tai traditional culture combining with modern design concepts.

#### 1. Introduction

Words, as linguistic symbols, record human history and are the sign of human civilization, carrying the spiritual pursuit and desire of mankind. Relying on the images and concepts of words, people perceive the world through vision and thinking. Excellent words and visual symbols contain rich information based on human visual experience and cultural accumulation. Through the image of words and visual symbols, it reveals people's inner thoughts and spiritual connotations, reflects value propositions and social attributes, leaves rich imaginary space for the audience, and achieves the integration of emotions and the exchange of information. However, with the progress of social civilization, it is no longer enough to rely solely on the semantic expression of words.

Controlled by modern creative thinking, it emphasizes more on the social communication function and cultural symbolic significance of words and visual symbols, which requires people to continuously create and explore, and to copy and spread literal messages through various means and carriers.

With the cultural exchanges and collisions between countries in the world, Chinese zodiac culture has gradually been spread to the other countries. In the process of spreading Chinese zodiac culture to foreign countries, some of them still retain their original meaning, while others have undergone various changes due to the differences in living environments and regional conditions. China is a nation of etiquette since ancient times and it mostly implemented moderately loose ethnic and national policies in its history. Except the frequent cultural exchanges between various ethnic groups in China, there are also cultural exchanges and absorptions between other countries and ethnic groups of China, among which the zodiac culture is one of the most important aspects. It has a profound impact on the Thai zodiac culture.

Compared to China, Thailand also has a saying about zodiac animals. But the difference is that China uses the lunar calendar, while Thailand uses the Thai calendar. In Thailand, they use the twelve zodiac animals to number a year, whose order is: snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog, pig, rat, cow, tiger, rabbit and dragon. In the traditional folk culture of Thailand, the zodiac culture is not just as simple as twelve animals, but has profound historical and cultural connotations. The zodiac contains twelve animals, but twelve animals may not form the zodiac culture. So that is why the zodiac culture can be carried forward in the whole world. With the spread of the zodiac culture outside the country, the Chinese zodiac is not only the cultural heritage of Chinese people, but also gradually become the common cultural wealth of the world.

## **2. The Design of the Visual Symbols of the Zodiac Words**

Wang Shouzhi, a well-known Chinese-American design theorist, also the professor at Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles, said: “The so-called design refers to the process of conveying a method of planning, imagination, and problem solving by vision.”

There are three aspects in his core contents. Firstly, it is the plan, which is the formation of ideas. Secondly, it is the way of visual communication, that is, to communicate plans, ideas, imagines, and problem-solving methods with visions. Thirdly, it is the specific application of the plan after being passed through the communication. The above core contents have been widely recognized by the design community. Therefore, the visual design of the Chinese zodiac should also follow these core contents. On the basis of learning from and using traditional elements, it should not only follow the characteristics of traditional elements, be familiar with and grasp their aesthetic connotations without applying mechanically, but also reflect the aesthetic needs of modern people. “As a creative activity of mankind, the fundamental purpose of design is to meet people's material and spiritual needs, and to

improve the quality and taste of their life. Therefore, design should no doubt be made in accordance with the laws of beauty.”

### 3. Design Procedure and the Pattern of manifestation

Before designing the visual image of the Chinese zodiac, it is necessary to conceive the design procedure. Generally speaking, the conceiving set, a mental activity before the materialization of the image, is the process of transforming the nature in the eyes into the nature in the mind, and is also the process of gradually clarifying the image in the mind. By comparing and analyzing various objective conditions, it chooses the pattern of manifestation according to the requirements of the subject, which can make the form better reflect the theme, achieve the purpose of the design, and lay the foundation for the development of derivative products.

*Table 1: Comparison table of Chinese and Thai zodiac words*

Chinese	Rat	Cattle	Tiger	Rabbit	Dragon	Snake	Horse	Sheep	Monkey	Chicken	Dog	Pig
Thai	☐ ☐ ☐	☐☐ จ	☐ ☐ ☐ อ	☐☐ ☐☐ ☐☐ ย	☐☐ ☐☐ ☐☐	☐☐ ☐☐ ☐☐	☐ ☐ จ	๒ พ ๕	จ จ ๒ ๕	☐ ☐ ☐ ๒	☐☐ ๒ ๒	☐ ☐ ก ๕

#### (1) Establishment of thinking mode

The purpose of establishing the thinking mode is to broaden the scope of mind and vision, which runs through all stages of the design. The deduction of thinking is an effective way to cultivate and train creativity. In the design of the visual image of the Chinese zodiac, different methods are used to make flexible combination by learning from the traditional elements and taking the modern composition as he perspective, so as to promote the formation of new expression concepts. Here, perceptual materials can become unique visual images in the process of rational analysis, and rational concepts and abstract word meanings can also be used to deduce related visual images through the replacement of perceptual elements.

As a visual image design of the Chinese zodiac, it is a product of the combination of "art production" and special spiritual production, a re-creation process that conforms to the regularity of design, and a symbol that has accumulated certain historical culture and human aesthetic consciousness .

#### (2) Entry Point of thinking

It is inseparable from methods such as association, metaphor, and symbolism used in traditional zodiac design. The natural objects in the objective world all have the relationships between time and space, shape and meaning, difference and similarity, which are the key entry points that the designer needs to seize. By using the relationship between time and space, it can make viewers to associate with the past, using anecdotes of the past to allude to the present. By using the relationship between form and meaning, it can extract the characteristics of words to achieve the transformation between form and meaning. By using the relationship between difference and similarity, it can

reflect differences in common characteristics and seek innovation.

### **(3)Expansion of thinking**

It is mainly the use of abstract visual language and generalized visual images on the basis of associative thinking. The design of visual symbols of the zodiac is carried out across the concrete field and the abstract field. By using the logical relationship between things, the associated content is abstracted and deduced. The abstract visual image is still based on the concrete of the objective. The use of generalized visual images is to find polymorphic visual images, which thinks about more extensive image elements from a single appearance, so that associative thinking can be comprehensively expanded and its efficiency can be improved.

### **(4)Orientation of thinking**

The purpose of determining the thinking orientation is to effectively analyze and make decisions on various plans and ideas, so that we can obtain creative breakthroughs. As for specific methods, it can lead from the cultural characteristics of the zodiac , cut in by atmosphere creation and concept construction, the coordination and unity of subjectivity and objectivity, and the symbolism and implication, so as to achieve the effective communication of ideas and the accurate transmission of information

## **4. The Design Manifestation of the Visual Symbols of the Zodiac Words**

On the basis of preliminary preparations, it should be clear that the manifestation and production stage of the visual image of the Chinese zodiac is not just a post-processing based on the choice results, but this stage is still a process of re-creation, and it is also a process of adjusting original ideas and discovering new expressions. This is because that the manifestation and production stage is the process of transforming design ideas into visual images, and the display effect can be finally achieved through production.

The problem of personalized forms is essentially a problem of diversification of modern design under the premise of standardization, or a problem that required by expression under the constraints of requirements in practicality, economy, material, technology, and environment. Gropius also pointed out when talking about the standardization of design in his book:“ The final result should be a pleasant combination and coordination of maximum standardization and maximum diversification”. Design itself is related to the uniqueness of the design styles. Similarly, the diversification of design styles is a rich and colorful scene expressed through the countless personalized forms of design products.



s *Zodiac design works (1)*

are some basic elements of visual forms. Whether in theory or in modern design practice, points, lines, and planes cannot be completely separated. William Hogarth has also emphasized: "This method of combining beautiful forms is to select a variety of lines according to the outline and size of the form, and then do everything possible to make changes on the relationship between forms." The "combination" emphasized by William Hogarth here refers to the combination that inspires our imagination and combine lines together, so as to create beautiful shapes or compositions. Based on the in-depth understanding of their characteristics and application rules, and after some necessary aesthetic analysis on them, the author then uses related composition rules of points, lines, and planes to make a practical attempt to design the visual image of the Chinese zodiac.



*Zodiac design works (2)*

As a unique symbol of folk culture, zodiac has different design styles in the process of transforming from cultural symbols to visual symbols. In the creation concept of folk culture, there are many excellent works derived from the externalization of spiritual elements, which reflects the changes of traditional beliefs and thoughts. These design concepts are mainly manifested in the form and function of products.

#### **(1) The Manifestation of Image Context**

Context refers to the literal sentences of the information content explained by the visual representation of graphics, and the language atmosphere created by such graphics. Image itself refers to the mental image of the fusion of subjective affection and external image. The Chinese zodiac contains the unique human concepts of Chinese people. It bases on feeling things, which means expressing emotions by things. According to the traditional artistic conception, it is "concepts creating from the external image". "The core of artistic creation is the generation of images. Artistic image refers to the mental image related to a certain aesthetic concept. The generation of design image refers to the process of artistic designer conceiving the product form. It is a creative imagination activity that combines rationality and aesthetic emotion." [5]

The manifestation of the image context emphasizes creative imagination and the creation of words and sentences in the form of pictures. Firstly, it transforms words into visual images. For a long time, the research of the zodiac

has been recorded and described mostly in the form of words. How to use visual symbols to replace words, or use graphics to "interpret" words and trigger associations? Then, whether visual symbols accurately can convey the meaning of words is particularly important. The manifestation of the context is actually the re-representation of the vocabulary. Viewers can deeply understand the connotation of words through "reading" the visual symbols. Secondly, it visualizes the content of the subject. The expression of the context must have a theme related to words. If the context of the visual symbol has no theme or does not express the theme, it will lose the value and meaning of its existence. Thirdly, it compounds the meaning and expands the connotation. It draws into the concrete images for required elements and then combines the images. The symbolism and implied puns of visual symbols expand the meaning of the internal representation. Finally, it materializes the emotion and has meanings in it. Feelings can be transformed into corresponding objects, embodied its meanings in visual symbols. As the saying goes: "expressing love by objects, making the emotion be harmonious with the context", which means that the meaning is in the image.

## **(2) The Creation of Image Context**

The creation of context is based on associative thinking. By using associative thinking, a variety of symbolic methods is discovered, and this context must be expressed accurately in order to make the designer's conception and manifestation correspond to the audience's cognition. For example, the folk cloth tiger is an amulet given to children by the elders, which can also be used as a toy for children. The image of the tiger used as an amulet and a toy is endowed with many symbolic meanings. The decorative stripes on the zodiac tiger are not simple natural forms. Animals that symbolize the "five poisonous insects", such as centipedes, snakes, scorpions, spiders, and lizards, are commonly used to replace the stripes on the tiger, which wants to use the mighty of the tiger to restrain and expel diseases and disasters, and to protect children to grow in safety and healthy. It can be seen that folk artists use natural form to generate associations, and use the method of exchanging forms to achieve a wish. The creation of image context is inseparable from creative thinking. Elements such as life experience, human concepts, and folklores can all become the source of creativity for designers.

## **5. Conclusion**

The research on the design of visual symbols of the Chinese zodiac starts from the general theoretical rules of semiotic elements in design, and then explores how to inherit and develop it in the display design in the information era.

By researching, it puts forward ideas, viewpoints and design methods which have theoretical and academic value and are suitable for designs in the new information era.

It also initially proposes some theoretical ideas and method systems for designers to study and discuss.

## References

- Wang Shouzhi. (1987). A brief history of world industrial design. *Shanghai, Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House* .
- Tao Yue. (2006). *Research on the Aesthetic Theory of Form and Space Art* (Master's thesis, Wuhan University of Technology).
- Wang Shouzhi. (2018). *World Graphic Design History* . China Youth Publishing House.
- William, Hogarth, & Cheng Yin. (1984). *Analysis of Beauty* . People's Fine Arts Publishing House.
- Jiahua, & Qi. (2009). *Design Aesthetics* . Huazhong University of Science and Technology Press.
- Sun Chenchen. (0). *Image expression of natural element graphics in graphic design* . (Doctoral dissertation).
- Tang Feng. (2007). Analysis of TV Public Media and Commercial Advertising. *China Education and Teaching* , 5 (002), 142-144.