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CULTURAL TRANSLATION AND INNOVATION APPLICATIONS OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE COLORS IN CONTEMPORARY JEWELRY DESIGN

GAO Anqi^{1,2}

¹ Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, Kyiv, Ukraine

² Changzhou University, Changzhou, People's Republic of China
gao1991@sina.com

Traditional Chinese colors are an important component of Chinese aesthetic culture, shaped by the philosophy of the Five Elements, ritual traditions, and historical artistic practices. Beyond visual appeal, they embody rich cultural symbolism. In contemporary design, traditional color systems have become a valuable resource for cultural innovation. This study explores how traditional Chinese colors are translated into contemporary jewelry design. Through the analysis of representative design cases, the research shows that traditional colors can be integrated into jewelry through material selection, color composition, and design narratives, thereby enhancing cultural identity and providing new possibilities for innovation in contemporary jewelry design.

Key words: *traditional Chinese colors, jewelry design, cultural symbolism, design innovation*

INTRODUCTION

Color is one of the most expressive visual elements in design. Within the system of traditional Chinese culture, color carries profound philosophical and cultural meanings. The ancient concept of the “Five Colors” (qing, chi, huang, bai, and hei), corresponding respectively to green or blue, red, yellow, white, and black, associates these colors with natural elements and the cosmological order. This concept has deeply influenced the development of traditional Chinese art and craftsmanship and has shaped a symbolic color system in jewelry design [1]. Previous studies indicate that traditional Chinese colors not only embody aesthetic values but also reflect social and cultural structures, continuing to exert significant influence on contemporary design practices [2].

With the rapid development of the cultural and creative industries, an increasing number of designers draw inspiration from traditional culture. Jewelry design, as a form that combines artistic expression with wearable function, can convey cultural imagery through materials, colors, and forms. By reinterpreting traditional color systems in a contemporary context, designers are able not only to preserve cultural heritage but also to create works that align with modern aesthetic preferences. Therefore, examining the application of traditional Chinese colors in contemporary jewelry design is of considerable significance.



PURPOSE

This study aims to explore how traditional Chinese colors can be translated into contemporary jewelry design. The research focuses on analyzing the cultural symbolism embedded in traditional color systems, examining their modes of expression in modern jewelry design, and illustrating their innovative applications in contemporary jewelry creation through specific design cases.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The traditional Chinese color system embodies rich cultural symbolism. These colors not only hold an important position in traditional craftsmanship but also provide significant inspiration for contemporary jewelry design. Recent design studies indicate that the application of traditional colors in modern design is often realized through material selection and integrated color compositions, thereby forming a culturally distinctive visual language in design practice [3].

In the field of contemporary jewelry art, the works of Hong Kong jewelry artist Wallace Chan demonstrate an innovative reinterpretation of traditional color aesthetics. In his high jewelry creations, Chan frequently employs colored gemstones such as jadeite, sapphires, and rubies, using bold yet harmonious color combinations to evoke an Eastern aesthetic sensibility. For example, in some of his jewelry pieces, green jadeite is paired with pink gemstones, a color scheme that echoes the traditional Chinese red–green contrast commonly found in historical color systems. This combination gives the jewelry a distinctive Eastern visual character (Fig.1). Furthermore, Chan incorporates titanium structures and advanced gemstone carving techniques, allowing colors to display rich layers and variations under changing light, thereby integrating traditional color aesthetics with contemporary jewelry craftsmanship.



Fig. 1. “A Jadetie and Multi-gem Clip Brooch” Designer Wallance Chan [4]

Another representative designer is Cindy Chao. In her renowned *Black Label Masterpieces* series, Chao creates layered visual effects through complex three-dimensional structures and the intricate setting of multicolored gemstones. The works in this series frequently feature gemstones such as emeralds, rubies, and yellow diamonds, generating visual tension through the interplay of green, gold, and



other complementary hues. This color arrangement resonates with traditional Chinese cultural concepts in which certain colors symbolize vitality and prosperity. At the same time, the sculptural metal structures enhance the expressive qualities of contemporary art jewelry (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. “The Roots of Genesis Brooch” Designer Cindy Chao [5]

In addition to independent jewelry artists, some cultural institutions have also explored the contemporary transformation of traditional colors through jewelry design. For instance, the Palace Museum Cultural Creative Jewelry Collection draws inspiration from the color system found in imperial artifacts, including iconic traditional hues such as “palace wall red,” “imperial yellow,” and “blue-and-white porcelain blue.” These colors are reinterpreted through techniques such as enamel work, colored gemstones, and metal craftsmanship, allowing the jewelry to convey a strong historical and cultural atmosphere. At the same time, simplified structures and modern materials are adopted to better meet contemporary wearing needs. One representative example is the pendant titled “Fortune and Wealth Together” (Fucai Shuangzhi). The design consists of multiple small blue enamel gourds, one of which is set with zircon, creating a sparkling visual effect. When worn, the pendant rotates with the wearer’s movements, symbolizing the auspicious meaning of smoothness and prosperity in all endeavors (Fig. 3). [6]



Fig. 3. “Fortune and Wealth Together Pendant” Design Institution The Palace Museum Cultural Service Center [6]



The above cases demonstrate that the application of traditional Chinese colors in contemporary jewelry design is not merely a direct replication of historical color schemes, but rather a process of cultural translation. Through the selection of materials, the orchestration of color combinations, and innovations in craftsmanship, designers reinterpret traditional colors as a design language that reflects contemporary aesthetics. In this way, traditional cultural elements are effectively integrated with modern design practices, enabling a meaningful dialogue between cultural heritage and contemporary creativity.

CONCLUSIONS

Traditional Chinese colors provide an important cultural resource and aesthetic foundation for contemporary jewelry design. The study shows that through material combinations, modern craftsmanship, and culturally informed design narratives, traditional colors can be creatively translated within a contemporary design context, forming a distinctive design language with strong cultural identity. The analyzed cases demonstrate that such translation not only enriches the visual expression of jewelry design but also strengthens the cultural significance of the works. Future research may further explore diverse applications of traditional colors in contemporary jewelry design by integrating digital design technologies and material innovations.

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