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INSPIRATION FROM THE EVOLUTION OF CHINESE FOLK AUSPICIOUS SYMBOLS “FU” AND “XI” FOR MODERN BOOK DESIGN

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This study compares the symbols “Fu” (fortune) and “Xi” (happiness), analyzing their evolutionary differences over long-term use from the perspective of folk functions. It proposes two pathway models: “symbolic expansion” and “symbolic cohesion,” and explores their implications for the visual translation mechanisms of contemporary book design. The study emphasizes that changes in symbolic form stem from cultural functional needs, rather than simply formal evolution.

Key words: Chinese folk culture; auspicious symbols; symbol evolution; book design; visual translation, graphic design.

INTRODUCTION

Chinese folk auspicious symbols, as an important medium for carrying collective wishes and social identity, are widely present in festival activities and daily life. Their meaning does not originate from individual aesthetics, but gradually stabilizes through repeated use by the group and confirmation of context [5]. In recent years, traditional auspicious symbols have been introduced into contemporary book design in large numbers, but in the process of application, they are often simplified into formal resources, and their folk functional logic and evolution mechanism have not received sufficient attention. Most existing studies focus on the interpretation of symbol meaning or the classification of types, lacking a systematic comparison of the evolutionary paths formed by different symbols in long-term folk practice. In fact, even within the category of “auspiciousness”, different symbols have significant differences in functional positioning and contextual dependence. Taking “Fu” and “Xi” as examples, they both have a broad cognitive basis, but present different cultural functional structures and visual development directions. Therefore, this study compares and analyzes their evolution mechanism within the framework of folk function. The novelty of this study lies in proposing a dual evolutionary model based on functional differentiation rather than stylistic transformation.



PURPOSE

This study aims to reveal the differences in symbolic strategies between "Fu" (fortune) and "Xi" (happiness) by comparing their usage and evolution in folk customs. It constructs two evolutionary models: "symbolic expansion" and "symbolic cohesion," and analyzes the impact of different evolutionary paths on the visual translation of contemporary book design, thereby providing a cultural logic basis for the rational use of auspicious symbols.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the perspective of the functional structure of folk culture, it can be found that although "Fu" and "Xi" belong to the same auspicious symbol system, they undertake different types of symbolic tasks. Nie Nan pointed out that the meaning generation of folk symbols is not an abstract existence, but is constantly confirmed and strengthened through collective practice in specific life situations [2]. Under this logic, "Fu" usually points to a continuous ideal state of life, with openness and generalization. Its scope of use spans festivals, home spaces and daily wishes, and the symbolic object is not limited to a specific event. On the other hand, "Xi" is highly dependent on the wedding ceremony, a life ritual node. Its symbolic function has clear temporality and context, and the confirmation of its meaning needs to be completed in a specific ritual space. This functional difference constitutes the cultural basis for the differentiation of the two symbols in the subsequent evolutionary path.

In the early stages, both symbols were primarily represented by written characters. However, as the usage context expanded, "Fu" gradually broke through the limitations of written form, and its meaning was transferred across media through homophony. Wang Shaoliang believes that homophonic prayer for good fortune is highly common in Chinese folk customs. The similarity between "Fu" (bat) and "Fu" (fortune) gives bat images a stable symbolic meaning [3]. With long-term use, this phonetic correspondence has become naturalized by group cognition. Even when the character "Fu" does not appear at all, bat patterns can still be accurately interpreted as symbols of good fortune. Thus, the meaning of "Fu" has shifted from a single written carrier to animal patterns, object decorations, and even more abstract graphic structures. This coexistence signifies that the symbolic meaning has broken away from the absolute dependence on written form and entered a stage of multi-carrier coexistence (Fig. 1, a), [4].

In contrast, the evolution of "Xi" is significantly different. Its symbolic expression always revolves around the structure of the character itself. This phenomenon is closely related to its ritual function. As an important node in the life ritual, the symbolic symbol of the wedding needs to form a clear and concentrated visual focus in the ritual space to ensure the immediate confirmation of meaning and group consensus. Therefore, the development of "Xi" did not pursue formal extension, but rather achieved symbolic concentration through internal structural reinforcement. Liu, Wenjie, & Zhao, Peize pointed out that the superposition of two "Xi" forms a symmetrical structure, which visually produces a stable axis and central composition, making it an irreplaceable visual core in the wedding space [1].



The double "Xi" decoration in the wedding scene reflects this structural reinforcement mechanism. Its symmetry and repetition not only enhance visual recognition, but also form symbolic authority in the space (Fig. 1, b).



a



b

Fig.1. Different Evolutionary Forms of "Fu" and "Xi": a - Famille Rose "Fu and Shou" (Longevity and Fortune) Pattern Plate, b - Chinese Wedding Ceremony Scene Setup.

Based on the above comparison, these two evolutionary paths can be summarized into two modes. The first is "symbolic expansion," where symbols break through their original carriers through homonyms or meaning transfer mechanisms, achieving cross-media expression and forming open structures. The second is "symbolic cohesion," where symbols consolidate their contextual exclusivity through structural reinforcement and formal stability, forming concentrated structures. The former emphasizes the transferability of meaning and the flexibility of form, while the latter emphasizes recognition efficiency and ritual certainty. In the context of contemporary book design, for the character "Fu," which has undergone symbolic expansion, design transformation can utilize graphic metaphors, abstract compositions, or imagery, rather than being limited to the textual form itself; formal innovation will not weaken its symbolic effectiveness. Conversely, for the character "Xi," which belongs to the symbolic cohesion type, design transformation must carefully consider its textual structure and symmetrical logic. Excessive deconstruction or abstraction will weaken the symbol's recognizability in a specific cultural context, especially in situations where the core structure must be preserved, such as wedding themes or ceremonial texts. This indicates that the evolutionary path of a symbol determines the boundary conditions of its visual reconstruction.



CONCLUSIONS

The comparative analysis of the symbols "Fu" and "Xi" shows that their evolution is determined by functional roles within folk culture rather than by formal changes alone. "Fu" demonstrates symbolic expansion: its meaning extends beyond the written character through homophony and cross-media transformation, allowing flexible reinterpretation in contemporary book design. In contrast, "Xi" represents symbolic cohesion: its meaning remains strongly tied to textual structure and ritual context, requiring preservation of compositional stability. The proposed dual model provides a methodological basis for culturally grounded design decisions and helps balance innovation with respect for traditional symbolic logic.

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ЕВОЛЮЦІЯ КИТАЙСЬКИХ НАРОДНИХ СИМВОЛІВ «ФУ» ТА «СІ» ЯК ДЖЕРЕЛО НАТХНЕННЯ ДЛЯ СУЧАСНОГО ДИЗАЙНУ КНИГ

Це дослідження порівнює символи «Фу» (щастя) та «Сі» (удача), аналізуючи їхні еволюційні відмінності протягом тривалого використання з точки зору народних традицій. В статті пропонується дві моделі, а саме: «символічне розширення» та «символічна згуртованість», а також аналізується їхній вплив на механізми візуального тлумачення сучасного дизайну книг. У дослідженні підкреслюється, що зміни в символічній формі випливають з культурних функціональних потреб, а не просто з формальної еволюції.

Ключові слова: китайська народна культура; сприятливі символи; еволюція символів; дизайн книги; візуальне тлумачення, графічний дизайн.