

Research on the Innovative Design of the IP Image Based on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of "Lord Rabbit"

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Abstract: Based on the inheritance and transformation of outstanding intangible cultural heritage, this paper analyzes the historical and cultural origins of "Lord Rabbit", the visual image cases and characteristics in various periods, actively excavates the typical features and artistic connotations of "Lord Rabbit", and is dedicated to conducting the fusion design of traditional and modern visual images by employing the design approach of three-dimensional in the plane. It refers to the creation methods of Disney and Japanese anime IP to enhance differentiation. While adhering to the creative transformation design, it promotes the cultural connotations of "Lord Rabbit", enhances the recognition of the visual image of "Lord Rabbit", and expands the thinking for the shaping of other intangible cultural heritage visual images.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage; "Lord Rabbit"; IP Image Design.

1. Introduction

The General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council have issued the "Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage", clearly stating that intangible cultural heritage, as an important part of China's outstanding traditional culture, is a cultural imprint of a nation and a continuation of the memory and history of a region. Protecting and inheriting intangible cultural heritage is of great significance for strengthening cultural confidence. While technological progress is necessary, we also need cultural confidence. This clear orientation has subsequently led to the "national trend fever" in the market. For a period, various traditional elements have occupied consumers' vision. However, can the near-frenzy "appropriation" of traditional elements in a short period bring about true cultural confidence? We need to seriously contemplate this era's proposition, which is also a direction that everyone with a sense of national development and a willingness to undertake historical responsibilities should deliberate carefully.

In the backdrop of the information age, the information conveyed by design not only conforms to the commonalities of the era but also highlights individuality. It is endowed with higher expectations and calls for innovation by the era. The content conveyed must be adapted to the progress of society and the times. The innovation of design concepts must meet people's spiritual and cultural needs, and the expression form of design connotations must satisfy people's enjoyment of modern visual culture. With the iterative evolution of human society and the inheritance and subversion of old cultural traditions, the inheritance and subversion of old cultural traditions have always been the themes of exploration, research, and reflection on design culture in the field of design.

In the aspect of IP image design in the national trend style, inspiration and materials are derived from the exploration of traditional culture and national history, such as folk tales, mythological legends, classic masterpieces, and so forth. This thinking possesses the characteristics of having a broad audience, significant influence, and the potential for in-depth

exploration. Moreover, modern design concepts and commercial culture are incorporated into the creation process, enabling it to possess cultural attributes while conforming to contemporary aesthetics. The IP image is also a concrete cognitive reflection of conceptual culture and has become a new medium for the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage. For instance, the innovative designs of IP images like Huaiyang clay dogs, Nuo show, Lion Dance, Shadow Puppetry, Huangmei Opera, etc., are based on the profound cultural background and the inner spiritual pursuit to establish concrete cognitive forms and are combined with graphic design, product design, and other directions.

"Lord Rabbit" is a national intangible cultural heritage and a local traditional handicraft in Beijing, serving as a children's toy for the Mid-Autumn Festival. The earliest prototype of Lord Rabbit originated from the Jade Rabbit in the Moon Palace. Through the artistic, personalized, and even deified transformation of the Jade Rabbit, it was molded into various forms of Lord Rabbit using clay. In the early days, people's fondness for Lord Rabbit stemmed from its powerful capabilities, which could ensure the safety of the common people and help them overcome all hardships. This belief has gradually transformed with the advancement and development of the times. Therefore, if we aim to rejuvenate "Lord Rabbit", we must adopt new methods. During the innovation process, we should extract the essence and discard the dross, endowing it with humanistic spirit and artistic aesthetics that are rich in the characteristics and connotations of the new era. With vigorous and innovative designs that serve the people, we can shorten the distance between each other, thereby facilitating better cultural inheritance and development.

2. Intangible Cultural Heritage - "Lord Rabbit"

2.1. The Origin and Evolution of "Lord Rabbit"

The "Lord Rabbit" emerged in the Ming Dynasty. Ji Kun (around 1636) recorded in "Flower King's Remaining

Manuscripts": "During the Mid-Autumn Festival in Beijing, people often mold rabbits with clay, dressing them in clothes and hats and sitting them upright like human figures. Children worship them." This is the earliest record of the "Lord Rabbit", and perhaps it was modeled with clay based on the image of the jade rabbit on the "Moonlight Paper". Since its appearance in the late Ming Dynasty, the "Lord Rabbit" has been widely spread among the people with its unique image and special cultural symbol. In the Qing Dynasty, the Qing government piously inherited the Han people's tradition of worshipping the moon. In the Qing court, the jade rabbit was called the Lady of the Moon, while in folk worship of the rabbit, there were not so many strict rules and it was more for entertainment. During the late Qing Dynasty, the "Lord Rabbit" was both a sacrifice for worship and a children's toy during the Mid-Autumn Festival. The Qing poet Li Wu described the "Rabbit Festival" in "New Poems of Yantai": "Families celebrate the reunion festival joyfully, laughing and chatting in the middle courtyard while presenting fruits and melons. The wife who stole the medicine is called the widow, and the cunning rabbit painted with gold is called grandpa. The autumn wind blows in the moon cave in the sky, and the cool moonlight of the toad shines on the water's edge. It is used as a plaything for children, and made with ink paste, paper, and sand." The nature of worship and play of the "Lord Rabbit" continued during the Republic of China period and was still prevalent even during the war.

From the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, the "Lord Rabbit" began to disappear. It was not until after the reform and opening up that the artisans of the "Lord Rabbit" resumed their old trade. Through continuous collection of materials and excavation and collation of resources, the "Lord Rabbit" finally returned to people's vision and life. Nowadays, the inheritors of the intangible cultural heritage of the "Lord Rabbit" include innovators such as Shuang Qixiang of the "Double-Style Lord Rabbit", Shuang Yan of the "Second-Generation Inheritor", Lin Aixing the "Skilled Lady of Beijing", and Hu Pengfei of the "Lucky Rabbit Workshop", etc. They have made significant contributions to the inheritance and development of the intangible cultural heritage of the "Lord Rabbit".

2.2. The Cultural Value and Image Evolution of "Lord Rabbit"

In the documentary records of "Hua Wang Ge Sheng Gao" in the late Ming Dynasty, it was reflected that the function of "Lord Rabbit" was for children to worship during the Mid-Autumn Festival. It was made of clay and had the form of a human figure wearing clothes and hats, which was easily reminiscent of the myth of Nüwa creating humans from clay, possessing both sacred and secular qualities. During the Qing Dynasty, the main function of "Lord Rabbit" was to integrate worship and entertainment. It gradually transformed from an object for worshipping the moon to a Mid-Autumn Festival toy, and the production became increasingly sophisticated. For instance, "multicolored makeup" was mentioned in "Qing Lei Bai Chao", with "gold paste applied to the face and colorful paintings on the body". Moreover, the postures and forms of "Lord Rabbit" also became diverse. "Yanjing Sui Shi Ji" recorded that "Lord Rabbit" "had those riding tigers and those sitting silently", and the actual forms were even more abundant. The late Qing Dynasty "Lord Rabbit" with a peony seat (Figure 1) collected by the Palace Museum is most notable for its mountain-shaped eyebrows and

anthropomorphic eyes, two ears tilted upright, holding a pestle for pounding medicine, wearing a battle robe, and standing on a peony seat, presenting a majestic appearance. Additionally, different shapes of "Lord Rabbit" have different cultural implications. For example, the "Lord Rabbit" sitting on a kirin has been handed down due to the allusion of the kirin spitting out books, symbolizing extensive knowledge. The "Lord Rabbit" riding a deer implies a prosperous official career and good health as well as a long life because the word "deer" is a homophone of "rank" and "longevity".



Figure 1. "Lord Rabbit" with Peony Seat in the Late Qing Dynasty

During the period of the Republic of China, the image of "Lord Rabbit" became increasingly rich in both expression and accessories. The "Old Beijing Customs and Manners" by Ji Wu recorded: "Lord Rabbit is made of clay. The extremely fine and moist yellow clay is carved and molded using brick molds, and there are also those hand-sculpted. The common form is that of a warrior, wearing a helmet, with a fox tail, or half-wrapped in a battle robe. The rabbit's mouth is crossed, and the ears stand upright. Behind it, there is either a paper flag or an umbrella held high, or it sits on a fake mountain or rides a unicorn, roaring tiger or leopard. The size varies, and the paintings range from coarse to fine. There are even humanoid figures with rabbit heads such as barbers, cobblers, wonton sellers, and tea soup sellers. Most of the manufacturers are located outside the Sha Guomen area. They start production in April and May and sell them in the toy market of Dajiangjia Hutong in front of Qianmen in mid-July." This indicates that during the Republic of China period, there were not only solemn warrior-shaped Lord Rabbit but also various forms depicting daily life, such as barbers, cobblers, wonton sellers, and tea soup sellers. Thus, the Lord Rabbit market a hundred years ago was far more diverse and closer to the daily lives of the common people than it is now.



Figure 2. Shuang Qixiang - The "Lord Rabbit" Riding a Deer

In the 1980s, coinciding with the revival of folk arts and crafts and the wave of intangible cultural heritage, a group of artisans led by Shuang Qixiang initiated a new chapter in the inheritance and development of Lord Rabbit. Shuang

Qixiang's Lord Rabbit maintained the traditional shape and color (Figure 2), and improvements were made to the material, making the body lightweight and less prone to cracking. His son Shuang Yan and his apprentice Lin Aixing basically adhered to the traditional shape and color of Lord Rabbit in their production, and they made more attempts in terms of mounts and themes.

In 2007, Hu Pengfei founded the "Lucky Rabbit Workshop" in Songzhuang, which remains the largest Lord Rabbit studio in the Beijing area to this day. The clay sculptures of Lord Rabbit produced by Lucky Rabbit Workshop are mainly classified into two types: traditional Lord Rabbit and new-style Lord Rabbit. The traditional Lord Rabbit of Lucky Rabbit Workshop is generally stockier in shape compared to the early Lord Rabbit, presenting a cute and fresh appearance. The new-style "Lion-Lion Auspicious Lord Rabbit" is more creative in both color matching and shape (Figure 3). There is a distinct color contrast between the mount and the Lord Rabbit itself. The shape is more agile than before. The facial decoration retains the classic mountain-shaped eyebrows and incorporates willow-leaf-shaped eyes. The mouth and nose are designed based on expressions, appearing very charmingly naive. The headgear incorporates numerous elements of Peking Opera but is very modern, signifying all things going as desired and safety year after year.



Figure 3. New-style "Lion-Lion Auspicious Lord Rabbit"

Based on the cultural value and image evolution of the "Lord Rabbit", we have discovered that the "Lord Rabbit" has remained relatively static with the advancement of the times. It has been severely impacted by foreign cultures in contemporary society, and its cultural connotations and image are now scarcely known. Hence, we require design approaches that are more in line with the aesthetics of the new era to reshape the "Lord Rabbit". In the past, the "Lord Rabbit" was typically presented in the sole form of clay sculptures. However, in the information age, the design and dissemination of IP images will enable the public to become familiar with this image more conveniently. Thus, diversified design methods also need to be incorporated into the process of inheriting intangible cultural heritage.

3. Innovative Scheme for the IP Character Design of "Lord Rabbit"

A high-quality IP, its core elements encompass excellent cultural connotations and correct value orientations, highly distinguishable visual communication, and the ability to easily evoke emotional identification and resonance among consumers. The innovative design of non-heritage IP images has distinct tendencies in creative characteristics, which are respectively reflected in two aspects: recreating cultural

connotations and enhancing the recognizability of visual images.

3.1. Recreation of Cultural Connotations

In the early days, the Lord Rabbit was mainly used for Mid-Autumn Festival sacrifices and was the patron deity of children. Later, it transformed into a beloved toy for children, featuring high playability and entertainment value, and encompassing common implications such as peace, good fortune, successful careers, good health, and longevity. These cultural connotations were bestowed upon the Lord Rabbit by people in different historical periods and represent rather common secular aspirations. In contemporary social culture, where people understand commonalities while pursuing individuality, the preferred IP images, in addition to fulfilling basic aesthetic demands, need to emphasize personalized characteristics. Thus, the new era cultural connotations of the Lord Rabbit can be sought from a perspective closer to life, finding elements that touch the creators themselves and discovering vivid and dynamic traits.

The author added a contextualized storyline when designing the image of the "Lord Rabbit". Taking children learning to paint as an example, the Lord Rabbit transforms into a cute and naive "Artistic Rabbit" (Figure 4), wearing a multifunctional apron, holding a paintbrush and palette, and looking into the distance with determination, as if telling people that it is willing to dedicate its entire life to the beloved art career. The overall image is both charming and traditional in flavor. By constructing an anthropomorphic role, it shortens the distance between people and the object, making the conveyed meaning more diverse.



Figure 4. Artistic Rabbit

3.2. Enhance the Recognition Degree of Visual Image

3.2.1. Structural Level

The design of IP images is accomplished on one hand through their external appearance and on the other hand through the shaping of their personalities, with the storylines manifesting their souls. Both aspects are indispensable. The external appearance is the information that can reach the audience most rapidly. Hence, visual communication needs to catch people's eyes within a short period and form lasting memory points, which undoubtedly requires the IP images to be highly vivid. How can we achieve this? By referring to Disney's creative drafts, we will discover that the observation in the preliminary stage of quick sketches or sketches is of great significance. Through repeatedly depicting the object to capture its key structural points and appealing aspects, and incorporating the nutrients absorbed from nature into the

creation, this is undoubtedly an excellent approach. Because only a thorough understanding of the object can lead to the flexibility of creation.

In the current field of IP image design, the majority of IP images present a stereotypical flatness. Although this design significantly enhances efficiency, it clearly shows insufficient stamina in terms of individuality and leaving a lasting impression. During the creation process of Disney's cartoon images, a large number of hand-drawn depictions are employed to capture the structure and prominent features of the object. By retaining the simple structural essentials and then adding innovative elements, the images are derived from objective entities and are further shaped. Such a creative process not only avoids overly flat structures and loss of flexibility but also provides the creator with a considerable space for expression.

3.2.2. Decorative Aspect

Overall, the decoration of "Lord Rabbit" takes into account the rhythm of density from the ears, hat, face, and body, featuring a combination of simplicity and complexity, as well as elegance and grandeur. The tiger head hat is modeled after the tiger and is a typical style of children's hat in Chinese folk children's clothing, significantly enhancing the childlike charm of the IP image. The face is delicately adorned with makeup. The eyebrows incorporate the mountain-shaped feature of the "Rabbit God" itself and the charm of Tang makeup, with some processing at the brow head. Regarding the clothing, cloud patterns are added to the collar and lower skirt, geometric patterns are added to the hem, and diamond patterns are embellished on the apron for processing. The overall patterns are mostly in dark tones, presenting an underlying and profound temperament.

4. Conclusion

The innovative design of IP images of intangible cultural heritage is closely related to culture. In fact, it represents an organic integration of artistic inspiration, design techniques, and cultural connotations. Through excavating and extracting

national characteristics, absorbing and applying typical elements and styles, and transforming them into images distinct from common visual features, the aim is to stimulate people's interest and imagination, deepen their understanding and awareness of the corresponding culture, and realize the wide dissemination of traditional cultural art. This also demands that creators delve deeper into innovation in both form and content, refrain from merely superficially "appropriating", and create an increasing number of classic images that can withstand the test of time!

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