

# Research on the Design Strategy of Cultural and Creative Products of Suzhou Museum from the Perspective of Semiotics

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**Abstract:** This paper, against the backdrop of regional cultural protection policies, starts from the perspective of semiotics. It first clarifies the concept of regional culture, analyzes the existing problems in the design of traditional museum cultural and creative products, then deeply explores the learnable aspects of the cultural and creative design of Suzhou Museum, and finally summarizes the design strategies suitable for the development of museum cultural and creative products. The aim is to provide theoretical and practical references for the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture in the field of modern cultural and creative industries. By combining specific cases with theoretical analysis, this paper comprehensively demonstrates the innovative value of Suzhou Museum's cultural and creative design in symbolic application and cultural expression.

**Keywords:** Semiotics; Cultural and Creative Design; Suzhou Museum; Design Industry; Design Strategy.

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## 1. Policy Background: Policy Support for Regional Culture Protection and Cultural and Creative Development

In recent years, the state and local governments have attached great importance to the protection and inheritance of regional culture, and issued a series of policies to promote the development of cultural and creative industries, creating a favorable policy environment for the cultural and creative design of Suzhou Museum. At the national level, since the implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2011, it has provided a solid legal protection framework for regional cultures including Suzhou Pingtan, Suzhou Embroidery and other intangible cultural heritages. The law clearly stipulates the responsibilities and measures of the government, social organizations and individuals in the protection and preservation of intangible cultural heritage, and guarantees the survival and development of regional cultural elements such as traditional techniques and folk customs from an institutional perspective. For example, as a national intangible cultural heritage, Suzhou Pingtan has obtained resource inclination in terms of inheritor training and performance venue construction under the support of this law, laying a foundation for the application of its cultural symbols in cultural and creative design.

At the local level, the Regulations on the Protection of Historical and Cultural Famous Cities in Suzhou has been implemented since 2018, focusing on the protection of material cultural heritages such as Suzhou's ancient city, traditional villages, and classical gardens, as well as intangible cultural heritages such as Suzuo crafts and Wudi folk customs, and emphasizing the inheritance and promotion of the characteristics of Suzhou's regional culture. The regulations make detailed provisions on the renovation of ancient buildings and the identification of traditional craft inheritors, ensuring the continuation of the material carriers and craft inheritance of Suzhou's regional culture. For example, under the regulation of the regulations, cultural symbols such as the architectural structure and garden layout

of Suzhou's classical gardens have been properly protected, providing rich visual elements for the cultural and creative design of Suzhou Museum. The Three-Year Action Plan for High-Quality Development of Suzhou's Cultural Industry (2023-2025) further proposes to focus on the development of creative design industries, support the development of museum cultural and creative products, promote the integration of Suzhou's cultural elements into modern design, and enhance the competitiveness and influence of Suzhou's cultural industry. According to the plan, Suzhou has set up special funds to provide financial support for museum cultural and creative projects, and organized cultural and creative design competitions to attract many designers, promoting the innovative expression of Suzhou's cultural symbols in cultural and creative products. These policies provide a solid policy basis and development direction for Suzhou Museum to base itself on regional culture and carry out cultural and creative design from different dimensions.

## 2. Concept Definition: Connotation and Characteristics of Regional Culture

Regional culture refers to a cultural form with uniqueness, inheritability, and stability formed through long-term historical development within a specific geographical space. It covers two levels: material culture and intangible culture. Take Suzhou's regional culture as an example, which demonstrates distinct characteristics in both material and intangible fields. Material culture includes physical forms such as architecture, clothing, and utensils, which carry the historical memory and aesthetic style of regional culture. Taking Suzhou as an example, its classical gardens and Su-style buildings are typical representatives of material culture. Suzhou gardens, represented by the Humble Administrator's Garden and the Lingering Garden, demonstrate the gardening art of "made by man, yet natural" through the exquisite layout of pavilions, terraces, towers, rockeries, and ponds. Architectural details such as cornices and carved window lattices have become highly recognizable cultural symbols.

Su-style buildings, with their pink walls, dark tiles, and well-arranged forms, reflect the gentle and graceful style of the Jiangnan water town. These architectural elements are also reflected in the architectural design of the Suzhou Museum. Mr. I.M. Pei integrated traditional Su-style architectural symbols with modern design concepts to create a unique museum space, providing rich visual materials for cultural and creative design. Intangible culture includes language, folklore, art, techniques, etc., which are the spiritual core of regional culture. Suzhou Pingtan tells stories in the soft Wunong dialect with gentle and melodious tunes; Kunqu Opera, as the "ancestor of all operas", shows Oriental aesthetics with delicate performances and elegant librettos; Suzhou Embroidery is characterized by "precision, fineness, elegance, and cleanliness", with rich and changeable stitches, which can vividly present landscapes, flowers, and birds on embroidery. These intangible cultural heritages are not only the treasures of Suzhou's regional culture but also provide a deep cultural foundation for cultural and creative design.

Regional culture has distinct characteristics. First, uniqueness: each region forms unique cultural characteristics due to differences in geographical environment, historical development, and ethnic composition. Suzhou is located in the Jiangnan water town, and its superior natural environment has nurtured the exquisite, elegant, and education-oriented Wu culture. From the garden gatherings of ancient literati to the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture in modern times, Suzhou has always maintained a unique cultural temperament. Second, inheritability: regional culture continues to be passed on from generation to generation. Suzhou's traditional crafts such as kesi and Ming-style furniture-making techniques have been inherited for hundreds of years. Kesi can weave exquisite patterns comparable to calligraphy and painting with the unique technique of "through warps and broken wefts", and its technique has been passed down from generation to generation, still rejuvenating in Suzhou's workshops today; Ming-style furniture is famous for its simple shape and exquisite mortise and tenon craftsmanship, passed down from the Ming and Qing Dynasties to the present, becoming an important representative of Suzhou's craft culture. Third, integration: regional culture does not exist in isolation but is continuously enriched and developed in the exchange and collision with other cultures. As a historical commercial town, Suzhou's culture has integrated the strengths of the north and the south, combining gentleness and grandeur. For example, while retaining the light taste of the Jiangnan region, Suzhou's food culture has also absorbed northern cooking techniques, forming a unique Su-style cuisine; in the field of art, Suzhou's calligraphy, painting, opera, etc., have also learned from other regions and continuously innovated. These characteristics of regional culture make it an important source of cultural and creative design, endowing cultural and creative products with deep cultural connotations and unique charm.

### **3. Problems in the Design of Traditional Museum Cultural and Creative Products**

#### **3.1. Shallow Excavation of Cultural Symbols**

Most traditional museum cultural and creative designs only scratch the surface in excavating regional cultural symbols, overly relying on intuitive symbols such as the appearance of landmark buildings and classic cultural relics. Take the

cultural and creative products of Jiangnan culture-themed museums as an example: a large number of products repeatedly use the cornices of gardens and the shapes of blue-and-white porcelain bottles, but fail to deeply excavate the deep symbols such as the craftsmanship and cultural meanings behind the cultural relics. [5] For example, some museums launch blue-and-white porcelain cultural and creative products, which only copy the appearance of blue-and-white porcelain bottles onto stationery and ornaments, without introducing the unique "underglaze color" technique of blue-and-white porcelain and the auspicious meanings contained in its patterns, such as the tangled lotus pattern symbolizing endless life and the sea-water river cliff pattern implying the eternal stability of the country. This shallow use of symbols fails to give full play to the value of symbolic symbols in semiotics, resulting in cultural and creative products lacking cultural depth and uniqueness, and being unable to meet consumers' deep needs for cultural connotations.

#### **3.2. Serious Homogenization of Design**

Due to the lack of an accurate grasp of the uniqueness of regional culture, the phenomenon of product homogenization is prominent in the traditional museum cultural and creative market. Cultural and creative designs and product types of museums in different regions are similar, making it difficult to reflect regional cultural differences. Take zodiac-themed cultural and creative products as an example: many museums have launched zodiac dolls, zodiac bookmarks, and other products. The design elements are mostly common zodiac animal images with traditional red and gold colors, and the expression forms are similar, failing to carry out differentiated designs combined with local zodiac folklore, legends, etc. [6] For example, in some cultural and creative products themed on the zodiac tiger, local characteristic cultural elements such as myths, legends, and folk activities about tigers are not integrated, making it impossible to show the unique charm of regional culture, resulting in consumers' lack of interest in such cultural and creative products and inability to meet their needs for personalized cultural and creative products.

#### **3.3. Disconnection from Modern Life**

Traditional museum cultural and creative designs do not fully consider the lifestyle and aesthetic needs of modern consumers, resulting in cultural and creative products with insufficient practicality and outdated aesthetic styles. Some cultural and creative products are only used as souvenirs or decorations, with limited use scenarios in daily life. For example, some museums launch large bronze cultural relic replica ornaments, which, despite their exquisite craftsmanship, are too large and impractical for modern home spaces, and consumers often have to put them aside after purchase. In terms of aesthetic style, the color matching and pattern design of some cultural and creative products do not conform to modern aesthetic trends, using too strong colors and complicated patterns, which are difficult to attract young consumer groups. For example, some cultural and creative products with traditional opera facial makeup as elements have strong color contrasts and overly realistic patterns, conflicting with the modern minimalist and fashionable aesthetic trends, making cultural and creative products out of touch with market demand and limiting their communication and promotion.

### 3.4. Lack of Narrativeness and Emotional Resonance

Traditional museum cultural and creative products often take a single product as the center, lacking systematic integration and narrative construction of cultural symbols, and failing to form a coherent cultural story line. When purchasing cultural and creative products, consumers find it difficult to feel the cultural connotations and emotional values behind the products through the products, and cannot establish an emotional connection with the products, reducing the attractiveness of cultural and creative products and consumer loyalty. For example, a museum launches a series of bookmark products with cultural relic patterns, each bookmark printed with different cultural relic patterns, but there is no connection between these bookmarks. Consumers can only simply appreciate the patterns when purchasing, unable to understand the historical stories, cultural meanings, and internal connections behind these cultural relics, making these bookmarks merely ordinary stationery and losing the functions of cultural communication and emotional transmission. [7]

## 4. Analysis of Cultural and Creative Design Cases of Suzhou Museum (Needs to Introduce a Specific Case)

### 4.1. Design Background



**Figure 1.** Design Drawing of "Qiyun Jiangnan" Products (The figure is from the WeChat official account of Suzhou Museum)

Against the backdrop of the common problems in traditional museum cultural and creative design, such as shallow excavation of cultural symbols, homogenized product design, and disconnection from contemporary life, Suzhou Museum has demonstrated strong autonomy and cultural stance in cultural and creative development by deeply excavating regional cultural characteristics and modern

aesthetic preferences. Among them, the "Qiyun Jiangnan" coffee cultural and creative series is based on the translation relationship between traditional cultural contexts and modern life scenes, exploring the embedding methods and visual expressions of traditional art and culture in contemporary daily life. Taking "coffee", a modern high-frequency consumer product, as the breakthrough point, the series connects cultural inheritance with life experience, avoids direct replication of the shapes of typical cultural relics, and comprehensively extracts cultural symbols from multiple levels such as Su-style furniture, Qing Dynasty embroidery, Republic of China cheongsam, and literati paintings, constructing a composite product system with practical functions, situational awareness, and cultural connotations. This strategy not only enables cultural and creative products to have high life adaptability but also reflects a strict sense of cultural context in symbol selection and integration logic.

### 4.2. Selection and Analysis of Cultural Symbols

"Qiyun Jiangnan" premium coffee skillfully extracts key elements from the collections of Suzhou Museum and Jiangnan culture. As can be seen from the inspiration source images, it draws on patterns of flowers, birds, bamboo, orchid, etc., from classic calligraphy and painting works such as the Qing Dynasty Embroidery Flower and Bird Picture and the Ming Dynasty Xia Chang's Ink Bamboo Picture, integrating the delicate brushwork and elegant artistic conception of traditional Jiangnan painting art into the design. At the same time, the cheongsam, as a representative symbol of the elegant temperament of Jiangnan women, is creatively applied to coffee packaging. In this way, by deeply excavating the connotations of Jiangnan culture, elements such as Jiangnan calligraphy and painting art and clothing culture are organically integrated, allowing consumers to intuitively feel the profound heritage and unique charm of Jiangnan culture while enjoying coffee, realizing the close combination of culture and products.

### 4.3. Analysis of Cultural and Creative Design Strategies of Suzhou Museum

#### 4.3.1. Deep Excavation of Regional Cultural Symbols

Suzhou Museum deeply analyzes Suzhou's regional culture, excavates cultural symbols from multiple dimensions such as architecture, gardens, cultural relics, and folklore, and constructs a rich symbol resource library. In terms of architectural symbols, it not only extracts the geometric pitched roofs, piece stone rockeries, and other appearance symbols of I.M. Pei's modern minimalist style but also deeply excavates symbolic symbols such as the gardening concept of "using the wall as paper and stones as painting" and the literati spirit of Jiangnan behind them. When designing Suzhou Museum, Mr. I.M. Pei borrowed from traditional garden techniques such as borrowing scenery and framing scenery, introducing outdoor natural landscapes into the interior through the combination of glass curtain walls and white walls, creating a unique spatial experience. This design concept is also reflected in cultural and creative products. For example, the "Window Shadow" series of cultural and creative products, taking the window frames of the museum building as the prototype, designs bookmarks, notepads, and other products, not only showing the beauty of the building's appearance but also conveying the wisdom of garden space construction. [8]

The "Qiyun Jiangnan" coffee cultural and creative products take Jiangnan culture as the core source of inspiration, deeply excavating the characteristic symbols and cultural connotations of the Jiangnan region. By endowing cultural

and creative products with unique charm through cheongsam elements, a distinct brand visual identity is formed, allowing consumers to immediately feel the unique charm of Jiangnan culture and enhancing cultural identity.

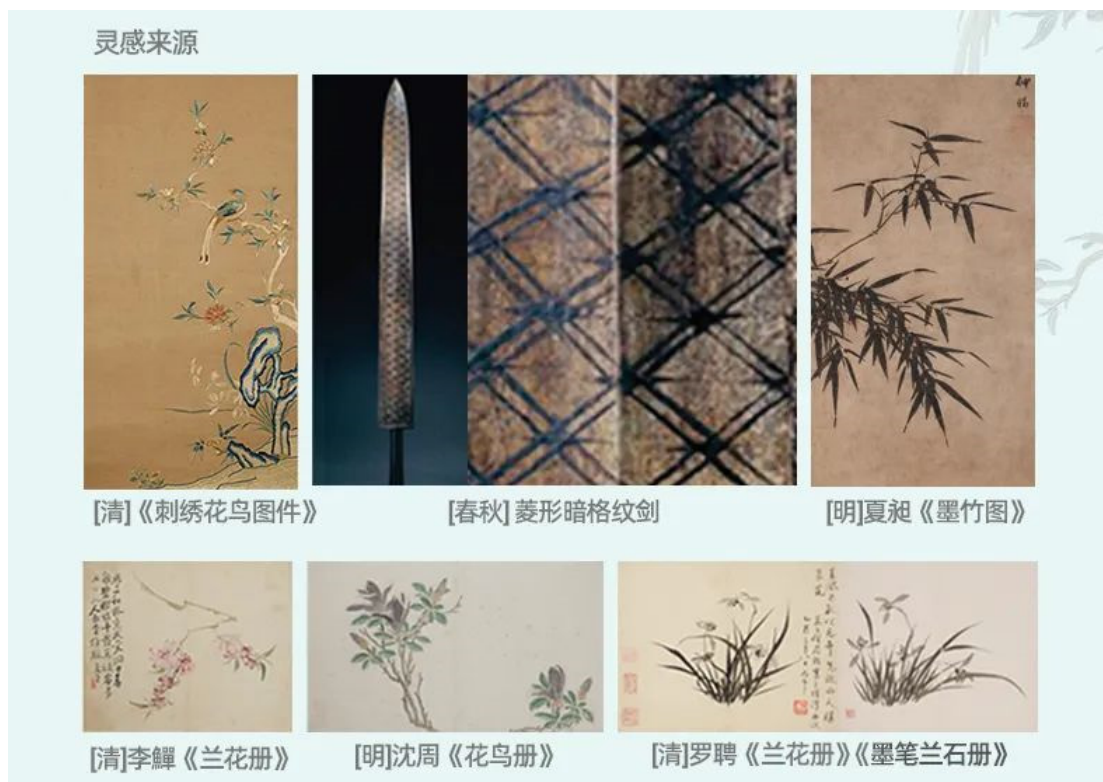


Figure 2. Analysis Diagram of Painting Symbol Inspiration Sources

#### 4.3.2. Innovative Symbol Translation Methods

Suzhou Museum adopts a variety of innovative symbol translation methods to achieve the modern transformation of traditional cultural symbols, making ancient cultural symbols glow with new vitality in modern life. In terms of isomorphic translation, it maintains the direct correspondence between the signifier and the signified of the symbol. For example, the "Window Shadow" bookmark takes the outline of the lattice window as the signifier, directly pointing to the artistic conception of the garden space (the signified). This translation method is simple and direct, allowing consumers to quickly understand the cultural information conveyed by cultural and creative products while retaining the original flavor of traditional symbols.

In terms of product types, innovative design has been carried out in product forms. The coffee packaging is designed in the shape of a cheongsam, which is not only highly visually recognizable but also endows the product with a strong cultural atmosphere. Cheongsam-packaged coffee in different colors and patterns is like a piece of exquisite art, satisfying consumers' pursuit of beauty and yearning for culture. Moreover, in terms of product combination, it is presented in a gift box containing various packaging styles of coffee, suitable for both personal tasting and gifting, meeting consumption needs in different scenarios. [9] This unique product design is different from ordinary coffee, improving the product's added value and attractiveness, making coffee not only a beverage but also a carrier of Jiangnan culture. By telling the story of Jiangnan culture, it attracts consumers to collect the entire set, enhancing the product's added value and sales potential.

#### 4.3.3. Construction of Brand Narrative and Communication System

Suzhou Museum constructs a complete cultural symbol narrative system through single-product narrative, serialized narrative, and digital narrative, allowing consumers to deeply experience the charm of Suzhou's regional culture in the process of purchasing and using cultural and creative products. [10] The "Qiyun Jiangnan" premium coffee cultural and creative products take Jiangnan culture as the core, accurately positioning consumers who love traditional culture, enjoy artistic atmosphere, and pursue high-quality life and unique consumption experiences, especially tourists and cultural enthusiasts with a special complex for Jiangnan culture. [11] Through a close connection with museum culture and leveraging the museum's brand influence and passenger flow, this coffee cultural and creative product can quickly enter the market, establish a unique brand image, and occupy a place in the highly competitive coffee and cultural and creative markets, achieving a win-win situation of cultural communication and commercial value.

### 5. Conclusion

Under the support of regional cultural protection policies, the cultural and creative design of Suzhou Museum, based on an in-depth understanding of regional culture and the application of semiotic theory, has effectively solved the problems existing in the design of traditional museum cultural and creative products. Through strategies such as deep excavation of cultural symbols, innovative translation methods, construction of narrative systems, and attention to user experience, it has created cultural and creative products

with both cultural connotations and modern aesthetics, providing a successful example for museum cultural and creative design. In the future, museum cultural and creative design should continue to take regional culture as the foundation, combine semiotic theory with modern design concepts, and continue to innovate and develop to promote the inheritance and communication of traditional culture in modern society. At the same time, with the continuous progress of science and technology and the increasingly diversified needs of consumers, museum cultural and creative design also needs to actively explore new technologies and models, such as using metaverse technology to create virtual cultural and creative products, to meet consumers' needs for immersive cultural experiences, and let traditional culture bloom more brilliantly in the new era.

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