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Research on the Cross-border Integration Design of Shikumen Symbols in "New Guochao" Brand Packaging

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Abstract: Focusing on the insufficient innovative transformation of Shikumen architectural symbols in current " New Guochao " packaging design , this paper takes typical Shikumen lilong architectures in Shanghai as research samples ,and explores a cross - border integration path connecting traditional architectural heritage with modern brand design .Combining field surveys and historical literature analysis, the study systematically sorts out the morphological evolution and visual characteristics of Shikumen architecture ,and constructs a three - dimensional semiotic translation framework covering material form , behavioral interaction and spiritual imagery .On this basis, shape grammar and parametric design methods are introduced to complete the creative transformation from architectural symbols to packaging elements ,and a progressive " Form Observation - Meaning Projection - Spirit Regeneration " translation model is proposed .Design practices verify the feasibility of this model in multiple packaging links: geometric simplification of lintel contours supports the structural innovation of gift boxes , parametric reconstruction of brick wall textures enriches the brand visual system ,and narrative graphics based on lilong life scenes enhance the emotional value of products .The " architectural syntax designification " approach proposed in this study balances cultural authenticity and modern aesthetic experience, andprovides a replicable theoretical reference for the contemporary creative transformation of traditional architectural heritage in the design field.

Keywords: Shikumen; New Guochao; Cultural Memory; Semiotic Translation; Packaging Design.

1. Introduction

With globalization and local cultural revival now closely interwoven , the " New Guochao " movement is becoming one of the main forces behind the creative transformation of traditional Chinese culture .Among Shanghai's architectural heritages , Shikumen stands out for its particular Chinese - Western fusion form and for a cultural depth that lends itself well to present-day design thinking — it is highly usable as a resource .Yet today's attempts to apply Shikumen symbols to design too often stop at the level of isolated elements , without full theoretical analysis or radical innovation in form .Such shallow uses do not help to realize a genuinely modern version of tradition nor to meet the taste of younger people.

With cultural memory theory as a basis , the present paper deals with the various cultural values encoded in Shikumen architecture .It considers, first, the physical form and the visual properties of such buildings;then, from the standpoint of social conduct, the spatial memories generated by life in lilong alleys;finally, regarding the spiritual content, the modernity factor latent in Shanghai - related culture .Such a multi - dimensional analysis may help to generate novel suggestions about the modern adaptation of traditional cultural symbols. [1-2]

2. Analysis of Cultural Symbols of Shikumen Architecture

2.1. Origin of Shikumen: Historical Context and Evolution

Shikumen was introduced as a particular kind of residential form following Shanghai's opening as a treaty port (mid-19th century).It began with the traditional " three - bay hall with two wing rooms " type of house used by people of Jiangnan , and—under the singular conditions of the concessions—slowly adopted Western classical design touches, producing an early hybrid of Chinese and Western architecture .There are three distinct stages in its historical development:

Formation period (mid - late 19th century): Western architectural elements—both for buildings and for details—were introduced into the traditional Jiangnan house type, giving rise at first to the special Shikumen fusion style.

The heyday stage (early 20th century to the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression): Architectural forms became more diverse, Art Deco decorations prevailed, and functional design grew more mature and complete.

The so-called transition period (from the War of Resistance to the beginning of New China): Design started to be oriented toward utility, and houses of combined function were developed.

The historical development described here gives an account of the dynamic interplay between architecture and society, as well as of Shanghai ' s urban nature—open, inventive, forward-looking. [3]

2.2. Types of Shikumen: Architectural Classification and Feature Analysis

Among the residential forms peculiar to Shanghai , Shikumen is one that has definite stage characteristics .With regard to architectural type and to history , it may be split into two classes—old - style and new - style—each of which comes from the same source yet has special features of its own .

Old - style Shikumen (1860 – 1910) is the earliest type , still bearing a number of features of traditional Jiangnan houses .The most characteristic layout is " three main rooms with two side wings " , with three middle rooms and wing rooms attached on either side .Built essentially of brick and of timber , they make use of conventional column - and - tie

wooden frames , as well as of wide , light courtyards — ideal for air circulation and illumination without loss of traditional yard character .Although gate embellishment was modest at this time , Western architectural moldings had begun to appear , hinting at an early fusion of Chinese and foreign styles .Examples of surviving lilongs like Xingrenli or Dunrenli mark this phase well , and help to describe the gradual change from old houses to modern Shanghai dwellings.

Shanghai ' s recent urban development and population growth have encouraged the rise of new - style Shikumen (1910 – 1930) .Such buildings kept the main characteristics of Shikumen but allowed for substantial adaptations .Among the principal innovations was the compact " single - bay " design , with narrower buildings suited to the limited space of urban areas .At the same time , reinforced concrete came to be used frequently as a construction material , vastly increasing the durability of such buildings .As far as decoration is concerned , the current Art Deco fashion led to a gradual replacement of traditional carvings with Western geometric forms;triangles or radial lines took over from elaborate details , helping to make the whole form more modern and concise .New - style lilongs—such as Jing ' an Villa or Bugao Li—are very fine examples of Shanghai - style architecture, with delicate gatework and well-organized spatial arrangements. [4]

3. Semiotics-based Deconstruction Framework of Shikumen Symbols

3.1. Origin of Shikumen: Historical Context and Evolution

As a carrier of Shanghai's regional architectural features, Shikumen is a typical local cultural symbol. Its value lies not only in the architectural form itself, but also in the rich cultural connotations behind it. As a product of Chinese-Western cultural integration, Shikumen carries special historical memories in both its form and spatial use. To fully understand its cultural value, we can analyze it from three levels: material form, behavioral culture and spiritual connotation.

From a material standpoint , Shikumen gives an intuitive picture of the collision and the integration of Chinese and Western architectural cultures .As a whole it preserves the traditional " three - bay hall with two wing rooms " form of Jiangnan house-building , but adds Western architectural innovations to it .One of the clearest examples is the origin of its name:it pairs Western - styled stone door frames with traditional Chinese " warehouse doors " , hence the designation " Shikumen " .With regard to details , Western triangular lintels contrast nicely with Chinese brick carvings or with stonework;cast-iron railings go well with wooden lattices.Each such hybrid is a graphic record of Shanghai ' s post-opening cultural transformation .When it comes to building materials , the move—over time—from brick-wood to reinforced concrete not only shows improvement in construction methods ,but also captures the effect of industry upon older forms of architecture .

On the behavioral level , the spatial form of Shikumen has nurtured an individual civilian lifestyle .A special spatial layout is responsible for many characteristic scenes of daily life: lilongs became neighborhoods with room for interaction — sites for children's games or adult conversation; pavilion rooms made possible a singular rental arrangement , once offering homes to many intellectuals and to artists;shared kitchens led to the " seventy - two tenants " way of living , which is part of the traditional Shanghainese life-wisdom repertoire .All such scenes bear upon Shanghai ' s past as a city , and help to shape a particular community culture grounded in practical living attitudes.

From a spiritual standpoint , Shikumen exemplifies the basic characteristics of Shanghai - style culture .It preserves traditional Chinese attitudes toward life and toward beauty—such things as auspicious symbols carved upon lintels, which represent people ' s hopes for happiness;it also incorporates Western pragmatism, such as the bringing in of Western - type bathrooms to meet domestic needs .The idea of " Chinese learning as the foundation , Western learning for practical use " is an exact embodiment of the city ' s urban spirit .The values—openness, tolerance, utility, and innovation—expressed by Shikumen still constitute the cultural gene behind Shanghai ' s growth today .

3.2. Theoretical Framework for the Semiotic Translation of Shikumen Symbols

To understand the present-day design transformation of Shikumen architectural symbols it is necessary to take account of their spiritual or cultural meanings—not merely of form .Such long-established buildings have been linked historically with specific emotions and human experiences .Only if one studies the past associated with them and translates that cultural memory, in part, into a modern idiom will it be possible to keep Shikumen alive aesthetically today, to meet current expectations, and to bring traditional forms back—successfully—into the world of design.

From a semiotic perspective , the translation of Shikumen architectural symbols can be interpreted through the theoretical framework of signifier and signified .This process includes two interrelated levels:at the denotative level , translation focuses on the material morphological features of Shikumen .Designers can extract available design elements from architectural outlines , decorative patterns, color systems and material textures , and reinterpret them with modern design methods .These visual elements , as the " signifier " of cultural symbols , form the material basis of symbol translation .At the connotative level , translation requires digging into the deep cultural meaning behind Shikumen architecture .Based on cultural hierarchy theory , it can be analyzed from three dimensions:the material dimension reflects the actual impact of architecture on people ' s perception , the spiritual dimension carries specific cultural values , and the philosophical dimension contains deeper ways of thinking .These three dimensions correspond to the connotative semantics of metaphorical expression , behavior guidance and narrative construction respectively .Through literature research and field investigation , we can accurately grasp the connotative value of Shikumen in a specific regional cultural context ,and then realize the effective transmission of cultural connotations on new carriers through the innovative combination of visual elements .

3.2.1. Observation to Extract Forms — Visual Transcription of Shikumen Architectural Outlines

Among the modeling elements of Shikumen architecture there is a special formal aesthetic .With regard to semiotics, one begins with the material forms of architecture—on the denotative level—as symbols to be translated .The essential design procedures are given below:

First , select typical Shikumen architectural forms and

extract contour lines that can represent their core characteristics .The selection of specific architectural images can be comprehensively judged from four dimensions:representativeness , recognition , public popularity and compatibility with modern aesthetics .Second , carry out targeted transformation of design elements .Methods such as figurative expression , abstract expression and decorative expression can be adopted to integrate and refine the extracted elements .Among them , figurative expression focuses on the reproduction and simplification of objects;abstract expression can be divided into freehand style and geometric style;decorative expression emphasizes concise shape and contour beauty , and often has a romantic tendency in color matching .These three methods can be used alone or in combination according to actual design needs .Finally , project the transformed design elements onto brand packaging carriers to complete the design implementation .

If one examines the usual Shikumen buildings of Shanghai in detail , then it is possible to isolate three main visual parts—gate header , facade and detailed decorations—as being especially characteristic. Gate headers make use of both the old Western-style triangular lintel and newer Art Deco geometric forms , which may be reduced effectively to simple vector graphics with geometric simplification .With regard to facade organization , the special proportions of the traditional " three - bay hall with two wing rooms " pattern lend themselves to conversion into modular modern designs .Brickwork texture or elements of doors and windows (in their actual forms) may now be reconstructed by means of parametric digital modeling . [5]

3.2.2. Express Meanings via Shapes — Imagery Projection of Lilong Sentiments and Metropolitan Temperament

Projection of Shikumen architectural symbols in an image form should not be limited merely to formal imitation , but should consider urban memory and humanistic sentiment behind them .With regard to packaging design , one must aim at cultural imagery that is capable of awakening consumer memory or emotional involvement by means of visual language .On a practical level , the special atmosphere of lilong life may be brought back in many forms:illustrations of detail help recall scenes—of children, of gossiping neighbors; typesetting with care can imitate the cadence of street cries;color combinations thoughtfully chosen may revive the public memory of old Shanghai life .Such design languages—taken together—serve to create a warmly familiar emotional setting.

At the same time , the translation of Shikumen symbols must bear some relation to the present-day character of Shanghai .Geometric lines used briefly are suited to the logic or rationality of Shanghai - type culture;dynamic forms stand for an energetic vitality of the city .There is no mechanical piling up of old and new elements here , but rather a genuine interplay - one shaped by ingenuity - of historical recollection with aesthetic trends, as seen in the combined use of various design languages.

On a more basic level, the projection of Shikumen cultural imagery is bound to Shanghai ’ s special urban character .Chinese - Western forms of decorative detail—on lintels or elsewhere—show openness and tolerance; compactness with regard to spatial use is itself an economical and intelligent idea; an interweaving of cultures is consistent with the city’s tradition of welcoming all rivers .Such visual expressions of spiritual facts help explain why architectural symbols of Shikumen type may be beautiful not merely in form , but also richly cultural in content .

4. Compatibility Analysis Between Packaging Design and the Translation of Shikumen Symbols

There is a natural formal fit between Shikumen architectural symbols and brand souvenir packaging design, mainly reflected in the commonality of spatial structure. The most prominent feature of Shikumen architecture is its longitudinal three-entry layout and unique gate header shape, which corresponds to the multi-layer storage structure of modern gift boxes. Designers can extract the three-section facade structure of Shikumen — "lintel – door frame – doorway" — and transform it into the opening method and layered internal structure of gift boxes.

4.1. Formal Consistency — Spatial Commonality Between Gift Boxes and Shikumen Buildings

With regard to physical form , the logic of structure followed by Shikumen architecture coincides closely with the logic of gift box packaging .Its gradual unfolding—gate, courtyard, and then interior—corresponds exactly to a layered sequence of gift box components:packaging, lining, and finally contents .Such an architectural–packaging parallelism allows one to translate spatial experience into that of unpacking something .If the gate’s opening (in stone) and the progressive spatial feel are simulated properly , designerscan help customers to meet Shikumen architecture’s charm at each stage of unpacking.

4.2. Imagery Resonance — Emotional Alignment Between User Demands and Cultural Symbols

From the perspective of emotional value, Shikumen architectural symbols have unique emotional appeal and fit well with users’ psychological needs. As a typical representative of Shanghai’s regional culture, Shikumen architecture carries the collective memory and emotional attachment of old Shanghai residents, and also bears the dual image of exquisite Shanghai-style life. Moreover, Shikumen has become a symbolic city card of Shanghai. Its innovative translation is not only the activation and utilization of architectural heritage, but also the contemporary interpretation of the city’s spiritual totem. In design practice, this deep emotional connection can be further strengthened through the refined design of "memory touch points", allowing consumers to gain emotional resonance while obtaining functional experience.

5. Design Integration of Shikumen Architectural Symbols into Brand Packaging

5.1. Design Path

Translation of Shikumen architectural symbols into souvenir packaging design amounts to an encoding and decoding operation involving cultural symbols .With regard to Peirce ’ s tripartite theory of signs , Shikumen may be called the " representamen " with its " object " indicating a particular

kind of Shanghai - related architecture (the Shanghai style) ,and its " interpretant " — whether visual or not — triggering recollection of urban life or of cultural identity .For such packaging, the symbol conversion has to meet a double standard:it must relate both to 3D architecture and to 2D representation , and to physical space and to emotional valuation .

Based on the research on the visual form of Shikumen architectural symbols and contemporary design trend expression ,combined with survey data on consumers ' cultural identity and the cultural attribute positioning of souvenir products ,the core design positioning of Shanghai Shikumen Guochao - style souvenir packaging is established .At the physical level , the iconic contour features of Shikumen architecture are extracted , presented artistically through modern line - drawing illustrations ,and the opening and closing structure of the gift box is cleverly combined with architectural form features .At the same time , a series of illustrations vividly present the life scenes in Shikumen lilongs , awakening the collective cultural memory they carry through visual narration .At the imagery level , the design digs into the spiritual and cultural connotations behind Shikumen architectural symbols ,and transforms the core characteristics of Shanghai - style culture—" integration of Chinese and Western ,inclusiveness and openness "—into specific design language .Through methods such as material contrast and color metaphor , the organic integration of traditional architectural spirit and modern aesthetic demands is realized on the premise of meeting functional needs . [6-7]

5.2. Design Practice

From the standpoint of implementation , the design uses the approach called " combining form and meaning ":it gives more weight to visual identification by means of geometrical treatment of architectural forms; it also brings in humanistic warmth by means of careful description of life-related details .

5.2.1. Extract Forms — Translation of Morphological Factors

Appropriate carrier selection is the prerequisite for the rational application of Shikumen modeling elements. According to the adaptability analysis of Shikumen architectural symbols and brand packaging design above, the natural spatial commonality between the two provides a realistic basis for the cross-border application of Shikumen symbols. Therefore, the packaging box is designed as a double-opening gift box, and line-drawn Shikumen architectural illustrations are presented on the surface of the gift box (Figure 1) to enhance product visual recognition and highlight its cultural attributes.

Figure 1. Gift box opening structure design

5.2.2. Extract Meanings — Creative Expression of Cultural Memory

The creative application of lilong culture is realized through playful illustrations .The works select the most vivid daily scenes of Shikumen communities:steaming breakfast stalls at dawn , clotheslines strung across alleyways , old general stores glowing with warm yellow lights at dusk , all of which carry unique urban emotional memories .Adopting a flat design style with minimalist geometric shapes and bright color blocks , the visuals retain the warm texture of traditional daily life while conforming to modern aesthetic trends .A multi - view collage composition artfully juxtaposes lilong moments from different times of day , and rhythmic variations of graphic elements metaphoricallyecho the lively atmosphere of street vendors ' cries and neighbors ' casual chatter in the alleys (Figure 2) .Different from simply copying real - life scenes , this group of illustrations artistically refines the earthly vitality of lilong life into contemporary visual symbols ,turning packaging into a cultural carrier bearing collective urban memory.

Figure 2. Lilong illustration design

5.2.3. Extract Spirit — Expression of Connotative Semantics

Both the physical form of a thing and the imagery of cultural memory are ultimately oriented toward transmission of deeper cultural meanings .Such an expression of meaning is not a crude transfer of symbols, but one that demands — via design language — three stages of sublimation, namely:

Start by analyzing the features of Shanghai - style culture .The architectural type known as " Chinese - Western integration " of Shikumen is to be reinterpreted—not as a relic but—as part of an organic whole (tradition + modernity) in design .Among possible approaches is the combination of Western geometry with Oriental aesthetics to form new visual tensions.

Secondly , think about the urban spirit. The urban character of Shanghai (as shown by Shikumen)—its openness , tolerance , practicality or ingenuity—may be communicated quite well by means of flowing lines and of detailed treatment of function in design .Such an approach avoids crude preaching and enables the consumer to absorb the idea gradually during actual use of the item.

What is most important is to interpret the philosophy of life today — not in isolation .The very compact and economical handling of space by Shikumen points to an individual Shanghainese life wisdom .With regard to packaging design , such a pragmatic attitude lends itself well to a modern visual idiom, one that may profitably employ modular or multifunctional configurations as forms of innovation.

This in-depth cultural translation makes packaging transcend the simple function of commodity container and become a cultural medium connecting history and present,

tradition and modernity. When consumers use it, they can not only feel the visual beauty, but also appreciate the cultural depth and spiritual value contained in it, truly achieving the design effect of "extracting spirit to convey charm". The final Guochao-style souvenir packaging design integrated with Shikumen architectural symbols is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Guochao-style souvenir packaging integrated with Shikumen architectural symbols

6. Conclusion

With the recent emergence of the New Guochao consumption trend in mind , it is now timely—and worth detailed study—to ask how traditional architectural symbols may be creatively transformed for use in modern design .Focusing on Shanghai Shikumen culture as an object of analysis ,the present work breaks down its many - layered meanings semiotically ,and proposes a three - tier model of " Form–Meaning–Spirit " tied to the actual properties of packaging design .It departs from the usual pattern—of bare element extraction or shallow deployment—found in most prior work,by emphasizing movement from formal identification to emotional attachment and finally to spiritual expression—it neither reduces Shikumen culture to insignificance nor allows its symbols to lose their aesthetic character, but instead reinterprets them flexibly in a modern idiom.

From the perspective of practical value, this design method transforms abstract architectural elements into perceivable visual and experiential content, which helps to enhance the cultural added value of souvenir packaging, and also provides a specific implementation path for the creative transformation of Shanghai regional cultural resources. It should be noted that this study currently focuses on the static visual presentation of physical packaging, and the exploration of interactive packaging and digital cultural creative scenarios is still insufficient. Follow-up research can further expand the application scenarios of Shikumen symbols, and try to combine digital media technology to realize more diversified cultural communication forms. In general, the modern translation of traditional cultural symbols is never just a formal design problem, but also a contemporary interpretation of urban cultural spirit. The design practice based on Shikumen symbols also interprets Shanghai's urban character of inclusiveness and innovation from the design dimension.

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