

# From the Perspective of Cultural Materialism, Traditional and Religious Art Serve as Dynamic Source Codes for Interdisciplinary Creation

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**Abstract:** Contemporary interdisciplinary creation faces the dilemma of homogenization and symbolic appropriation, with traditional and religious art often simplified into superficial visual elements. The perspective of cultural materialism reveals the essential attributes of traditional and religious art deeply rooted in material practice and social context. As a "living source code", it includes three core components: formal rules, symbolic meaning, and bodily skills. Combined with new technological media, it can achieve deep innovation in interdisciplinary creation. This article analyzes practical cases in fields such as digital installation art, new media images, and architectural design to demonstrate the application logic of "live source code" - not replicating traditional symbols, but extracting their material practical logic for contemporary translation. Research has shown that the dynamic inheritance characteristics of traditional and religious art endow it with sustained creativity, providing cultural roots and practical paths for interdisciplinary creation, and promoting the dialectical unity of tradition and modernity in contemporary art and design.

**Keywords:** Cultural Materialism, Traditional Religious Art, Living Source Code, Interdisciplinary Creation, Formal Translation, And Technological Integration.

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## 1. Introduction

In the context of globalization and digitization, interdisciplinary creation has become a mainstream trend in fields such as art, design, and architecture. The integration of media and collision of ideas between disciplines brings about diverse possibilities, but also leads to the homogenization problem of "emphasizing form over connotation" - traditional art elements are often stripped away from their original context and reduced to meaningless decorative symbols, which not only dissolve their cultural value but also make works lack a deep spiritual core. Traditional and religious art are the crystallization of human long-term material practice and spiritual activities, not static heritage, but a "living" existence that is continuously practiced and transformed in inheritance. Raymond Williams' theory of cultural materialism breaks the notion that culture is the "superstructure" and emphasizes that culture is the "sum of the whole way of life". Art is deeply rooted in material production, social relations, and daily practice. This perspective provides a key to examining its contemporary value: its essence is a complete system that includes material carriers, practical logic, and cultural significance, possessing the derivatibility and creativity of "source code", and becoming a "living source code" for interdisciplinary creation due to continuous updates and inheritance [1]. This article is based on the framework of cultural materialism, exploring the composition and application path of traditional and religious art as "living source code". Through case analysis of their interdisciplinary practical effects, it argues that only by deeply exploring their material practical logic rather than symbol appropriation can cultural innovation be achieved in interdisciplinary creation. The research not only provides theoretical support for the contemporary transformation of traditional art, but also provides reference for interdisciplinary creation to overcome the homogenization

dilemma.

## 2. Traditional and Religious Art from the Perspective of Cultural Materialism

### 2.1. The Core Position of Cultural Materialism

Cultural materialism was founded by British scholar Raymond Williams, whose core viewpoint is to break the binary opposition between the "economic base superstructure" and advocate that culture is not a passive product of the economic base, but a "practical process" that interacts with material production and social structure. From this perspective, culture runs through daily production, life, and rituals, and the value of art lies not only in aesthetic expression, but also in the unity of its material carrier, creative skills, and social functions. For example, the firing process of bricks and stones and the mortise and tenon structure of wood in ancient Chinese architecture are both technical practices and concrete manifestations of ritual culture. Cultural materialism emphasizes the importance of "historical context" and "material practice": the emergence and development of any art form are subject to the production tools, material characteristics, and social needs of a specific era. Talking about art without material practice can only yield abstract fragments of symbols. This theory provides a key method for interpreting traditional and religious art - starting from the "material logic behind the form" rather than just focusing on surface visual features.

### 2.2. Materiality and Vitality of Traditional and Religious Art

The essence of traditional and religious art is the crystallization of material practice. From the perspective of material carriers, the painting of Buddhist mandalas relies on the characteristics of mineral pigments and rice paper, the

generation of Islamic geometric patterns is directly related to mosaic inlay techniques, and the practice of Chinese feng shui concepts closely follows the physical properties of terrain, climate, and building materials [2]. These art forms are not purely spiritual concepts, but practical achievements formed by creators through the interaction between their bodies and material materials, in response to social needs such as religious practice and ethnic identity. At the same time, traditional and religious art have a distinct "liveliness". This dynamism is not a static form, but a continuous update of the core practical logic. For example, the principle of "symmetrical composition and central radiation" in Buddhist mandalas has maintained logical continuity from ancient murals to contemporary digital installations, but the carrier has changed from mineral pigments to digital pixels; The "stroke technique" of Chinese calligraphy, from brush writing to digital brush application, the core "force control and rhythm change" have not disappeared, but have adapted to new media to achieve transformation. The unity of materiality and liveliness endows traditional and religious art with the attribute of "source code" - its formal rules and technical methods can be "compiled" through interdisciplinary media and transformed into new achievements in contemporary creation. The value of cultural materialism lies in revealing the material practical essence of this "source code" and avoiding it from being simplified into abstract symbols.

### **3. Composition and Use of Active Source Code**

Traditional and religious art, as interdisciplinary "living source code", are not composed of surface symbols, but rather of formal rules, symbolic meanings, and bodily skills that run through material practice. The combination of these three with new technological media forms the "compilation and operation" path of source code.

#### **3.1. Drawing on Formal Rules**

The formal rules of traditional and religious art are the "efficient logic" formed through long-term material practice. The symmetrical composition of Buddhist mandalas originates from the spatial order requirement of "center as reverence and coordination in all directions" and human perception of balance; The principle of "leaving blank space" in Chinese traditional painting is not only constrained by the material characteristics of Xuan paper ink painting, but also in line with the philosophy of "the interplay between reality and virtuality"; The infinite cycle of Islamic geometric patterns is highly unified with mosaic modular craftsmanship and the concept of "divine infinity". The core of interdisciplinary creation that draws on formal rules is to extract the unified logic of "material function meaning" rather than replicating the form. For example, graphic design transforms the "central radiation" of a mandala into information layout logic, with core information centered and auxiliary information layered and diffused; Industrial design draws on the proportion logic of traditional objects' "functional adaptation to the human body and visual coordination" and applies it to product form design, allowing traditional principles to gain contemporary functional value.

#### **3.2. Conversion of Symbolic Meaning**

The symbolic significance of traditional and religious art is the unity of material practice and spiritual needs. The symbol

of "imperial power and auspiciousness" of dragons originated from the ancient society's reverence for natural forces and the need for ethnic cohesion; The mandala "lotus" symbolizes "purity and transcendence", which is related to the characteristics of plants and also in line with the spiritual pursuit of Buddhism; Feng Shui's "mountains surrounded by water embrace" symbolizes "storing wind and gathering qi", and is essentially a summary of the experience of a livable environment. In interdisciplinary creation, the core of symbolic meaning is "contextual transformation": contemporary ecological art transforms the symbol of the dragon into "ecological balance", combining natural elements to convey environmental demands; In new media art, the meaning of mandala's "cultivation" has been transformed into "digital meditation", which uses interactive generation to alleviate anxiety in the digital age and continue the core function of constructing spiritual order [3].

#### **3.3. Application of Physical Skills**

The core values of traditional and religious art are embodied in the "bodily skills" formed by the interaction between the body and matter. Chinese embroidery relies on precise control of thread tension and needle tip angle by fingers, and the texture cannot be replicated by machines; Before drawing thangka, one needs to practice and maintain focused meditation during the process. The artwork becomes a "trace of physical practice"; The Tai Chi movement paradigm embodies the rhythm and force logic of "unity of body and mind". The key to the application of physical skills in interdisciplinary creation is "logical transformation": dance art extracts the logic of Tai Chi's "overcoming hardness with softness and synchronizing breathing and movement" and transforms it into rhythm control; Digital art uses motion capture to convert the ups and downs of calligraphy strokes into digital brush parameters, preserving the temperature of body traces; The architectural design draws inspiration from the modular adaptation logic of mortise and tenon joints and transforms it into a modern detachable design that meets environmental protection needs.

#### **3.4. Combining New Technological Media**

New technological media provides a new "compilation environment" for "live source code", while digital technology VR/AR、Artificial intelligence and other technologies not only expand presentation forms, but also activate the contemporary value of deep logic. The combination of the two follows the principle of "complementarity rather than substitution": VR technology can construct virtual spaces, allowing viewers to immerse themselves in the spatial logic of Feng Shui's "mountain ring water embrace" and understand its environmental adaptation wisdom; Artificial intelligence extracts mandala composition rules to generate infinite variations, requiring creators to inject contemporary meaning to avoid mechanical replication [4]; 3D printing technology enables the application of mortise and tenon "bite logic" in modern furniture design, breaking through the limitations of traditional materials. This combination enhances the adaptability of "live source code", allowing the core values of traditional art to be perceived by more people and providing diverse paths for interdisciplinary creation.

## 4. Analysis of Interdisciplinary Creative Examples

### 4.1. In the Field of Digital and Installation Art: Algorithmic Translation and Spatial Expression of Buddhist Mandalas

The Buddhist mandala follows the core formal principles of "symmetry, layering, and central radiation", and the drawing process is a material practice of religious practice, embodying the symbolic meaning of "building order and returning to the origin". The translation of mandalas in contemporary digital and installation art revolves around extracting their formal rules and spiritual essence, and achieving interdisciplinary innovation through algorithms and spatial media. The digital installation work *Machine Hallucinations: Mandala* by Türkiye artist Refik Anadol is a typical case of algorithm translation. The team extracts the core logic of "central origin circular layering symmetrical iteration" from Tibetan Buddhist thangka and Hindu mandala, integrates natural data such as starry sky trajectories, and generates dynamic digital mandalas through algorithm visualization, presenting them as giant projections in architectural spaces. The audience can perceive the "sense of order" and "sacredness" of the mandala while also experiencing the natural rhythm through dynamic data. The innovation of the work lies in retaining the unified logic of "formal rules spiritual meaning": the circulation of data corresponds to the symbol of "infinity", the immersive experience of space echoes the "focused state" of practice, and the integration of natural data transforms the "divine order" into contemporary "ecological order" thinking, activating the core practical logic of the "order construction tool" of the mandala through digital media.

### 4.2. Mandala Images in New Media

The core of mandala creation on new media platforms is to achieve contemporary symbolic transformation through interactivity, with a greater emphasis on audience participation, transforming "personal cultivation" into "public participation". The "digital mandala painting live broadcast" on platforms such as Tiktok and Xiaohongshu, the creator follows the principle of symmetrical composition and color harmony, and integrates contemporary life symbols such as coffee cups and green plants. The audience makes suggestions through the pop-up screen, and the work becomes a microcosm of collective wisdom and life scenes. In this mode, the symbolic meaning of the mandala shifts from "religious practice" to "construction of life order", allowing contemporary people to obtain spiritual peace through participation in a fast-paced environment, continuing its core function of "relieving anxiety and building inner balance". The *Mandala Interactive Wall* at the Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art achieves interaction through touch sensing technology: the wall is pre-set with a basic framework, and the audience's touch triggers color and element changes to jointly complete the dynamic work. Its symbolic meaning extends to "community connection", where each touch action is a part of the work, symbolizing the individual's value and connection in the community, and adapting to the contemporary needs of community identity [5].

### 4.3. Feng Shui Concepts in Architectural Design

Feng Shui is a traditional spatial planning system in China, with the core concept of "adapting to local conditions and harmonizing heaven and man". Essentially, it is an experiential summary of terrain, climate, and building materials, which is in line with the cultural materialism that "material practice determines cultural form". The reference of Feng Shui in contemporary architecture is to extract the unified logic of "space environment human" to achieve interdisciplinary integration. The Suzhou Museum designed by I.M. Pei is a classic example of the combination of feng shui and modern architecture. The site is located in the core area of the ancient city of Suzhou, and the core logic of Feng Shui is extracted as "storing wind and gathering air, and relying on mountains and rivers": the main body faces north and south to ensure natural lighting and ventilation, the entrance stone rockery simulates natural mountains and rivers to store wind and gather air, and the internal central axis layout takes into account Feng Shui order and exhibition functions. The slate rockery achieves traditional visual effects and load-bearing requirements through modern concrete technology, and the central axis layout balances traditional logic and visitor flow, proving that the core of feng shui is the scientific grasp of the relationship between "human environment architecture", which can provide important reference for modern architecture.

### 4.4. Comparison of Different Cases

Although the media and scenarios of the cases in the three fields are different, they all follow the application logic of "live source code", presenting distinct similarities and differences: in commonality, all three extract core practical logic rather than surface symbols to achieve contemporary transformation of symbolic meaning, and combine new technologies to expand the expression space: digital installation art focuses on the "form spirit" logic of mandalas, new media creation focuses on the "order construction mind balance" function, and architectural design extracts the "space environment human" adaptation logic of Feng Shui. In terms of differences, digital installation art focuses on "spatial immersion" and enhances sensory experience; New media creation focuses on "interactive participation" to activate community value; Architectural design focuses on "practical functions" and integrates the material attributes of the building. This difference stems from the core requirements of the discipline, but is based on the core logic of "live source code". The comparison of cases shows that the value of traditional and religious art lies not in the form itself, but in the unified logic of material practice and spiritual needs behind it. The key to the success of interdisciplinary creation is to find the intersection between this logic and contemporary needs, and to achieve the integration of tradition and modernity through media transformation [6].

## 5. Conclusion

The perspective of cultural materialism provides a new interpretation of the contemporary value of traditional and religious art: it is not a static historical heritage, but a "living source code" deeply rooted in material practice and possessing the characteristics of living inheritance. This source code consists of three core components: formal rules, symbolic meaning, and bodily skills, which are interrelated

and unified in material practice, providing a core logic that can be derived and transformed for interdisciplinary creation. The use of "live source code" in interdisciplinary creation is not about replicating traditional symbols, but rather about achieving contemporary translation of traditional core logic through formal borrowing, meaning transformation, and technical logic transformation, combined with new technologies. Case studies in fields such as digital installation art, new media creation, and architectural design demonstrate that this translation not only preserves the cultural roots and core values of traditional art, but also endows it with contemporary new functions and meanings, effectively solving the homogenization dilemma of interdisciplinary creation. The vitality of traditional and religious art endows it with continuous renewal. With the development of technology and changes in social demands, "live source code" will continue to gain new forms of expression, but its material practical logic and cultural core will always provide inspiration support for interdisciplinary creation. Future interdisciplinary creation should further explore the material and practical essence of traditional art, strengthen the dialogue between disciplines and traditional art, promote the inheritance of traditional vitality and contemporary innovation, and achieve the unity of cultural value and practical value. The limitation of this study lies in its narrow coverage of traditional and religious art, mainly focusing on

Buddhist mandalas and Chinese feng shui concepts. In the future, it can be expanded to more fields such as Islamic art and folk traditional art to further verify the universality of the theory.

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