

Textile Pattern Design and Cultural Geography: A Case Study of *A Pattern for Pepper*

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Abstract:

This paper takes the Canadian English picture book *A Pattern for Pepper* as its research object to explore how various traditional textile patterns depicted in the book reflect their corresponding regional cultural characteristics. It further analyzes the visual communication function and cultural educational potential of pattern design in children's literature. By integrating theories from cultural geography, visual semiotics, and multicultural transmission in children's literature, this study reveals the narrative and identity-building roles that pattern design plays in cross-cultural contexts. The book features representative patterns such as herringbone, tartan, ikat, and toile, which embody the aesthetic styles and social traditions of Europe, Asia, and other regions. Through the synergy of image and text, these patterns are vividly introduced into children's everyday reading experiences. The study argues that such a pattern-based mode of cultural expression not only enhances children's awareness of global cultural diversity but also provides a visualized foundation for developing global identity and aesthetic judgment. Finally, the paper highlights the multifaceted value of pattern design in visual education for children and advocates for its broader integration into cross-cultural understanding and curriculum planning.

Keywords:

Cultural Geography, Pattern Transmission, Visual Culture, Textile Folklore, Globalization in Children's Literature

1. Introduction

As an important branch of visual art, pattern design has long been widely applied in many fields such as architecture, clothing, and decoration. In the public impression, patterns are often regarded as decorative visual elements, functioning to beautify objects and attract attention. However, from the perspectives of cultural studies and visual anthropology, patterns are far more than surface decorations—they are precipitates of cultural memory, concrete expressions of regional aesthetics, and effective carriers for the dissemination of cultural symbols. Patterns contain the choice of materials, the evolution of craftsmanship, metaphors of lifestyle, as well as

the condensation of group identity, historical memory, and aesthetic taste. Especially in today's society where globalization and cross-cultural communication are increasingly frequent, the role of pattern design in cultural dissemination and identity construction has become more prominent.

Julie Kraulis, a picture book author and illustrator who graduated from the Ontario College of Art & Design University in Canada, created *A Pattern for Pepper* [4], a children's literature work with "the search for the ideal pattern" as the main thread. The book tells the story of a girl named Pepper who customizes the first dress in her life for the special occasion of attending her grandmother's birthday, and in the process of selecting fabrics in a tailor's shop, comes into contact with various traditional patterns from around the world. She goes through comparison and selection from herringbone, houndstooth, tartan, to ikat, toile, and other patterns, each fabric vividly introduced by Mr. Taylor, the tailor, with its place of origin, traditional uses, and cultural implications. This narrative structure of a "visual journey" not only provides young readers with a rich aesthetic experience but also constructs a concise and enlightening pathway of cultural-geographical knowledge.

This study aims to take this picture book as a case to explore the cultural-geographical dimensions behind patterns and analyze how the textile patterns displayed therein reflect the social and cultural background, aesthetic tradition, and functional logic of their places of origin. This paper attempts to answer the following questions: How do these patterns become visual expressions of "cultural symbols"? How is the regionality of patterns visualized and narrativized in the verbal and pictorial context of the picture book? By coming into contact with these cross-cultural patterns, how do young readers build an initial global cultural awareness through silent images? Through these analyses, this paper intends to reveal how pattern design undertakes the function of cultural transmission in children's literature and further demonstrate the potential of visual art in cross-cultural understanding and education under the context of globalization.

2. Theoretical Framework and Review of Relevant Studies

A Pattern for Pepper constructs a cross-regional path of children's visual cultural experience using patterns as the medium. In order to analyze more deeply how patterns carry cultural-geographical information and function in communication within the picture book, this paper adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework by integrating perspectives from cultural geography, visual semiotics, and multicultural studies in children's literature, and briefly reviews scholarly achievements in related fields.

2.1. The Perspective of Cultural Geography and the Spatial Significance of Textile Patterns

Cultural geography emphasizes the interactive relationship between culture and space, holding that localized cultural practices are not only constrained by geographical environment but are also continuously constructed and reproduced within space [7,3]. Patterns, as a kind of visual cultural symbol, are often closely related to specific geographical regions, modes of production, and ethnic customs. For example, the historical connection between "tartan" and the Scottish clan system, and the traditional hand-dyeing and weaving practices of Southeast Asia embodied in "ikat," are typical manifestations of the integration between culture and regional space.

Cultural geography studies emphasize how local experiences are externalized and disseminated through material culture, which provides an analytical foundation for understanding the cultural origins and spatial orientation of patterns in *A Pattern for Pepper*.

2.2. Visual Semiotics of Pattern Design and the Production of Meaning

Patterns are not only decorative motifs but also systems for the generation of meaning. According to the semiotics of design, patterns can be regarded as a kind of visual language, in which color, composition, repeated elements, etc., all constitute specific cultural codes [1,5]. In children's picture books, the transmission of patterns often employs techniques such as "personification" and "narrativization" to lower the threshold of understanding, enabling complex cultural information to be delivered through images as a form of "explicit education." In *A Pattern for Pepper*, each pattern is endowed with personality and narrative attributes through illustrations and dialogue, and behind these are cultural interpretations of symbolic systems. By interpreting this visual language, we can analyze how these images generate meaning, guide emotions, and establish identification in children's visual reading.

2.3. Multicultural Communication in Children's Literature

With the diversification of cultural education in the context of globalization, children's literature is increasingly regarded as an important platform for spreading cross-cultural understanding and building global perspectives [2,6]. Image texts with "cultural permeability," especially in the form of picture books, possess even greater potential to intuitively convey foreign cultures and stimulate cross-cultural cognition. Kraulis's picture book is precisely a reflection of this multicultural educational concept. In the process of selecting patterns, Pepper indirectly completes a cultural-geographical journey—without being physically present, she has already touched the visual styles and philosophies of life from various cultures through patterns. This latent mechanism of constructing children's global cultural perception is precisely an important topic in current image text studies.

3. Analysis of Patterns and Regional Cultures in *A Pattern for Pepper*

A Pattern for Pepper takes the protagonist Pepper's selection of dress fabric as the narrative thread, and through the sequential presentation of classic textile patterns from around the world, transforms a fairy tale-like coming-of-age ritual into a visual journey that crosses geographical and cultural boundaries. Each fabric pattern not only possesses a unique aesthetic style but is also deeply rooted in the historical context of its regional culture. This section will analyze, in the order of appearance of the patterns, their cultural origins, visual characteristics, and regional symbolism, and explore the narrative functions they carry within the picture book.

3.1. Herringbone: Natural Metaphors in Linear Order (Europe)

The first pattern introduced to Pepper is herringbone, inspired by the arrangement form of herring bones, commonly used in suits, floor tiles, and wooden flooring. This pattern embodies a strict, continuous, and highly ordered linear structure, representing the rational aesthetics in European architecture and clothing. In the picture book, Mr. Taylor points to the floor to explain this pattern, implying that patterns originate from the observation and abstraction of daily life, highlighting the implicit connection between nature and design.

3.2. Tartan: Visualization of National Identity and Family Tradition (Scotland)

Tartan is a typical Scottish plaid pattern, closely associated with Highland culture and the clan system of Scotland. Its combination of colors and lines represents the identity of specific families or regions and serves as a visual symbol of collective identity. In the book, Mr. Taylor's suit is taken as an example, and its multiple uses (including for bagpipes) are mentioned, constructing a cultural atmosphere of tradition and ritual, suggesting that patterns are not only beautiful but also a kind of history worn on the body.

3.3. Houndstooth: A Symbol of Power in Aristocratic Aesthetics (England/Scotland)

Houndstooth, commonly known as "dogtooth pattern," is composed of strong black-and-white contrasts forming a sharp and rhythmic pattern, originating from Scottish hunting attire. In the book, Mr. Taylor tells how his grandfather wore this fabric while hunting in the Scottish Lowlands, showing its historical connection to power, masculinity, and the elite class. Pepper's comment on its lack of color also reflects a modern aesthetic re-examination of traditional patterns.

3.4. Ikat: Complex Aesthetics of Hand-Dyeing and Weaving (Malay-Indonesia-Central Asia)

Ikat originates from Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and other regions. It is a textile technique that achieves blurred-edge patterns through a process of dyeing the yarns before weaving. The word comes from the Malay-Indonesian language "ikat," meaning "to tie, to bind." The book emphasizes its complicated production process, which serves as an enlightening introduction to non-Western traditional handicrafts for child readers, and also implicitly conveys respect for craft culture and technical wisdom.

3.5. Argyle: The Fusion of Sports and Aristocratic Leisure (Scottish Highlands)

Argyle patterns are formed by interlaced diamonds and diagonal lines and were widely used in golf clothing, symbolizing the leisure lifestyle of the Scottish upper class. Pepper discovers this pattern through a pair of socks—an intimate item—presenting how patterns infiltrate everyday life and become a subtle transmission of class culture from a child's perspective.

3.6. Pinstripe: Discipline and Self-Restraint in Modern Cities (Europe and America)

Pinstripe is commonly seen in men's formal wear and represents the typical dress of professionals such as bankers and lawyers. In the book, this pattern is presented through the clothing of a passerby, and Pepper thinks it "looks a bit gloomy," demonstrating children's instinctive resistance to monotonous and serious patterns. Here, pinstripe symbolizes the disciplinary culture of urban society, forming a contrast with the free imagination of childhood.

3.7. Dotted Swiss: Visual Representation of Romanticism and Feminine Qualities (Switzerland)

Dotted Swiss is a kind of light and thin gauze produced in Switzerland, embroidered with small dots, and often used for wedding dresses or girls' clothing. In the book, this pattern is presented through a wedding photo of Pepper's grandmother, implying the intergenerational transmission of aesthetics. Although Pepper does not

ultimately choose this pattern, her comment that it is “too plain” reveals a childlike aesthetic preference for “liveliness” and “color.”

3.8. Toile: Pastoral Fantasy in Pictorial Narration (France)

Toile de Jouy originates from eighteenth-century France and often depicts scenes of rural life, with complex composition and rich narrative quality. In the book, it appears as the fabric of a chair, and Pepper comments that “the picture is too complicated,” exposing the visual resistance that pattern complexity may cause in childhood reading, while also emphasizing that a “suitable” pattern must take both aesthetics and function into consideration.

4. Pattern Design and the Dissemination of Visual Culture

As a type of composite text that features the “co-construction of text and image,” picture books use visual language not only to serve narrative purposes but also as effective mediums for the dissemination of cultural content. *A Pattern for Pepper* precisely integrates textile cultures with distinct regional characteristics into the development of the plot and interactions between characters through the symbolically meaningful visual element of patterns, constructing a clear and vivid pathway for visual cultural dissemination that is accessible to child readers. This section will explore the visual dissemination mechanism of pattern design in the picture book from three dimensions: the visual language function of patterns, the image expression strategies of cross-cultural content, and the mediating role of patterns in character identity construction.

4.1. The Narrative Function of Patterns as Visual Language

In this picture book, patterns are not merely fabric decorations, but rather a readable form of “visual language” [5]. The appearance of each pattern is accompanied by Mr. Taylor’s brief explanation of its cultural background and visual presentation, making the pattern a core element for information transmission. The repetitive structure, color matching, and spatial arrangement of the patterns themselves constitute a highly recognizable system of visual symbols, allowing readers to “read the images” while “looking at them.” Through Pepper’s observations and evaluations of the patterns, readers subconsciously learn the cultural connotations and aesthetic styles referenced by the patterns. This image-based mode of knowledge dissemination lowers the threshold of cultural understanding and is especially suitable for the cognitive reception of young children.

4.2. Image Expression Strategies of Cross-Cultural Content

To help children understand textile patterns from different cultures, *A Pattern for Pepper* adopts personification, scenarization, and comparative expression strategies. First, the patterns are “characterized,” such as ikat being described as “complex and entangled,” pinstripe giving an “oppressive” impression, and tartan being endowed with a “traditional and solemn” temperament. This emotional expression makes the patterns easier to perceive and remember. Second, each pattern is placed within a specific, familiar, or concrete context: the grandmother’s wedding dress, the fabric of a chair, the pattern on a pair of socks, the clothing of a passerby on the street, etc. This “domestication” not only enhances the perceptibility of the patterns but also strengthens the possibility for children to integrate “foreign cultures” into their own experiences. Finally, Pepper’s process of continuous comparison and rejection

constructs a framework of “critical selection,” in which child readers may form preliminary cross-cultural judgments and aesthetic preferences.

4.3. Pattern Design and the Construction of Character Identity

Patterns are ultimately not only used to tell cultural stories but also deeply participate in the process of character identity construction. That Pepper eventually chooses the pattern “that belongs to her” is based on her step-by-step experience, understanding, and rejection of various cultural patterns. This process of selection actually serves as a metaphor for the exploration, self-confirmation, and identity formation experienced by children when facing multicultural contexts. At the end of the picture book, Pepper and her grandmother are seen drinking tea and playing croquet in the sunshine, each wearing their respective patterned dresses. Here, patterns are no longer decorative graphics but visual symbols of intergenerational identification and cultural dialogue. This also shows that patterns in the picture book not only fulfill a cultural dissemination function but also participate in the symbolic construction of children’s identities, acting as a visual bridge connecting “the self” and “the other.”

5. The Connection Between Cultural Geography and Children’s Global Cognition

Against the backdrop of rapid globalization, the education sector increasingly emphasizes the cultivation of children’s global cognitive abilities. Image texts, especially picture books rich in cross-cultural content, have become important media for inspiring children’s diverse perspectives and cross-cultural understanding. *A Pattern for Pepper* takes pattern design as the thread, concretizing and visualizing regional culture, and guiding children in a relaxed and intimate manner to think about basic cognitive questions such as “Where does culture come from?” and “What is my relationship to it?” This section will explore, from three levels, how pattern design helps children establish a sense of cultural geography and thereby promotes the formation of their initial global cognitive ability.

5.1. From Regional Patterns to Global Vision: Constructing a Perceptual Path of Cultural Diversity

Although the patterns presented in *A Pattern for Pepper* originate from different countries and ethnicities, they are all introduced into Pepper’s real-life choices in a lively and perceptible way, allowing child readers to unknowingly complete a “cultural journey.” This geographical leap connected by patterns—from the Scottish tartan of the European Highlands, to the Southeast Asian ikat, and further to France’s toile and Switzerland’s dotted swiss—makes the cultural features of different regions visually juxtaposed and comparable. Through patterns as concrete media, the picture book guides children to perceive the richness and diversity of world cultures, laying a foundation for their deeper future understanding of culture and cross-cultural interaction.

5.2. Pattern Design as a Starting Point for Geographical Cognition and Cultural Imagination

In early childhood education, geographical knowledge is often conveyed through abstract concepts such as maps, landforms, and climate. However, *A Pattern for Pepper* uses patterns as an entry point, embedding “cultural geography” into concrete

objects, thereby concretizing the cognition of a “sense of place.” These patterns are not empty decorative elements but visual symbols with clear geographical coordinates and cultural stories. For example, Scotland’s tartan contains clan structures and regional identity; France’s toile carries pastoral ideals; the intricate craftsmanship of ikat points to Asian handcraft traditions. These patterns allow child readers not only to “know” that there are different cultures in the world, but also to “imagine” how these cultures live, create, and express themselves.

5.3. Pattern Selection and the Budding of Cultural Identity Awareness

Pepper’s journey is, to some extent, a dialogue between the self and culture. In the process of constant rejection and selection, she learns to think: “Who am I?” “What do I like?” “Which aesthetic context do I belong to?” Although these questions are still in the budding stage for a child, through the concrete act of “choosing a pattern,” the child begins to establish aesthetic judgment and a sense of cultural belonging at the cognitive level. This initial emergence of “cultural identity awareness” not only helps children build confidence in a diverse society but also provides them with psychological and cognitive preparation for understanding, respecting, and appreciating other cultures in the future.

6. Conclusions

This article centers on the picture book *A Pattern for Pepper* and, based on the core perspective of “pattern design and cultural geography,” analyzes the regional cultural connotations and visual communication functions carried by patterns in children’s literature texts. The study points out that this picture book takes patterns as a medium and, through the visual presentation and plot-based narration of a series of representative textile motifs, successfully transforms cultural symbols from around the world into an image language easily understandable by children, constructing a path of cultural geography dissemination that integrates both aesthetics and educational value.

Firstly, from the perspective of cultural geography, each pattern in the picture book is rooted in a specific regional space and cultural tradition, reflecting that pattern design is not an isolated aesthetic product, but a cultural crystallization shaped by a particular social group, historical background, and natural environment. Through visual techniques, readers can not only “see” traditional patterns from all over the world, but also preliminarily understand their cultural connotations and social functions.

Secondly, patterns play an important role in visual communication within the picture book. They are not only narrative tools that promote story development but also carriers for the formation of character personality, aesthetic taste, and cultural identity. In the process of choosing patterns, Pepper gradually distinguishes the meanings behind the patterns; this process symbolizes children’s exploration and positioning when facing multicultural contexts, and also reflects the potential of patterns as a “cultural language.”

Finally, this article emphasizes the inspirational value of pattern design in children’s global cognitive education. The picture book, through life-oriented situations and entertaining presentation methods, guides children to enter cultural understanding starting from sensory experience, and subtly completes the cognitive leap from “seeing patterns” to “understanding culture.” This kind of visual-based cultural

learning not only expands children's imagination of the world but also lays the foundation for them to construct an open and inclusive cultural identity in the context of globalization.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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