

# Research Status and Countermeasures of Colors and Elements in Dunhuang Murals Applied to Modern Theme Hotels

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## Abstract:

Entering the new era, the rapid economic development has brought numerous changes to people's lifestyles and values. China has always been a country with a huge population, and since the new era, it has also entered a new stage of development. With the completion of the poverty alleviation campaign, people's pursuit of a better life has been continuously improving, and the number of business and leisure travelers in China has also undergone a qualitative change. The development of the tourism industry has driven the vigorous growth of the hotel industry. Hotels involved in travel have inevitably become an indispensable part, and even a crucial factor in measuring and determining the quality of travel. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the artistic value of Dunhuang murals, a world cultural heritage. Starting from the decorative patterns in Dunhuang murals, it deeply explores the origin and evolution of these decorative patterns, conducts in-depth analysis, extraction, reference and reconstruction, and applies them to the design of modern theme hotels in combination with modern design techniques. The sole purpose is to better explore the new application methods and styles of the decorative patterns in Dunhuang murals in modern hotel space design, and to inherit and develop traditional Chinese culture.

## Keywords:

Dunhuang Murals, Theme Hotels, Color Design, Cultural Elements, Modern Translation, Spatial Narrative

## 1. Introduction

With the continuous improvement of living standards, people have higher requirements for accommodation when traveling. They not only want it to be comfortable and clean, but also hope that it can reflect local cultural characteristics. Contemporary young people are under a lot of pressure in the fast-paced life. During their leisure time/holidays, they prefer to stay away from the city to enjoy natural scenery/culture. Dunhuang, located in the northwest of China, is a national intangible cultural heritage with a profound historical and cultural heritage. Since Mr. Zhang Daqian discovered its artistic value, Dunhuang murals have been influencing and

leading future generations, cultivating generations of art masters. The artistic forms and characteristics of Dunhuang murals show people the history and culture of thousands of years. The combination of Chinese traditions presents the most refined essence to people. Dunhuang murals express the Chinese nation's infinite yearning for beauty and persistent pursuit of a better life [1], and also show the aesthetic course of Dunhuang and classical China for thousands of years, making it a spiritual yearning for modern people. Therefore, starting from the innovation and application of colors and elements in Dunhuang murals, this paper combines the indoor color design needs of theme hotels, discusses the design points of applying Dunhuang murals' colors and elements in theme hotel spaces, provides new ideas for the spatial color design of Dunhuang cultural theme hotels, and enables people to not only live comfortably but also better feel the local culture and immerse themselves in it when traveling.

## **2. Research Content**

The content of Dunhuang murals is very rich, including Buddha statues, donor portraits, story paintings, traditional national myth themes, etc. Except for decorative paintings, all other paintings have plots. They reflect the social reality of the time through some religious story themes and then show the social scenes in the form of religious art [3]. This paper mainly focuses on how to better express the cultural connotation of the decorative patterns in Dunhuang murals and apply them to interior design to make them better play their artistic functions.

## **3. Research Purpose**

Dunhuang murals are located in the arid northwest region of China. Due to their long history, even with protective measures, they still undergo fading and other problems every day. Moreover, Dunhuang mural art contains a wealth of content and is a highly comprehensive art form. Through the inheritance and development of past dynasties, Dunhuang murals have perfectly reflected the course of China's economic, cultural, religious and political development [2]. With the development of the times, the elements of Dunhuang patterns have been continuously applied in modern design. The effective combination of traditional design elements and modern design integrates traditional culture into people's lives and better inherits our excellent culture.

## **4. Analysis of the Development Status of Domestic Cultural Theme Hotels**

The grade of China's theme hotels is basically positioned in the high-end market, and more than half of China's theme hotels are four-star or above. This is mainly because China's theme hotels pay more attention to providing differentiated, personalized high-quality services and customers' own value experience in their operations, and these target customers have higher quality requirements for products.

According to the data provided by the China Theme Hotel Research Association, although theme hotels started late in China, their market size growth rate has been higher than the GDP growth rate except in 2009. In 2014, the market size of China's theme hotel industry reached 16.3 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 21.35%. Theme hotels will maintain a good growth trend, and it is expected to reach 48 billion US dollars by 2025. A unique accommodation experience has become an important trend in modern tourism with great development potential.

#### ***4.1. Case Analysis of Domestic Cultural Theme Hotels (Taking Dunhuang Dongyi Hotel as an Example)***

The design of Dunhuang Dongyi Hotel is exquisite, perfectly integrating tradition and modernity, nature and culture, showing a unique charm. In terms of architectural design, it draws on traditional forms, such as the “earth walls” and “drying houses” of traditional northwest dwellings in Dunhuang, and adopts rammed earth construction technology with locally produced adobes, making the buildings seem to grow naturally in the surrounding environment, integrating with cliffs, deserts and Yardangs, reflecting the grandeur and inclusiveness of Oriental aesthetics (as shown in Figure 1). It strives to create a square and solid appearance. The building has a square and solid exterior, with columns and beams like backbones, giving people a calm and solid feeling. At the same time, the reserved holes allow people to watch the rotation of light and shadow throughout the day, and the desert wind penetrates them day and night, adding a lot of poetic and picturesque charm to the building. The building facade has rich virtual and real changes, forming a harmonious, quiet style and sense of rhythm (as shown in Figure 2). The main rooms face the sand landscape, interpreting the true meaning of northwest architecture and providing guests with a unique visual experience.



***Figure 1. Panoramic View of Dunhuang Dongyi Hotel.***



***Figure 2. Exterior View of Dunhuang Dongyi Hotel.***

In terms of interior design, it integrates cultural elements and skillfully applies the cultural elements in Dunhuang murals into the space through abstract and concise techniques. From “residential objects” to “textiles” and then to “utensils”, each item carries the history and culture of Dunhuang, allowing tourists to feel the charm of Dunhuang every moment. Emphasis on natural materials: the interior design emphasizes the texture, quality and form of the materials themselves, pursuing a minimalist and profound wabi-sabi realm. For example, local drought-tolerant natural materials such as Donghong willow are used to show the simplicity and beauty of nature.

Focus on space experience: the space design of the hotel focuses on the guests' experience, creating a comfortable and convenient living environment through reasonable layout and design. For example, some rooms are equipped with outdoor leisure courtyards, and individual room types are equipped with separate outdoor swimming pools, allowing guests to get close to nature and enjoy a unique accommodation experience.

As a typical characteristic cultural tourism hotel, Dunhuang Dongyi Hotel shows unique advantages in many aspects, but there are also some areas that need to be improved. First, the internal design is homogenized. The interior design still follows the traditional hotel model, with empty furnishings in the indoor space that do not

have substantial effects. Second, the quality of activities needs to be improved: the quality of some cultural activities in the hotel is not high. For example, the morning pastoral song activity only allows tourists to listen to sheep barking, lacking substantial content; the lantern lighting ceremony imitates the sunset ceremony of other hotels, but fails to create a good atmosphere, is short in time and does not provide soft drinks and snacks, giving people a perfunctory feeling. Third, the service efficiency needs to be improved: the one-to-one butler service of the hotel has problems in actual implementation, failing to timely respond to and solve the guests' needs, and there is room for improvement in service efficiency and staffing.

## **5. Analysis of the Development Status of Foreign Cultural Theme Hotels**

The development of foreign cultural theme hotels shows the characteristics of rapid market size growth, diverse theme types and distinctive regional development. First, rapid market size growth: according to relevant reports, the global theme hotel market size has exceeded 68 billion US dollars in 2023, with a compound annual growth rate of 9.2%. It is expected that during 2025-2030, the market size will continue to expand at a compound annual growth rate of 7.2%, and is expected to exceed 98 billion US dollars by 2030. Second, diverse theme types: the themes of foreign cultural theme hotels cover various styles and types, such as art themes, natural scenery themes, celebrity culture themes, historical and cultural themes, national cultural themes, urban cultural themes, etc. For example, the Park Hotel in Vienna is themed on historical music, and the hotel is full of photos, paintings, sculptures of musicians, etc.; the rock music theme hotel in Bali, Indonesia, not only provides interactive audio-visual entertainment systems in the rooms, but also displays music cultural relics and musicians' manuscripts. Third, distinctive regional development: the Asia-Pacific region will become the fastest-growing market with an average annual growth rate of 9.8%. Among them, Southeast Asian countries, benefiting from the island vacation economy and the linkage effect of film and television IP, are expected to double the total number of theme hotel rooms by 2027. Foreign theme hotels are developing rapidly, operating booming and highly recognized. There is a certain depth in theoretical discussions, but more literature research focuses on the hotel operation level. There are very few literatures and books on the theme hotel design level, and the discussion on its cultural heritage is very scarce, lacking a lot of in-depth research and discussions.

## **6. Main Problems Solved and Innovations**

### **6.1. Main Problems**

Based on the accumulation of a large number of literatures and analyses, the following universal problems are summarized. First, the theme materials of theme hotels are single. Theme hotels are characteristic operations based on theme culture, relying on certain resources or culture. However, many operators do not have a good grasp of their content and essence, and fail to truly integrate culture into them, not only at the design level but also at the invisible service level. Finally, the display form of theme hotels is outdated and the materials are too single. Second, the functional structure is unreasonable. Theme hotels are based on their distinctive themes, but the essence of hotels has not changed. They are still sojourn spaces with service as the first priority. However, many hotels focus on form to pursue more innovative themes,

but ignore functions, resulting in great inconvenience in use, which violates the essence of design [1].

## **6.2. Innovations**

Through analysis, it can be said that the design and application of Dunhuang elements in hotels are very few. Although Dunhuang designs are prevalent in the market, they are only simple copies and imitations without substantial significance. Therefore, this paper is committed to re-examining Dunhuang culture, extracting, applying, analyzing, transforming and combining the colors and elements of Dunhuang culture again through practical techniques, and applying them to the indoor space of hotels, so that more people can understand and think about Dunhuang culture.

# **7. Specific Application Methods of Dunhuang Colors and Elements in Modern Theme Hotels**

## **7.1. Application of Color Elements**

In the color system, extract the main and auxiliary colors from the murals to build the space tone. Focus on mineral colors, which are saturated and layered. When applying, distinguish the main colors, auxiliary colors and accent colors to avoid space clutter. Application of main colors (large-area layout): select the most representative colors in the murals, such as ochre (earth red), azurite blue (blue-green) and earth gold, as the main space colors, which are used in large-area areas such as the lobby floor, walls and guest room background walls. For example, the main wall of the lobby uses ochre artistic paint, matched with local azurite blue reliefs to restore the simple texture of the murals. Public areas (such as corridors and restaurants) can learn from the color logic of “sutra illustrations”, take one main color as the base, and create a sense of depth through light and shade gradients to avoid the dullness of a single color block. Application of auxiliary colors and accent colors (local brightening): extract cinnabar red, malachite green and gamboge from the murals as auxiliary colors, which are used in soft furnishings such as furniture, curtains and cushions. For example, place malachite green velvet sofas in the guest rooms, matched with cinnabar red embroidered pillows, echoing the color contrast in the murals. Use earth gold for detailed decoration, such as doorframe lines, lamp frames and decorative painting gold edges, simulating the “gilding on raised lines” technique in the murals to improve the space delicacy, while avoiding the exaggeration caused by excessive gold.

## **7.2. Application of Decorative Elements**

Extract symbols from the murals and integrate them into space details. Select highly recognizable and auspicious elements from Dunhuang murals, and integrate them into the hard decoration, soft decoration and furnishings of the hotel through abstract and simplified design. Architectural and hard decoration details: Caisson elements: transform the circular nested structure of the “caisson” in Dunhuang grottoes into the shape of the lobby chandelier and guest room ceiling. For example, a circular chandelier with a diameter of 2-3 meters is hung in the center of the lobby. The lamp frame is made of metal to replicate the honeysuckle pattern and lotus pattern of the caisson. The light projects mottled light and shadow through the patterns, simulating the atmosphere in the grottoes.

Feitian and patterns: abstract the ribbons, lotus patterns and scroll patterns (honeysuckle patterns) of Feitian into wall reliefs, floor mosaics and screen patterns [5]. For example, the glass partition of the guest room bathroom is engraved with simplified Feitian ribbon patterns using etching technology, which not only ensures light transmission but also conveys the Dunhuang image. Soft decoration and furnishings design: Furniture shape: the lines of sofas and coffee tables can learn from the curvature of the “donor” seats in the murals, matched with fabrics printed with lotus patterns and scroll patterns; the guest room bedside table is designed in the shape of an unfolded “sutra scroll”, and short scriptures (such as fragments of the “Auspicious Sutra”) are reprinted on the surface using gold stamping technology, which has both functionality and cultural sense. Decorations and works of art: hang abstract “mural fragments” decorative paintings on the corridor walls, such as reconstructing the images of “playing the pipa backwards” and “nine-colored deer” with minimal lines, avoiding the heaviness of full-scale reproduction. Place small sculptures in the corners of the lobby and restaurant, such as miniaturized “donor figurines” and “Feitian figurines”, made of clay and metal, forming a contrast with the modern space materials.

### **7.3. Design of Functions in Various Fields**

Commit to functional scenarios in various fields: combine the hotel’s business format to create an immersive experience. Match the artistic conception of Dunhuang elements according to different functional areas of the hotel (lobby, guest rooms), so that cultural experience is combined with functional needs.

Lobby (first impression area): set up a “simulated grotto” shaped entrance hall at the entrance. The walls are made of texture paint to simulate the texture of grotto rock walls. Reproduced “mural fragments” decorations are placed on both sides to create a sense of ritual of “entering the Dunhuang grottoes” [4].

The background wall of the front desk adopts the narrative logic of “sutra illustrations”, using relief + light to create a simplified fragment of “Western Pure Land Transformation” (such as simplified pavilions and Feitian), conveying an atmosphere of “auspiciousness and peace”, which is consistent with the “rest” attribute of the hotel.

Guest rooms (core experience area): theme guest rooms can be divided into “Feitian Room”, “Nine-Colored Deer Room” and “Sutra Illustration Room”, each focusing on one element. For example, the bedside background wall of the “Feitian Room” is made of Feitian ribbons using embroidery technology, the curtains are gradient azurite blue, matched with bedding printed with Feitian patterns; the “Nine-Colored Deer Room” takes light brown as the base, the walls are hung with abstract decorative paintings of nine-colored deer, and the carpet is printed with simplified deer patterns [5].

Place “Dunhuang cultural and creative” derivatives as practical items in the guest rooms, such as notebooks printed with scriptures, cups reprinted with mural patterns, and slippers with lotus patterns, allowing guests to feel cultural details in use.

## **8. Conclusions**

In a word, the application of traditional decorative patterns in Dunhuang murals in the interior design of modern theme hotels is a rational choice in the new era. It is not only the inheritance and development of traditional culture, but also promotes the

development of traditional Chinese culture, playing a good role in promoting people's acceptance of the essence of this traditional culture. In this design process, boldly abandon some patterns, select classic pattern elements for reorganization and redesign, integrate new concepts and design techniques, and let Dunhuang murals be displayed to people from a new perspective. Let Dunhuang murals and Dunhuang traditional culture inherit, develop and innovate.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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