

Application of Lingnan Intangible Cultural Heritage Colors in Modern Brand Design

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Abstract:

The color system of Lingnan intangible cultural heritage (ICH) serves as a visual carrier of Lingnan cultural genes, and its matching principles integrate multiple wisdoms including regional climate adaptation, folk belief expression and traditional craft inheritance. Taking lion dance, Guang embroidery, Foshan paper-cut, Duan inkstone and Xiangyunsha as typical research objects, this paper systematically deconstructs the cultural origins and core principles of Lingnan ICH color matching by means of literature research, case analysis and interdisciplinary comparison, and constructs a four-dimensional theoretical framework of “Symbolism-Coordination-Functionality-Regionality”. The study finds that Lingnan ICH color matching takes red, gold and blue as the core color systems, and realizes the unity of cultural implication and practical function through the balance of contrast and harmony. On this basis, combined with modern brand design cases, this paper puts forward the paths of symbol extraction, emotional translation, scene adaptation and innovative application of ICH colors, which provides theoretical support and practical paradigm for the activation of ICH elements in modern brand visual system, and promotes the in-depth integration of traditional culture and modern design.

Keywords:

Lingnan Intangible Cultural Heritage, Color Matching Principles; Brand Design; Cultural Translation, Activation Application, Visual Design, Traditional Craft, Cultural Innovation

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Relying on the geographical pattern of “mountains and seas embracing each other” and the cultural trait of “inclusiveness”, Lingnan region has bred abundant intangible cultural heritages such as lion dance, Guang embroidery, Foshan paper-cut, Duan inkstone and Xiangyunsha [1][2][3]. The color expression of these ICH projects is not only a visual aesthetic choice, but also an important symbol of regional cultural identity, carrying the wisdom of Lingnan people in adapting to the natural environment, the pursuit of a better life and the emotional sustenance of folk beliefs [4][5]. Under the guidance of the cultural confidence strategy, ICH elements have become an important source of inspiration for modern brand design. However, the cross-context application of color matching often faces problems such as distortion of

cultural connotation and disconnection of aesthetic expression—some designs simply copy traditional color symbols leading to rigid design, while others excessively deconstruct resulting in the loss of cultural genes [10][12]. Therefore, systematically sorting out the internal logic and core principles of Lingnan ICH color matching and exploring its scientific transformation path in modern brand design has become an important subject for the living inheritance of ICH and design innovation.

1.2. Research Status

Existing studies mainly focus on three dimensions: first, the cultural interpretation of ICH colors, such as the classification of “Weicai” and “Dancai” in Guang embroidery and the explanation of color symbolism of Foshan paper-cut [5][6]; second, the application of color psychology in design, emphasizing the impact of color on consumers’ emotional cognition [16][18]; third, the modern design transformation of ICH elements, focusing on symbol extraction and formal innovation [11][14]. However, there are obvious limitations in existing studies: most studies focus on the color description of a single ICH project, lacking the overall deconstruction of Lingnan ICH color system; the theoretical construction of color matching principles is insufficient, failing to form a systematic framework; the combination of ICH colors and modern brand design mostly stays on the surface application, lacking the research on the deep translation mechanism from cultural connotation to visual expression [13][17]. Based on this, this paper constructs a theoretical system of Lingnan ICH color matching from an interdisciplinary perspective, explores the transformation path of modern brand design, and fills the gaps in existing research.

1.3. Research Significance and Methods

1.3.1. Research Significance

Theoretical significance: Constructing a four-dimensional theoretical framework of Lingnan ICH color matching enriches the interdisciplinary research achievements of ICH aesthetics and design science, and provides a new perspective for the systematic study of ICH colors [12][19]. Practical significance: Proposing the activation path of ICH colors in modern brand design provides operable method guidance for brand visual system construction and cultural and creative product development, and promotes the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional cultural resources [10][20].

1.3.2. Research Methods

This study adopts three research methods: literature research method to sort out the theoretical basis of ICH colors and brand design [1][3]; case analysis method to take typical Lingnan ICH brands as examples to verify the application effect [4][8]; interdisciplinary comparison method to integrate design science, folklore and color psychology to optimize the research system [16][18]. The core innovations are as follows: constructing the four-dimensional framework to reveal the internal logic of color matching; putting forward the translation model from cultural symbols to brand visual elements to solve the disconnection between traditional colors and modern aesthetics; forming a replicable activation process to enhance the practical guidance of the research.

2. Cultural Origins of Lingnan ICH Color Matching

2.1. Adaptive Selection of Geographical Environment and Climate

Lingnan has a subtropical monsoon climate with high temperature, rainy and strong sunshine in summer, and warm and humid in winter, which directly affects the selection and matching of ICH colors [2][3]. To adapt to strong light, Lingnan ICH mostly uses high-saturation colors to enhance visual recognition, such as the red dan color (Wannianhong) and Buddha blue of Foshan paper-cut, which still maintain a bright visual effect in outdoor scenes [6]. At the same time, the hot and humid climate leads to fading of traditional fabrics, prompting craftsmen to select non-oxidizable natural dyes. For example, the black-brown base color of Xiangyunsha formed by the *Dioscorea cirrhosa* dyeing process is not only dirt-resistant and easy to take care of, but also reflects sunlight to reduce body temperature [4][8]. The modern innovative blue Xiangyunsha optimizes color expression on the basis of retaining technological characteristics [8][22]. The resource endowment created by geographical environment also affects color composition: the blue-purple base color and "Honna Yanhongyun" texture of Duan inkstone originate from the unique ore components of Duanxi in Zhaoqing, and its color matching completely relies on the texture characteristics of natural materials [3][7]; the gold color of Foshan paper-cut benefits from the local developed iron industry, and the application of copper foil material forms a unique magnificent visual effect, which becomes an important mark different from paper-cut in other regions [6][21].

2.2. Visual Expression of Folk Beliefs and Aesthetic Concepts

The diversity of Lingnan folk beliefs endows ICH colors with rich symbolic meanings [2][4]. Cantonese region worships gods such as Emperor Bei and Sea God. The red and yellow colors of lion dance in festival activities symbolize good fortune, red represents exorcising evil spirits and avoiding disasters, yellow implies dignity and prosperity, and black reflects the trait of bravery and robustness [21][23]. This color distribution is in line with the symbolic system of Cantonese opera facial makeup [5]. Yingge dance in Chaoshan area takes red and black as the main colors, echoing the folk function of "exorcising evil spirits and praying for good luck", with strong color contrast and dynamic sense [2][3]. The pragmatic and exquisite aesthetic concept of Lingnan people is reflected in the balance of "appropriate shade" in color matching: Guang embroidery is divided into two categories: "Weicai" and "Dancai". Festival supplies such as happy tents adopt full and gorgeous "Weicai", while stationery supplies choose elegant and soft "Dancai", realizing aesthetic adaptation in different scenes [5][21]. Foshan paper-cut takes red and gold as the keynote, supplemented by black line lining, which not only meets the festive needs of festivals, but also avoids visual clutter through color levels, reflecting the aesthetic pursuit of "rich but not gaudy" [6][21].

2.3. Restriction and Shaping of Craft Technology Inheritance

Traditional craft technology directly determines the color presentation and matching logic of Lingnan ICH [5][13]. The gold embroidery craft of Guang embroidery takes gold thread as the main material, supplemented by color thread embroidery, forming a magnificent visual effect. This color matching originates from the material characteristics of gold thread and the needle requirements of "nailing, padding, piecing, pasting and stitching" [5]. The luster of gold and silver thread contrasts with

the delicate texture of velvet thread, enhancing the three-dimensional sense and decoration of the work [5][21]. The copper lining, copper writing and copper chiseling crafts of Foshan paper-cut rely on the metallic luster of copper foil materials, and the combination of gold and red, blue and other colors forms a strong visual contrast, becoming its unique color mark [6][21]. The color matching of Duan inkstone completely respects the natural stone texture, and craftsmen integrate natural colors such as “blue flower”, “banana leaf white” and “Honna Yanhongyun” into carving composition through ingenious design, realizing the aesthetic realm of “harmony between man and nature” [3][7]. Modern technological innovation has also promoted the development of ICH colors. For example, Xiangyunsha breaks through the traditional black-brown tone, develops blue base with modern dyeing technology, and retains the environmental protection characteristics and texture of plant dyes, realizing a double breakthrough in craft technology and color expression [4][8][22].

3. Core Principles of Lingnan ICH Color Matching

3.1. Symbolism Principle: Deep Binding of Color and Cultural Implication

The core of Lingnan ICH color matching is to convey specific cultural implications and values through color symbols, forming a matching logic of “color determined by meaning” [11][16]. As the core color of Lingnan culture, red is widely used in lion dance, Foshan paper-cut, Guang embroidery and other ICH projects. It not only symbolizes festivity and good luck, but also carries the folk belief of exorcising evil spirits and avoiding disasters [5][6]. Foshan paper-cut takes the local red dan (Wannianhong) as the main tone, which is used in Spring Festival, weddings and other scenes, and red becomes a visual link connecting folk activities and cultural emotions [6][21]. The red lion head (Guan Yu lion) of lion dance symbolizes loyalty, benevolence and courage, and is often used in important festivals and ceremonial occasions, with color selection highly consistent with folk implications [21][23]. Gold occupies a special position in Lingnan ICH color system. The copper foil gold of Foshan paper-cut is used with other colors to form a magnificent visual effect, which not only reflects the prosperous culture of Lingnan region, but also symbolizes dignity and eternity [6][21]. The gold embroidery of Guang embroidery takes gold thread as the core element, which is used for court tributes and high-end clothing, and gold becomes the visual expression of status and craft value [5][21]. As an auxiliary color system, blue in the Buddha blue tone of Foshan paper-cut and the blue innovation of modern Xiangyunsha not only reflects the awe of nature, but also endows traditional crafts with modern aesthetic vitality, realizing the ancient and modern continuation of cultural implications [6][8][22].

3.2. Coordination Principle: Dynamic Balance of Contrast and Harmony

Lingnan ICH color matching pays attention to enhancing visual tension through contrast and achieving overall harmony through reconciliation, forming an aesthetic effect of “unity in contrast” [17][18]. Color contrast is mainly reflected in the differential application of lightness, purity and hue: Foshan paper-cut takes red and gold as high-saturation main colors, matched with black lines for outlining, with strong lightness contrast and clear boundaries, which not only highlights the main pattern, but also avoids color clutter [6][21]; the red, yellow and black colors of lion dance are obviously different in hue, but visual coordination is realized through balanced distribution of color area. For example, the yellow lion head (Liu Bei lion)

takes yellow as the main tone, supplemented by red decoration and black lines, forming a calm and dynamic visual effect [21][23]. Color harmony is realized through adjacent color matching and transitional color application: the “Dancai” series of Guang embroidery takes three inter-colors as the main tone, creating an elegant and soft visual atmosphere through color gradient and connection, suitable for elegant scenes such as stationery supplies [5][21]; the blue-purple base color of Duan inkstone and the pink tone of “Honna Yanhongyun” transition naturally, forming an integrated color level, reflecting the aesthetic pursuit of “harmony between man and nature” [3][7]. This balance of contrast and harmony not only meets the visual impact needs of folk activities, but also conforms to the harmony concept of traditional aesthetics [17][18].

3.3. Functionality Principle: Adaptation of Color to Scenarios and Crafts

Lingnan ICH color matching always revolves around practical functions, realizing the high adaptation of color expression to usage scenarios and craft characteristics [10][20]. In terms of scene function adaptation, color selection is closely related to the functional needs of usage scenarios: “Weicai” of Guang embroidery is used for festivals and performance scenes such as happy tents and costumes, and high-saturation colors enhance visual attraction; “Dancai” is used for stationery and daily clothing, and low-saturation colors conform to the quiet use atmosphere [5][21]; the color of lion dance is adjusted according to the nature of activities, red lion head for formal ceremonies, yellow lion head for celebrations, and black lion head (Zhang Fei lion) for competitive performances, with precise matching of color and scene functions [21][23]. In terms of craft function adaptation, color matching fully considers material characteristics and production process: the traditional black-brown tone of Xiangyunsha originates from Dioscorea cirrhosa dyeing and river mud drying process, with strong color stability and dirt resistance, adapting to the use needs in Lingnan's hot and humid climate [4][8][22]; the copper foil gold of Foshan paper-cut has good ductility and luster, which perfectly fits with the carving and chiseling crafts of paper-cut, not only enhancing the decoration of the work, but also improving durability [6][21]; the color of Duan inkstone completely depends on natural stone, and craftsmen design according to stone texture to avoid conflict between color and craft, realizing the unity of material characteristics and aesthetic expression [3][7].

3.4. Regionality Principle: Color Expression of Lingnan Cultural Characteristics

Lingnan ICH color matching deeply reflects the cultural characteristics of “openness, inclusiveness, pragmatism and innovation” in Lingnan region, forming a unique color style different from other regions [2][3][19]. In terms of color selection, Lingnan ICH is dominated by warm colors. Red, yellow and other colors not only adapt to the visual needs of regional climate, but also reflect the cheerful personality of Lingnan people. The warm color matching of lion dance, Guang embroidery, Foshan paper-cut and other projects can bring a warm and bright visual feeling in Lingnan's rainy climate, alleviating the depression caused by humid weather [2][6][21]. In terms of color innovation, Lingnan ICH shows the cultural trait of “inclusiveness”: Guang embroidery in the Qing Dynasty was influenced by Western paintings, absorbed the principles of perspective and light refraction, enriched the color level and three-dimensional sense, forming a “Chinese-Western integration” color style [5][21]; modern Xiangyunsha breaks through the traditional black-brown tone, introduces modern colors such as blue, and retains the core of traditional crafts,

realizing the integration of regional culture and contemporary aesthetics [4][8][22]. This regional color expression not only reflects the adherence to local culture, but also shows the tolerance of external culture, becoming an important visual symbol of Lingnan cultural identity [2][3][19].

4. Case Analysis of Lingnan ICH Colors in Modern Brand Design

4.1. Dexi Jianqiu (Xiangyunsha Brand): Color Innovation and International Expression

Dexi Jianqiu, an original brand in Shenzhen, takes Xiangyunsha ICH craft as the core, and achieves a breakthrough integration of tradition and modernity in color matching [4][8]. The brand breaks through the limitation of Xiangyunsha's traditional black-brown tone, and selects calm and vivid blue as the base, which not only retains the natural texture of Xiangyunsha, but also endows traditional crafts with modern aesthetic vitality, in line with the aesthetic preferences of young consumers [8][22]. In terms of color matching, the brand adopts the combination of “blue base + silver thread embroidery”. The calm blue and glossy silver form an elegant contrast. The three-dimensional bamboo shadow embroidery on the chest achieves the harmony of color and pattern through the virtual-real gradient effect, which not only conveys the cultural implication of bamboo as a “gentleman”, but also conforms to the aesthetic language of international fashion [8][22]. The color application of this brand has successfully promoted Xiangyunsha from traditional fabrics to the international stage, and has appeared in important occasions such as CCTV ICH Gala and SCO Summit. The blue Xiangyunsha windbreaker has become a representative of the internationalization of oriental aesthetics, verifying the market value and cultural communication power of innovative application of ICH colors [4][8][22].

4.2. Guang Embroidery Element Brand: Modern Translation of Traditional Color System

A cultural and creative brand focusing on Guang embroidery elements continues the classification logic of “Weicai” and “Dancai” of Guang embroidery in color matching, realizing the modern translation of traditional color system [5][11][21]. The stationery series developed by the brand for young consumers adopts the elegant tone of “Dancai” of Guang embroidery, takes light blue and light pink as the base, integrates the color elements of classic flower patterns of Guang embroidery, and creates a simple and fashionable visual effect through low-saturation color matching. In the high-end gift series, it inherits the magnificent style of “Weicai” of Guang embroidery, takes red and gold as the main tone, and uses the color level of gold embroidery craft to create a ritualistic product visual image. Through scene-based adaptation of colors, the brand not only retains the cultural connotation of Guang embroidery colors, but also meets the diversified needs of the modern consumer market, realizing the commercial value transformation of ICH colors [10][11][20].

4.3. Foshan Paper-cut Theme Brand: Visual Reconstruction of Color Symbols

A Foshan paper-cut themed cultural and creative brand focuses on the core colors of red, gold and blue of Foshan paper-cut to reconstruct the brand visual system [6][21]. The brand LOGO takes red as the main tone, extracts the line elements of Foshan paper-cut, and forms a concise and distinct visual logo through modern font design and color matching; product packaging adopts the combination of red base and gold

lines, echoing the copper foil gold characteristics of Foshan paper-cut, and integrates modern minimalist design style to avoid the accumulation of traditional elements; in product design, the brand matches red, gold and white, which not only retains the festive atmosphere of traditional festivals, but also conforms to the blank leaving concept in modern aesthetics [6][21]. The color application of this brand realizes the modern transformation of Foshan paper-cut color symbols, extending ICH colors from traditional craft works to all dimensions of brand vision, and enhancing the brand's cultural recognition and market competitiveness [6][11][21].

5. Activation and Utilization Paths of Lingnan ICH Colors in Modern Brand Design

5.1. Symbol Extraction: Condensation of Core Elements of ICH Colors

Modern brand design should first extract core color symbols from Lingnan ICH, and establish a color database and cultural interpretation manual [11][14]. For lion dance, Guang embroidery and other ICH projects, systematically sort out the core color system, color proportion and matching logic, such as extracting the red, yellow and black three-color system of lion dance, and clarifying the cultural implication and usage scenarios of each color [21][23]; for the red dan color, Buddha blue color and gold color of Foshan paper-cut, establish color standard values to ensure the accuracy of color restoration [6][21]. In the extraction process, it is necessary to take into account the visual recognition and cultural integrity of colors, not only extract representative single colors, but also retain unique color combination modes, such as the classic “red-gold matching” of Guang embroidery and the “red-black contrast” color relationship of Foshan paper-cut, providing rich color materials for brand design [5][6][21]. At the same time, combined with modern color digital technology, traditional colors are transformed into accurately applicable digital color values to adapt to the color presentation needs of different design carriers [14][18].

5.2. Emotional Translation: Contemporary Expression of Color Implication

Brand design needs to combine the traditional implications of ICH colors with the emotional needs of modern consumers to realize the cross-era transmission of cultural emotions[11][16]. According to the aesthetic preferences of young consumers, the cultural implications of ICH colors are transformed into contemporary emotional languages: red is translated from “exorcising evil spirits” to “enthusiasm and vitality”, gold from “noble status” to “quality texture”, and blue from “awe of nature” to “simplicity and elegance” [16][18][22]. For example, Dexi Jianqiu combines Xiangyunsha blue with the brand concept of “Oriental Elegance, Contemporary Rebirth” to convey the emotional value of traditional craft innovation [8][22]. In color application, adjust the color area, lightness and purity to match the emotional positioning of the brand: high-end brands can adopt low-lightness, high-purity ICH colors to create a calm and elegant emotional atmosphere; fashion brands can adopt high-saturation color contrast to convey a dynamic and fashionable emotional experience. At the same time, combined with the principles of color psychology, such as red stimulating purchase desire and blue bringing a sense of tranquility, the precise matching between ICH color implications and consumers’ emotional needs is realized [16][18].

5.3. Scene Adaptation: Functional Optimization of Color Application

The application of ICH colors in brand design needs to be functionally optimized according to product types and usage scenarios to realize the unity of aesthetic expression and practical needs [10][20]. At the product design level, clothing brands can learn from the color innovation experience of Xiangyunsha, adjust color saturation according to wearing scenarios: daily clothing adopts low-saturation ICH colors to meet comfortable wearing needs; stage clothing adopts high-saturation colors to enhance visual expression [4][8][22]; home furnishing brands can refer to the “Dancai” series of Guang embroidery, select elegant and soft colors to adapt to the quiet atmosphere of home environment [5][21]. At the brand visual system level, LOGO design can adopt concise ICH color combinations to enhance recognition; packaging design can combine the color levels of Foshan paper-cut to realize the visual balance of product information and cultural elements [6][21]; advertising promotion can adjust color presentation according to communication scenarios, online communication adopts high-contrast colors to attract attention, and offline scenarios adopt coordinated colors to improve experience [14][18]. Through scene-based color adaptation, ICH colors not only meet the functional needs of modern design, but also maintain the integrity of cultural connotation [10][20].

5.4. Innovative Application: Modern Reconstruction of Traditional Colors

The activation of ICH colors requires innovative reconstruction on the basis of inheritance to avoid simple copying and formal application [12][19]. In terms of color combination, the core ICH colors can be matched with modern popular colors, such as combining Xiangyunsha blue with Morandi color system to create a color scheme with both traditional charm and fashion sense [8][22]; in terms of color expression, modern design techniques such as gradient, color collision and blank leaving are used to reconstruct ICH colors, such as gradient processing of red and gold colors of Guang embroidery for the background design of brand packaging [5][21]; in terms of technical application, combined with modern technologies such as digital printing and 3D printing, the accurate presentation and innovative expression of ICH colors are realized, such as digitizing the natural color texture of Duan inkstone for the texture design of brand vision [3][7]. At the same time, interdisciplinary innovation is encouraged, such as combining ICH colors with ceramic crafts to develop products with healing significance of color psychology, expanding the application boundary of ICH colors, and realizing the in-depth integration of tradition and modernity [9][15].

6. Conclusions

Through the systematic study of Lingnan ICH color matching principles, this paper draws the following core conclusions: first, the formation of Lingnan ICH color system is the result of the combined action of geographical environment, folk beliefs and craft technology, and the core color systems such as red, gold and blue carry the collective memory of regional culture [1][2][3]; second, Lingnan ICH color matching follows the four core principles of symbolism, coordination, functionality and regionality, and realizes the unity of aesthetic value and practical value through the expression of cultural implications of color symbols, the dynamic balance of contrast and harmony, and the functional adaptation of scenes and crafts [17][18]; third, modern brand design can realize the activation and inheritance of ICH colors through four paths: symbol extraction, emotional translation, scene adaptation and innovative application. Cases such as Dexi Jianqiu verify the feasibility and effectiveness of this path [4][8][22].

Although this study constructs the theoretical framework and application path of Lingnan ICH color matching, there are still some limitations: the research cases mainly focus on ICH projects in Cantonese region, lacking coverage of ICH colors in Hakka and Chaoshan regions; the discussion on the differentiated application of ICH colors in brand design of different industries is not in-depth. Future research can further expand the research scope, include color research of ICH projects such as Hakka folk song costumes and Chaoshan inlaid porcelain, and improve the overall cognition of Lingnan ICH color system; strengthen cross-industry comparative research, and put forward differentiated ICH color application strategies according to the brand characteristics of different industries such as clothing, beauty and home furnishing; combined with big data analysis and consumer research, quantitatively evaluate the market effect of ICH colors in brand design, and provide more accurate decision-making basis for ICH activation [12][19][20].

With the further promotion of the cultural confidence strategy and the sustainable development of consumption upgrading, the application of ICH elements in modern brand design will be more extensive. In the future, on the basis of adhering to the cultural core, it is necessary to promote the in-depth integration of ICH colors with modern design concepts and technical means, not only realize the living inheritance of traditional culture, but also endow modern brands with unique cultural recognition and market competitiveness, so that Lingnan ICH colors can glow with new vitality in the context of contemporary design [12][19][20].

Conflicts of Interest

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

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