

A Study on Intangible Cultural Heritage Creative Design Based on the Visual Language of Zhu Xian Town Woodblock New Year Paintings

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Abstract:

The woodblock New Year prints of Zhuxian Town are a National Intangible Cultural Heritage, characterised by distinct features of folk art, regional cultural value and traditional printing techniques. With changes in modern lifestyles and consumption patterns, the traditional festive applications of these prints have gradually diminished; their transformation into cultural and creative products continues to face issues such as superficial use of elements, a lack of product diversity, and insufficient expression of their craftsmanship. This article takes Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year paintings as its subject of study, analysing their visual language characteristics in terms of composition, colour, form, patterns and woodblock multi-colour printing techniques. By employing methods such as symbol extraction, colour translation, graphic reconfiguration and texture rendering, it establishes a translation approach for cultural and creative product design, applying it to the Door God Guardian series, the Auspicious Patterns series and the Multi-colour Printing Experience series of cultural and creative products. It explores methods for revitalising the visual resources of traditional New Year paintings within modern printing and cultural and creative design, thereby providing a reference for the inheritance and innovation of Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year paintings.

Keywords:

Zhu Xian Town Woodblock New Year Paintings, Visual Language, Intangible Cultural Heritage Cultural and Creative Products, Multi-Colour Printing Techniques, Design Translation

1. Introduction

The living transmission of intangible cultural heritage relies not only on preservation and display, but also on the integration of contemporary design into modern life. As a highly representative example of traditional Chinese woodblock New Year paintings, Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year paintings feature themes such as door gods, opera stories, myths and legends, and auspicious imagery, reflecting the cultural psychology of the people in seeking blessings and good fortune, warding off evil and misfortune, and decorating for festivals [1]. They have developed a distinctive visual language in terms of compositional form, character design, colour

schemes, decorative motifs and woodblock printing techniques, providing a rich resource for the design of cultural and creative products based on intangible cultural heritage. At present, the traditional practice of displaying New Year prints during festivals is gradually waning, and some cultural and creative developments remain confined to the reproduction of images and decorative collages. There is a lack of systematic extraction of their visual language, cultural symbolism and printing techniques, which can easily lead to the superficial use of traditional elements [2]. The modern adaptation of Zhu Xian Town's woodblock New Year prints should not merely involve transplanting the images directly onto product surfaces; rather, it should begin with visual characteristics such as composition, colour, form, patterns, woodcut lines and the texture of multi-colour printing, extracting representative cultural symbols and craft language to incorporate them into packaging, paper goods, canvas products, decorative prints and products offering a multi-colour printing experience.

Accordingly, this paper explores the visual language characteristics of Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year prints and the pathways for their transformation into cultural and creative design. It analyses their visual composition and craftsmanship, proposes design translation methods suitable for modern cultural and creative products, and, drawing on product design practice, explores ways to revitalise traditional woodblock New Year prints through modern printing media and cultural and creative products.

2. Visual Language Characteristics of Zhu Xian Town Woodblock New Year Paintings

Zhuxian Town woodblock New Year prints have a long history, having flourished during the Northern Song Dynasty and reached their peak during the Ming and Qing dynasties; in 2006, they were included in the first batch of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List. Their artistic value is reflected not only in their subject matter—such as door gods, opera stories, myths and legends, and auspicious imagery—but also in the unique visual effects created by traditional printing techniques such as woodblock carving and multi-colour watermark printing [3]. As a quintessential example of the fusion of folk art and traditional printing techniques, the visual language of Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year prints is primarily manifested in five aspects: composition, colour, form, patterns and craftsmanship (see Table 1).

Table 1. *The Visual Language of Zhu Xian Town Woodblock New Year Paintings and Methods of Cultural and Creative Adaptation.*

Types of Visual Language	Typical Characteristics	Cultural Symbolism	Methods of Adaptation for Cultural and Creative Products
Colour Language	Vermilion, locust yellow, bitter green,	Festivals, Blessings,	Primary product colours, packaging colours, print colour schemes
	High-Contrast Colours	Exorcism	
Compositional language	Central composition, symmetrical layout, full-frame composition	Sense of order,	Poster layout, front-of-pack composition, decorative art layout
		a sense of ceremony	
Stylistic Language	Large heads and small bodies, exaggerated facial features, stylised figures	Folk aesthetics,	Auspicious IP characters, illustrated characters, product motifs
		Expression of the Divine	

Pattern Language	auspicious clouds, flowers, weapons,	Auspiciousness, Protection,	Border decorations, continuous patterns, auxiliary graphics for packaging
	clothing motifs	Decorative	
Artistic techniques	Woodcut lines, multicolour printing,	Traces of Handwork,	screen-printing textures, paper textures, packaging print effects
	off-register texture	printing traces	

In terms of composition, Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year prints generally adopt a centralised or symmetrical structure; New Year prints depicting door gods place the main figures at the centre of the composition, incorporating elements such as auspicious clouds, flowers, weapons and decorative patterns on clothing to create a rich and stable visual relationship. This ‘full composition’ enhances the visual tension of the image and embodies the lively, abundant and joyful aesthetic qualities of folk New Year prints. This compositional approach can be adapted for the front layout of packaging, poster compositions, decorative art layouts, and the key visuals for product ranges.

In terms of colour, Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year prints generally employ high-purity hues such as vermilion, locust yellow, bitter green, sunflower purple and wood red, creating a clear and striking visual impression. The pairing of complementary colours—such as red and green, or yellow and purple—further accentuates the festive atmosphere and decorative feel. Modern cultural and creative design can, whilst retaining the characteristic hue of traditional colours, appropriately adjust the brightness and saturation according to different media—such as paper, fabric and packaging materials—ensuring that the distinctive features of New Year prints are preserved whilst also meeting the aesthetic expectations of contemporary products.

In terms of form, the figures in Zhu Xian Town’s woodblock New Year prints emphasise ‘capturing the spirit’ and stylised representation. They often employ a ‘large head, small body’ proportion and utilise almond-shaped eyes, arched eyebrows, exaggerated facial features and ornate attire to enhance the characters’ recognisability. Such designs can be adapted into auspicious IP characters, illustrated characters, packaging motifs and decorative logos for products.

In terms of patterns, elements such as auspicious clouds, flowers, weapons, clothing motifs and border decorations possess strong adaptability. These patterns serve a decorative purpose whilst also carrying cultural connotations of good fortune, protection and the attraction of blessings [5]. Cultural and creative design can utilise continuous patterns, the rearrangement of borders, partial enlargement and geometric treatments, and can be applied to products such as wrapping paper, planners, bookmarks, paper bags and stationery.

In terms of craftsmanship, Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year prints utilise traditional woodblock multi-colour printing techniques. The production process involves selecting blocks, carving, cleaning the blocks and applying multiple colours. The rough texture of the woodcut lines, the sense of depth created by the layering of colour blocks, the positional discrepancies resulting from multi-colour printing, and the blurring effect caused by the paper’s absorption of ink all combine to form its distinctive printed texture. Modern cultural and creative design can recreate these characteristics through techniques such as screen printing, digital printing, paper embossing, spot colouring and misregistration effects, thereby enhancing the products’ handcrafted feel and the recognisability of this intangible cultural heritage.

3. Pathways for the Design Translation of the Visual Language of Zhuxian Town Woodblock New Year Paintings

The modern adaptation of Zhuxian Town woodblock New Year prints should avoid simply replicating traditional imagery; instead, it should establish a translation pathway comprising ‘symbol extraction—colour translation—craft reproduction—product application’.

3.1. Symbol Extraction: From Traditional Imagery to Design Elements

Symbol extraction forms the foundation for transforming traditional imagery into modern design elements. Typical elements such as door god figures, auspicious clouds, flowers, weapons, clothing patterns and border decorations can be selected for design purposes; through a process of ‘extraction—simplification—reconstruction’, these are transformed into recognisable, combinable and printable graphic units.

With regard to figurative symbols, elements such as the headdresses, eyebrows and eyes, beards, armour, weapons and silhouettes of the door gods can be extracted, retaining their cultural connotations of protection, blessing and warding off evil, whilst simplifying intricate lines to make them suitable for illustrations, packaging visuals, canvas bag designs and decorative art. As for pattern symbols, auspicious clouds, floral motifs and border patterns can be geometrised and modularised to form a supplementary graphic system suitable for wrapping paper, postcards, bookmarks, planners and stationery products [6]. As for line symbols, the characteristic variations in line thickness, forceful turns and pronounced chisel marks of woodblock prints can be retained for use in product illustration outlines, decorative borders and background textures.

3.2. Colour Adaptation: From Traditional New Year’s Painting Colours to Modern Product Colour Schemes

A key distinguishing feature of Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year prints is their colour palette. Whilst the colours used in traditional New Year prints are vibrant and eye-catching, certain adjustments must be made in modern products to suit the materials, printing methods and intended use. Vermilion can serve as the primary colour for visual elements, used on packaging covers, main product motifs and the central elements of posters; locust yellow can be employed as an accent colour for title areas and the background of motifs; bitter green can be used as an accent colour to create a stark contrast with vermilion; sunflower purple and wood red can be utilised for backgrounds, borders and textural layering to enhance the traditional feel of the products (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Adaptation of Traditional Colours from Zhuxian Town Woodblock New Year Paintings for Application in Cultural and Creative Products.*

Traditional Colour Names	Colour Characteristics	Digital Colour Values	Application in Cultural and Creative Products
Vermilion	Vibrant and eye-catching,	#E62E3A	Main visual, packaging cover,
	strong festive feel		Product’s primary colour
Acacia yellow	Bright and warm,	#F2C522	Accent colour, heading colour,
	ornamental and distinctive		Pattern background
Bitter Green	Strong contrast,	#2CB36F	Accent colour, localised

			decoration,
	enhances visual depth		pattern colour scheme
Sunflower Purple	Sober and mysterious,	#9A2F7B	Secondary visuals, background decoration,
	rich colour depth		Localised emphasis
Wood Red	Rustic and substantial,	#C05D41	textured background, border decoration,
	with a traditional craftsmanship feel		packaging accent colour

3.3. Artistic Adaptation: From Woodblock Multi-colour Printing to Modern Printing Techniques

The uniqueness of Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year prints lies not only in their subject matter, but also in the craftsmanship evident in the woodblock carving and the multi-colour watermark printing. The design adaptation of these techniques can be approached from four aspects: colour separation, overprinting, texture and medium.

Colour separation translation involves converting the traditional multi-colour printing layers into the colour-separated plates used in modern screen printing, so that figures, patterns, backgrounds and decorative colour blocks correspond to different printing layers respectively. Overprinting translation is achieved through the overlapping of local colour blocks, variations in transparency and the manipulation of colour registration layers, thereby recreating the depth of colour characteristic of traditional New Year prints. Textural adaptation is achieved through scanning and sampling, the selection of paper, localised embossing and the simulation of printing textures, recreating the effects of woodcut engraving marks, paper fibres, pigment bleeding and the irregularities of hand-printed misregistration. Medium adaptation involves extending paper-based New Year paintings to everyday items such as canvas bags, packaging boxes, postcards, bookmarks, stationery, decorative prints and print-your-own experience kits, transforming traditional New Year paintings from festive items into modern cultural products.

4. Application in Cultural and Creative Product Design

Based on the aforementioned analysis of visual language and the path of translation, this paper applies the woodblock New Year prints of Zhuxian Town to the design of intangible cultural heritage cultural and creative products, developing three series: the Guardian Deity Series, the Auspicious Patterns Series and the Overprinting Experience Series.

4.1. Design Positioning

Zhuxian Town woodblock New Year print cultural and creative products should target three key demographics: young consumers, cultural tourism visitors and enthusiasts of traditional culture (see Table 3). Young consumers are interested in 'Chinese-chic' aesthetics, everyday practicality and social media sharing; lightweight products such as canvas bags, stickers, mobile phone cases and stationery are therefore suitable for them. Cultural tourism visitors value regional souvenirs, cultural identity and portable purchases; commemorative products such as postcards, fridge magnets and souvenir packaging are therefore suitable for them. Enthusiasts of traditional culture focus on collectible value, craft experiences and cultural depth;

products such as decorative prints, block-printing experience kits and limited-edition prints are therefore suitable for them.

Table 3. *Target Audiences and Design Positioning for Cultural and Creative Products.*

Target Audience	Consumer Needs	Product Direction
Young Consumers	‘National Trend’ aesthetics, everyday practicality, social sharing	Canvas bags, stickers, mobile phone cases, stationery
Cultural Tourism Visitors	Regional souvenirs, cultural identity, portable shopping	Postcards, fridge magnets, gift packaging
Traditional culture enthusiasts	Collectible value, craft experiences, cultural depth	Decorative art, printmaking experience kits, limited-edition prints

4.2 Development of Cultural and Creative Product Series

In terms of product range development, this paper categorises cultural and creative products into three themes—the ‘Door God Guardians Series’, the ‘Auspicious Patterns Series’ and the ‘Block-Printing Experience Series’—based on the visual characteristics and cultural significance of Zhu Xian Town’s woodblock New Year prints (see Table 4). These three series correspond respectively to the adaptation of figurative imagery, the extension of pattern systems and the transformation of craft experiences, forming a product hierarchy that spans from visual decoration to hands-on craft participation.

Table 4. *Development of Cultural and Creative Product Series.*

Product Series	Core Visual Source	Product Types	Design Focus
Door God Guardians Series	Silhouettes of the Door Gods, armour, weapons, facial features	Canvas bags, decorative prints, mobile phone cases, stickers	Emphasising symmetrical composition and the symbolism of protection
Auspicious Patterns Series	Auspicious clouds, flowers, borders, clothing patterns	Postcards, bullet journals, Wrapping paper, bookmarks	Creating continuous patterns and decorative schemes
Overprinting Experience Series	Separation plates, woodcut lines, Colour-matching process	DIY colour-matching kits, Screen Printing Experience Kit, Colour-separated Postcards	Emphasising craft experiences and intangible cultural heritage education

The Door God Guardian Series (see Figure 1) features the Door God figures as its central visual elements, drawing on characteristics such as their headdresses, armour, facial features, weapons and silhouettes. It retains the symmetrical, centre-focused composition typical of traditional Door God New Year prints, whilst employing highly recognisable colours such as vermilion, locust yellow and bitter green. This series can be applied to products such as canvas bags, decorative prints, mobile phone cases and stickers, transforming the image of the door gods from a traditional festive motif into a cultural symbol for everyday use.

The Auspicious Patterns Series (see Figure 2) utilises auspicious clouds, flowers, weapons, clothing motifs and decorative borders as its primary elements. Through techniques such as geometrisation, modularisation and continuous arrangement, it

transforms disparate New Year's print motifs into an expandable pattern system. This series is suitable for flat-print products such as postcards, planners, wrapping paper, bookmarks and paper bags, enhancing the decorative appeal, regional character and gift-giving potential of cultural and creative products.



Figure 1. *Gate God Guardians Series.*



Figure 2. *Auspicious Motifs Series.*

The Multi-colour Printing Experience Series (see Figure 3) highlights the craftsmanship involved in the production of Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year prints. Based on the process of ‘selecting blocks – carving blocks – cleaning blocks – multi-colour printing’, this series includes DIY multi-colour New Year print kits, screen printing experience sets, postcards featuring separate colour plates, and cultural tourism and educational products. Consumers can complete the printing of different colour plates in sequence, gaining a practical understanding of the traditional multi-colour printing process, the interplay of overlapping colours and the texture of hand-printed work. This series combines product sales with the educational value of intangible cultural heritage and research-based learning, making it suitable for settings such as museums, intangible cultural heritage exhibition halls, cultural and tourism attractions, and art education courses.



Figure 3. *Multi-colour Printing Experience Series.*

4.3. Cultural and Creative Design for Intangible Cultural Heritage Printing Experiences

Of the three product categories, the multi-colour printing experience series best embodies the craftsmanship of Zhu Xian Town's woodblock New Year paintings. The ‘Zhu Xian Town Woodblock New Year Painting Multi-colour Printing Experience Pack’ includes colour-separated patterns, printing backing paper, colour explanation cards, pattern story cards, multi-colour printing instruction cards, eco-friendly printing ink or pigments, simplified printing blocks and tool instructions. The colour-separated patterns are used to illustrate the structure of the New Year paintings' multi-plate registration printing; the printing backing paper simulates the effect of traditional

paper substrates; the colour guide card explains the cultural significance of traditional colours such as cinnabar red, locust yellow and bitter green; whilst the instruction card guides users through the printing process in the correct colour sequence. In terms of printing techniques, screen printing offers strong colour opacity, a wide range of compatible materials and a distinctive textural quality, making it well-suited to rendering the high-purity colours and rich, solid colour blocks characteristic of Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year prints. By utilising colour separation and plate making, and controlling local misalignment effects through layer-by-layer registration, it is possible to simulate the traces of traditional hand-printed woodblock New Year prints. As screen printing can be applied to media such as paper, fabric, wooden panels and packaging materials, it provides technical support for the cross-media transformation of the visual language of Zhu Xian Town's woodblock New Year prints.

5. Conclusions

The visual language of Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year prints is primarily manifested in composition, colour, form, patterns and the woodblock overprinting technique. Symmetrical and full compositions establish a stable and rich visual order; high-purity colours such as cinnabar red, locust yellow and bitter green enhance the festive atmosphere; the depictions of door gods, auspicious clouds, flowers and border motifs embody folk auspicious symbolism; whilst the woodcut lines, overlapping colour blocks and the textures created by multi-colour printing establish the distinctive characteristics of this printing technique. Through symbol extraction, colour translation, graphic reconstruction and texture reproduction, Zhu Xian Town woodblock New Year prints can be transformed from mere decorative images into modern cultural and creative design resources that are applicable, combinable and printable. Applying these designs to products such as canvas bags, postcards, wrapping paper, decorative prints, stationery and overprint experience kits can help transition traditional woodblock New Year prints from festive folk contexts into modern consumer settings, thereby achieving a synthesis of cultural dissemination, craft preservation and product transformation. Intangible cultural heritage creative design, underpinned by the translation of visual language, offers a viable approach to the living transmission of Zhu Xian Town's woodblock New Year prints. Moving forward, material experiments, screen-printing process parameters and market feedback can be further integrated to validate product print quality, production costs and consumer acceptance, thereby enhancing their application value within the cultural tourism industry and the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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