

Digital Reconstruction of Traditional Auspicious Imagery

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Abstract

Traditional auspicious images, as important visual symbols of traditional Chinese culture, carry auspicious meanings, political symbols, and moral ideals. Evolving over thousands of years, they have formed a unique visual system with Eastern aesthetics. Faced with the changing context of globalization and the digital age, the inheritance and innovative expression of traditional auspicious animal images urgently require new paths. This paper takes typical auspicious images as its research object, systematically reviews their historical evolution and cultural connotations, explores the application mechanism and case results of AI-generated images in the digital reconstruction of traditional auspicious animals, and analyzes the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western auspicious symbols in visual language and cultural symbolism. Through empirical research on the "National Trend Pattern Project," it reveals how digital media empowers the contemporary expression and international dissemination of traditional images, and proposes a systematic path integrating visual strategies, narrative reconstruction, and cross-media communication.

Keywords

Auspicious images; Digital reconstruction; AI-generated images; Traditional Chinese culture; Cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

Chinese civilization has nurtured a rich collection of auspicious images, such as dragons, phoenixes, qilin, and xiezhi. These mythical auspicious beasts have long carried connotations of good fortune, beauty, and sacredness, and are widely found in historical documents and works of art. As early as the Warring States period, the silk painting "Figures with Dragons and Phoenixes" (Figure 1) depicts a phoenix soaring alongside a dragon, reflecting the important position of traditional auspicious concepts in ancient visual art. In the new era, under the backdrop of "cultural confidence," how to reshape and innovatively express these traditional images through digital technology has become a cutting-edge issue in the field of art and design. This paper will explore the cultural symbolism and historical evolution of

traditional auspicious images through literature analysis and case studies, analyze the practical path of AI-generated technology in the digital reconstruction of traditional auspicious beast images, compare the differences in visual language between similar auspicious beast symbols in China and the West, and further explore new strategies for the contemporary expression and international dissemination of traditional cultural images through digital media art. Finally, it proposes strategic suggestions for the innovative transformation of traditional images under the background of cultural confidence.



Figure 1. Figures with Dragons and Phoenixes

2. The Symbolic Meaning, Stylistic Language, and Historical Evolution of Traditional Auspicious Images

The Cultural Connotation of Auspicious Images: In traditional Chinese culture, "auspiciousness" refers to auspicious omens, and auspicious beasts are called spirit beasts or auspicious beasts, referring to animal images with auspicious connotations. These can be real animals or fictional creatures from mythology. Ancient people believed that the appearance of auspicious beasts often foreshadowed good fortune or the birth of a sage. Therefore, the worship of auspicious beasts became an important cultural phenomenon in ancient Chinese society, continuing to this day. The classic "Four Auspicious Beasts" include the dragon, phoenix, tortoise, and qilin, each with different forms in different times and contexts. Besides these four, traditional Chinese culture also includes other auspicious beasts such as the xiezhi, bai ze, and pixiu, each carrying specific symbolic meanings.

Dragon: The supreme and yang auspicious beast. The dragon occupies a unique and exalted position in Chinese culture, revered as a divine creature and a symbol of supreme power. Archaeological evidence and historical records show that the image of the dragon has a long history, with the earliest dragon-shaped patterns dating back

to the Neolithic Age, approximately 8,000 years ago. In subsequent dynasties, the dragon gradually became associated with imperial authority, becoming a symbol of imperial power, and its status grew increasingly revered. From the perspective of its stylistic language, dragon motifs have undergone significant evolution throughout history. Regardless of its form, the dragon has always symbolized auspiciousness, authority, and sacredness, and is one of the most important cultural totems of the Chinese nation.

Phoenix: King of birds and symbol of virtue. In traditional Chinese culture, it corresponds to the dragon and is often used as a symbol of nobility and peace. Ancient texts describe the phoenix as possessing the best features of all birds: a head like a golden pheasant, a body like a mandarin duck, wings like a roc, legs like a crane, a beak like a parrot, and a tail like a peacock, thus earning the title of king of birds. In ancient legends and the ritual systems of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, the phoenix often symbolized the virtues of emperors and empresses, representing the highest level of female nobility, paired with the dragon as the symbol of male emperors. The cultural connotations of the phoenix emphasize peace and virtue. Confucian culture further endows the phoenix with the five virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness, believing that the phoenix possesses five colors, symbolizing the completeness of the five virtues, while its five-colored feathers also correspond to the five elements. In contemporary design, the phoenix remains synonymous with elegance and auspiciousness; its five-colored appearance and noble connotations make it an important visual symbol of Chinese culture.

Qilin: The embodiment of benevolent beasts and auspicious omens. Revered as one of the "Four Auspicious Beasts," the male Qilin is called Qi, and the female Lin, its image combining features of numerous animals. It has a head resembling a dragon, a body like a horse, a physique like a deer, and a tail like an ox, its entire body covered in scales, and can live for over a thousand years. Ancient people believed the Qilin to be gentle, never harming living beings, and even avoiding trampling on grass and insects when walking, thus being called a "benevolent beast." Historically, the Qilin was often used to symbolize virtuous and talented individuals or to praise the descendants of royalty and nobility. In artistic depictions, the Qilin image is quite diverse due to the lack of a real-world counterpart. In general, the Qilin in traditional culture primarily symbolizes benevolence, auspiciousness, and a peaceful and prosperous era; its appearance is often seen as a harbinger of national prosperity and social harmony.

Xiezhi: A mythical beast that punishes corruption and distinguishes evil. The Xiezhi is a one-horned auspicious beast in ancient Chinese legends, particularly symbolizing judicial fairness in traditional culture. It is said that the Xie Zhi understands the good and evil of human nature. When encountering disputes, it will use its horn to gore the wrongdoer. When it hears a dispute, it will bite the troublemaker and not

let go. Therefore, it is regarded as a divine beast that can judge right and wrong. In ancient times, the image of the Xie Zhi was a symbol of power. Only those who shoulder the responsibility of law enforcement could wear it. Its image appeared on the top ornaments of official hats, stone carvings of yamen, etc., to remind officials to enforce the law impartially. As a traditional auspicious beast, the Xie Zhi concretizes the abstract ethical values and injects a unique moral symbolic power into traditional Chinese culture [1]. In summary, the traditional Chinese auspicious image system covers a variety of magical animals. Each of them carries a rich cultural symbolic meaning through a unique modeling language. These auspicious beast images have been constantly evolving in the long river of history and have always echoed the core values of Chinese culture. This tradition of giving abstract concepts to concrete images has given auspicious culture a strong dissemination power and lasting vitality. It has also provided a valuable source of inspiration for visual innovation in later generations.

3. Practical Path of AI-Generated Images: Digital Reconstruction of Traditional Auspicious Images

With the development of artificial intelligence technology, the use of AI-generated images to digitally reconstruct traditional cultural elements has become an important trend in contemporary art and design. Generative models, such as Stable Diffusion and Midjourney, can automatically generate new images with specific stylistic characteristics based on text or existing images. This provides a new tool for the innovative expression of traditional auspicious images. Designers can input descriptive text or reference samples to allow AI to generate different styles of auspicious beast images such as dragons, phoenixes, and qilin, which can then be refined through manual adjustments, thereby creating visual works with contemporary aesthetics while preserving traditional charm. The intervention of AI technology has greatly improved creative efficiency and imaginative space, making the restoration, reconstruction, and re-creation of traditional auspicious beast images possible. This injects new vitality into the inheritance and development of traditional auspicious images.

In practice, the digital reconstruction of traditional auspicious images using AI typically involves the following steps: First, material preparation, which involves collecting a large amount of high-quality traditional auspicious beast image data, including historical paintings, sculptures, patterns, etc., as training or reference data for the AI model. For example, a large number of dragon patterns can be input into the model to capture the shape features and pattern style of the dragon, and then new dragon images can be generated by adjusting the parameters. In the generation and iteration stage, the designer filters and optimizes the initial output, and modifies the prompt words, changes the reference style, or makes a small amount of manual modification to the generated results when necessary, so as to gradually approach

the ideal effect. Throughout the process, human-computer collaboration forms an efficient creative cycle. AI provides a large number of diverse initial creative materials, and the designer selects and adjusts them according to aesthetic judgment, and finally produces image works that combine traditional charm and new ideas [3]. It is worth noting that concept guidance is very important in this process - the designer needs to clarify the cultural connotation and aesthetic orientation that he/she wants to highlight, and guide the AI to generate images that meet the expectations through carefully designed prompt words and model parameters. For example, keywords such as "auspicious beast Qilin, auspicious clouds, meticulous brushwork and Chinese ink painting style" can be added to the prompt words to prompt the model to output a Qilin image with the charm of Chinese painting; for example, in order to reflect the modernity, elements such as "low polygon style" and "cyberpunk background" can be tried to be incorporated to make the traditional auspicious beast exude a cross-era visual tension [2]. Through continuous experimentation and fine-tuning, the practical path of AI-generated images can produce a rich variety of new images of auspicious beasts, laying the foundation for the digital reconstruction of traditional auspicious images.

In recent years, there have been many successful cases of applying AI technology to the reconstruction of traditional patterns and auspicious beast images. Among them, the "National Trend Pattern Project" initiated by Meitu is a representative practical project.(Figure 2) Since 2022, Meitu Xiuxiu has relied on its accumulated artificial intelligence technology to deeply integrate national style cultural elements with digital images, and has joined forces with hundreds of intangible cultural heritage inheritors, illustrators and AI designers across the country to carry out co-creation. In the "New Year Snake Pattern" launched before the Spring Festival in 2025, the Meitu team invited intangible cultural heritage craftsmen of opera costumes to digitally and meticulously copy the traditional dragon, phoenix and crane patterns on Peking Opera costumes when cooperating with the National Peking Opera Company. Using Meitu's powerful algorithm to analyze and learn these classic patterns and colors, extract their line characteristics Figure 2. and color matching essence, and use AI models to intelligently reorganize and recreate the pattern elements [4]. It can be said that Meitu's national trend pattern project has successfully given new life to the auspicious totems that were sleeping on costumes and objects in the digital age. AI technology not only faithfully preserves the aesthetic characteristics of traditional patterns, but also gives them digital vitality and dissemination power, so that they can be infinitely copied and freely combined, breaking through the limitations of time and space, and quickly entering the lives of the masses. The team used AI algorithms to deeply learn a large number of traditional patterns and accurately capture the essence of national style aesthetics, thus realizing the "refinement and reconstruction" of traditional cultural elements. This innovative application effectively lowers the technical threshold of traditional pattern creation, allowing ancient pat-

terns to be integrated into the daily aesthetics of modern people in a lighter and more lively way, satisfying the younger generation's pursuit of the coexistence of traditional culture and fashion trends [5].

As can be seen from the above practice, the digital reshaping of traditional auspicious images with the help of AI can achieve many positive effects. First, in terms of protection and inheritance, AI technology has enabled a large number of auspicious beast patterns scattered in ancient books and cultural relics to be digitally preserved and returned to the public eye in the form of interactive experience, realizing the living inheritance. Second, in terms of aesthetic innovation, AI generation has injected unprecedented diversity and imagination into the traditional auspicious beast images. Through the integration of cross-media and cross-style, many works have emerged that both inherit cultural traditions and have novel styles, such as images combining ink-wash unicorns with cyber technology backgrounds, and designs that blend Tang-style painted phoenixes with contemporary illustration styles. Furthermore, in terms of social impact, AI-enabled traditional image creation has greatly enhanced public participation and cultural identity. When young netizens are happy to use auspicious beast pattern stickers and share creative works containing traditional elements, traditional culture has already been integrated into the lifestyle of the younger generation through digital social channels and has become part of the new fashion [7]. From a design perspective, AI-generated images provide the ability to "prototype quickly" for the development of traditional auspicious images. Designers can efficiently produce different style solutions and accelerate iteration, which shortens the innovation cycle of traditional images from several weeks to several days or even several hours. Under the premise of maintaining the cultural connotation, flexible changes in form and style can be achieved. This efficient trial and error and diverse innovation mechanism will help to give rise to more excellent designs that have both national characteristics and contemporary aesthetics [6].

4. Conclusion

Traditional auspicious images, as important symbols of outstanding traditional Chinese culture, face unprecedented opportunities for innovation and dissemination in the digital age. By deeply exploring their symbolic meaning and historical evolution, utilizing new technologies such as AI for digital reshaping, and flexibly applying the visual and narrative strategies of digital media art, we can fully realize the contemporary rebirth of traditional auspicious animal images, enabling them to transcend language and cultural barriers and reach the world. In this process, we should always adhere to cultural confidence as our guiding principle, safeguarding the "roots" of Chinese culture while boldly exploring the "path" of contemporary innovation. Practice has proven that the integration of digital technology and traditional culture can give ancient images new vitality, not only allowing traditional culture to break free from its closed ivory tower and become an interactive and participatory

element of fashion, but also providing a vivid example for Chinese culture to go global.

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