

## The New Life and Translation of Traditional Culture in Modern Context from Japanese Graphic Design

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### Abstract

Japan is one of the most distinctive Design Powerhouse in Asia. This article aims to study the translation of Japanese traditional culture in modern Japanese graphic design and explore the characteristics of Japanese artistic style. First of all, through the analysis of the spirit of Japanese traditional culture, we can clarify the factors behind the performance of traditional art in modern Japanese graphic design. Secondly, by analyzing the traditional elements and artistic characteristics of typical Japanese graphic design works, it can be concluded that how modern Japanese graphic design translates traditional art from the three dimensions of form language, color language and artistic conception. Finally, it expounds the cognitive mechanism of traditional culture in Japanese graphic design. Japanese graphic design is both national and cosmopolitan. Its design works are characterized by natural simplicity, harmony and unity. The balance between modern design language and traditional cultural prototype is the key to cultural translation. It can provide reference for other countries to design the development direction of nationalization, through analyzing the translation of traditional art in modern Japanese graphic design.

### Keywords

Japanese design; Graphic design; Artistic features; Traditional; Modern.

### 1. Introduction

Traditional culture is the source of modern design innovation. Japanese design culture is paralleled by tradition and modernity [1], and its design forms a development path that combines tradition and modernity. It has produced many internationally influential designers such as Ikko Tanaka, Koichi Sato, Kenya Hara and so on. In Japanese design, graphic design is unique among Asian countries with its characteristic Japanese style. Literature [2] Takes typical Japanese graphic design works as an example, tradition of graphic design is shown through six aspects: form, color, composition, artistic conception, text, and character, which points out that Japanese design still pay more attention to retaining its own artistic characteristics while accepting Western styles. Literature [3] Compares the works of two graphic design masters, Jin Daiqiang and Ikko Tanaka, and interprets how modern design and traditional culture are integrated and exerted, and respectively explores the expression of traditional elements and spirit of the two designers. Literature [4] studied the sensory design characteristics of Japanese products from the dimensions of color and material, and pointed out that color and material are important elements that affect product sensory design. The color of Japanese design usually presents an empty feeling, and the material usually presents natural and simple The sense, color and material are not isolated from each other, and together constitute an important visual element of the sensory design of Japanese products. Literature [5] discusses the application of Japanese traditional cultural concepts in design through the analysis of Japanese traditional cultural concepts, combined with typical designers and their design works, and puts forward

suggestions for Chinese design. Literature [6] explains the diversified visual language and the presentation of typical cultural forms in Japanese design from the perspective of aesthetic cultural psychology, and profoundly interprets the Japanese cultural spirit. Literature [7] combined with the theory of Japanese folk art and analyzed the design concepts of masters of design Soetsu Yanagi and Sori Yanagi, expounding how Japanese design integrates tradition and modernity. In addition, the document [8] also analyzes Japanese traditional culture from two different perspectives: artistic analysis and cultural internal factors. It believes that despite the different styles of Japanese design, they all attach equal importance to aesthetic traditions, and point out that Japanese traditional culture promotes Japanese modern design. Important factors for development. Based on the above analysis, it can be seen that Japanese design, with its unique cultural characteristics and manifestations, has formed a manifestation of the integration of tradition and modernity, and has received extensive attention from related scholars. However, there are few studies on the modern translation of traditional elements in Japanese graphic design. This article intends to start with the translation of traditional culture in Japanese modern graphic design as an entry point to explore the expression of traditional culture in a modern context, from the perspective of cultural spirit and means of expression. Starting from the level, in-depth discussion of the performance of Japanese traditional style in the modern context, to help designers more deeply understand the integration of traditional culture and modern design, and then provide a reference for Chinese design to form its own characteristics.

## **2. Traditional Culture Is the Foundation for Japanese Graphic Design to Go Global**

Traditional culture is a unique existence that has precipitated in the process of historical development. During this process, it has continuously collided with the times and has been preserved to this day [9]. Each country has a unique traditional culture. As the basis and root, traditional culture has painted national symbols for Japanese design [10], creating a unique temperament in Japanese design works (Figure 1).

First of all, a design work with distinctive identity, its theme or visual symbols are usually based on tradition, such as the classic design work Japanese Dance by Japanese national treasure-level graphic designer Ikko Tanaka, which is based on the image of Japanese singing girls. Combining modern design and expression techniques, using the combination of traditional flat geometric figures to create characters, black and red are the dominant colors of the picture, presenting a flat and neat Japanese style. This kind of work that combines traditional art and modern design has a wide range of influence in the field of Asian graphic design.

Secondly, in the context of globalization, traditional culture also provides us with a way to make design distinctively recognizable among the modern masses. MUJI design in Japan uses visual communication as a medium and uses modern design techniques to perfectly recreate traditional culture. It incorporates the cultural concept of Japanese "Zen" and pursues natural simplicity. Whether it is a packaging bag or a product, each Every detail contains Japanese traditional culture. The visual elements in the poster convey the simple and simple traditional style of Japan to consumers, and effectively improve its brand recognition, as if a symbol is attached. The symbol referred to here is exactly what Japanese design found based on tradition and innovation.



Figure 1. Traditional culture and modern design

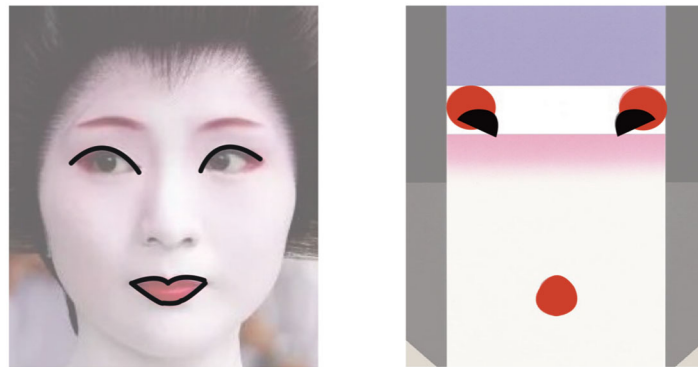
### 3. Analysis of Traditional Cultural Expressions in Japanese Graphic Design

#### 3.1. Reflect Traditional Cultural Themes with Geometric Morphological Language

Here is an example of Japanese Dance by Ikko Tanaka (Figure 2). The prototype of Japanese Dance is the image of a geisha in the Edo period of Japan. The designer takes the most typical hairstyle and facial makeup of the prototype as the source of features, and embodies the typical features of the geisha through the straight line and square geometrical form, and in the simplification of facial features (Figure 3), the characteristic divinity is conveyed through the combination of semicircle and circle by taking the eye form and dynamic momentum as the source of features. In the work, the geisha's face only uses the eyes and mouth to convey the charm of the geisha archetype. Although the form is simplified and the archetypal features are summarized and deformed through simple geometric forms, the charm and typical features still have their distinctive traditional cultural recognition without losing the sense of modern design.



Figure 2. Analysis of the characteristics of Japanese Dance



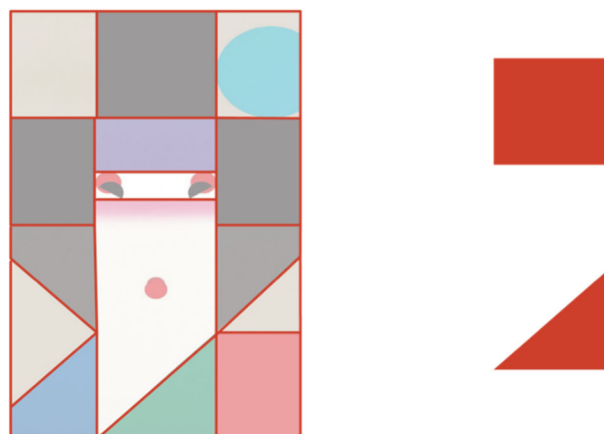
**Figure 3.** Analysis of the facial features of Japanese Dance

In the control of the overall shape of the picture (Figure 4), the head, face, and the position of the shoulders of the figures are blocked and uniformly regarded as large blocks, and by preserving the typical features without separate detailed analysis, the features of the figures are deformed and presented in a geometric expression.



**Figure 4.** Analysis of the overall shape of Japanese Dance

In terms of form combination (Figure 5), Japanese Dance uses rectangles and triangles for the head, face and shoulders respectively, simplifying the shape and presenting the original features in the most concise language, and this artistic expression of simplification is one of the common expressions in Japanese modern design.



**Figure 5.** Analysis of the morphological combination of Japanese Dance

### 3.2. Representation of Traditional Colors in Modern Works

As one of the important mediums of the senses, color is the first judgment of an unknown object, which can bring a certain visual impact and has a significant impact on the perceptual perception of the viewer. In Japanese design, color is not only a medium to convey the senses, but also an expression of Japanese culture and emotions. Japanese traditional colors, mainly include black, white, red and blue [11]. Influenced by Zen culture, Japanese people advocate nature and harmony, so the combination of black, white, red, and cyan appear in Japanese traditional colors with high frequency, thus making them impressive (Figure 6). In the work Sapporo Winter Olympics by Ikko Tanaka, for example, the picture is divided into two parts, with black, white and red as the main colors, and adjustments are made to the brightness and saturation of the colors; black is not pure black, white is not pure white, and red is not abrupt in the center of the picture, making the picture harmonious and regular as a whole, which not only retains the flavor of traditional Japanese colors, but also has a sense of modern design, reflecting Japanese design. This is a reflection of Japanese design's strong ability to reconcile traditional colors and creativity in modern works.



Figure 6. Color analysis of Sapporo Winter Olympics

In addition to monochromatic color design, multi-color combination design is also found everywhere in Japanese graphic design. Traditional Japanese costumes and vivid neon signs convey the Japanese love of rich colors. Take the poster work of Ikko Tanaka as an example (Figure 7), which features a woman wearing a gorgeous kimono as the main character, with the head and back decorations made up of large blocks of color, and the costume part with red as the base color and combined with fragmented color accents.



Figure 7. Ikko Tanaka 's poster artwork

In addition, the picture is prone to problems such as clutter and inconsistent color matching when there are more colors. In order to avoid these problems, often treats works with rich colors in terms of their hues and contrasting relationships (Figure 8), dividing the picture into multiple blocks with different colors in the work. On top of this, the five facial features are represented in black geometric forms, and the purity of each color is weakened, blurring the boundaries between different colors and reconciling the impact of multiple colors, giving the viewer a sense of harmoniously whole and varied artistic characteristics.



Figure 8. Ikko Tanaka 's poster artwork

### 3.3. The Expression of the Mood of Traditional Art in Modern Graphic Design Works

Zen, simplicity and tranquility, as representatives of the spirit of traditional Japanese culture, are applied in modern graphic design, such as the famous Japanese brand - MUJI (Figure 9), whose poster design is precisely the integration of the spirit of traditional Japanese culture, the work away from the figurative expression, to convey a different realm. The work is expressed in the way of white space, in which MUJI's poster design can always find a balance, which is like the Chinese yin and yang balance, and this "yin" and "yang" in the Japanese view is the pursuit of design in the right way. While conveying the message, it also leaves the viewer room for imagination and relaxation, showing a natural, quiet and natural mood, just like reading a book of poetry, with eyes closed, experiencing the rhythm of it, with more and less, strong and weak, subtle and introverted and passionate, which is also the distinctive style of Japanese traditional art.



Figure 9. Analysis of the poster design of Indy

#### 4. Analysis of the Mechanism of Traditional Culture Cognition in Japanese Graphic Design

According to the above analysis, the cognition and recognition of traditional cultural features can be decomposed into four main links: acceptance of visual elements, cognition of visual elements, recognition and feedback of elements, and cultural recognition (Figure 10). Firstly, when the viewer sees a graphic design work, he or she receives the information elements of shape, color, and theme, which are the visual elements of graphic design, and they constitute the main content of graphic design and form the visual stimulus for the viewer. Secondly, the shape, color, theme and other elements of graphic design will create an overall vague cognition of the style and culture of the work, and the viewer will process the information, make initial associations in the brain based on these elements, and compare them with the experience. Then, based on the results of information processing, the typical color, shape, semantic and other characteristics of graphic design works are further identified and fed back. Finally, in the process of recognition and feedback, traditional culture is identified, and when the typical features of graphic design match the viewer's own experience, the viewer can effectively identify its cultural origin.

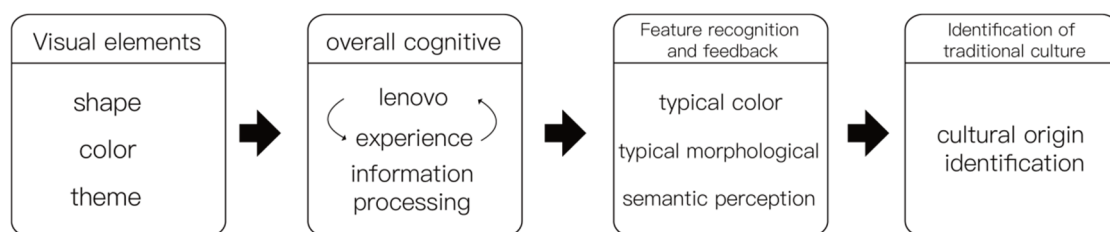


Figure 10. Cognitive mechanism of traditional culture

According to the previous discussion on the expression of Japanese graphic design, the characteristics of form, color, and mood in Japanese graphic design are analyzed (see Table 1).

Table 1. Analysis of formal characteristics of Japanese graphic design

Design Language	Feature Description
Morphology	Simple plane geometry
Color	Black, white, red and blue are common colors, high brightness and low purity in color
Mood	Rustic, natural, pure

Here we take the graphic design work Winter by the famous Japanese designer Koichi Sato as an example (Figure 11). At this point, the viewer uses the shapes, colors, and thematic elements in the picture as the basis for association and information processing of the experiences that already exist in the brain, after which a shallow conceptual and macroscopic overall perception of the work is created. Then it goes to a deeper level of understanding. The gap at the top of the middle part of the work, a form that looks like a volcanic crater, in addition to the shape of the mountain, Mount Fuji in Japan, which resembles this form, as well as the strong Zen color scheme and the Japanese characters that appear in the picture, are features that give the viewer a precise recognition of the overall work and feedback on the traditional Japanese style. When this feedback is consistent with the viewer's own definition of traditional Japanese culture from their own experience, the viewer is able to develop an effective recognition of Japanese style.

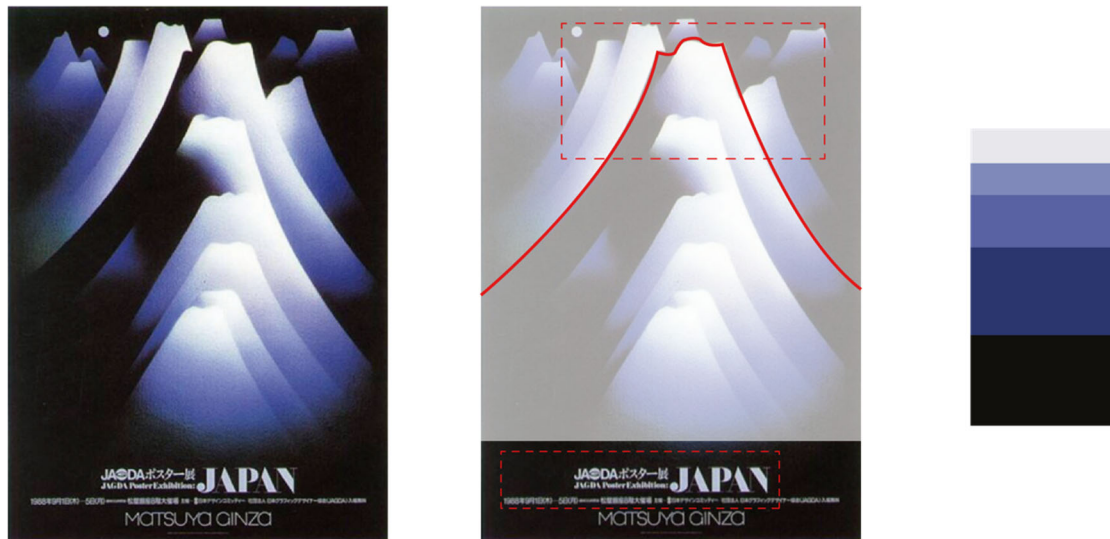


Figure 11. Winter by Koichi Sato

## 5. Conclusion

Japan is a country that excels in absorbing and learning from foreign cultures, but at the same time pays attention to the preservation and inheritance of its own culture, and its graphic design is a unification of nationality and modernity. First of all, in the selection of thematic archetypes, things with typical Japanese traditional culture are often used as sources, and through the refinement of their typical characteristics, traditional cultural imagery is conveyed. Then, on the level of formal language, the graphics mostly use horizontal and vertical lines and simple geometric figures to express the main objects, making the whole picture more regular and rational instead of complicated. Finally, on top of this, we control the overall feeling of the picture, using "white space" and "empty space" to convey the mood of rich Japanese traditional culture. Japanese traditional art pursues nature, attaches importance to details, makes good use of white space, and attaches importance to the spiritual realm of natural simplicity; Japanese modern graphic design takes traditional culture as an important source of innovation, and through the analysis of the expression of traditional culture in Japanese graphic design, it can provide reference for the nationalization of modern design in China.

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